

# FURNITURE WORLD

**SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT**  
**AREA RUGS FOR EVERY BUDGET**

**IN  
THIS  
ISSUE**

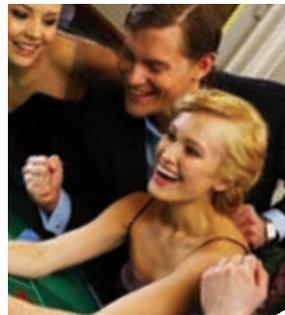
- REDUCE FUEL COSTS IN 7 STEPS
- MANAGE YOUR ONLINE REPUTATION
- HELP BEDDING CUSTOMERS TO BUY - PART 2
- USE NEW TECHNOLOGY TO BOOST GMROI
- INEXPENSIVE SHOWROOM RENOVATIONS - BIG IMPACT!
- CURE FOR THE BUSINESS BLUES



# Attract The High Income Resort Furniture Customer!

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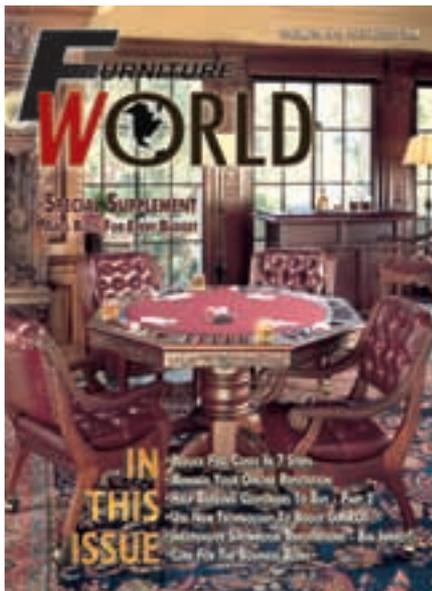
**Many Darafeev retailers achieve high volume sales by marketing the line to local country clubs...**

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# IN THIS ISSUE

The Business Solutions Magazine For Furniture Retailers

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**Cover Photo:** Photographed at the Robinson May House in Beverly Hills CA, this 1912 home provides a stately backdrop for **Darafeev Resort Furniture's** Ponce De Leon club chairs and Chateau Dining/Gaming table with matching bar and barstools. Only the finest American hardwoods are used, since 1959, to create an elegant setting for family fun or a luxurious party. "You Dream It, We Build It" is the Darafeev campaign for the upcoming Las Vegas furniture market. See page 1 in this issue or visit [www.darafeev.com](http://www.darafeev.com) for more information.

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# Time To Manage Your ONLINE REPUTATION

Customers check out social media websites, blogs, pod casts, wikis, videos and other online content to view and post comments about your store. Shouldn't you?

*Internet Marketing By Leslie Carothers*



Over 78% of all consumers research their furniture purchases online prior to making a decision. That's why online reputation management is fast becoming an indispensable part of retailers' marketing budgets as they seek to build and maintain a positive online reputation for their brand, products and services.

What, exactly, does the term "online reputation management" refer to, and why is it so important?

Online reputation management refers to tracking all social media websites, blogs, pod casts, wikis, videos and other online content that mentions a company's brand, products or services. Once the tracking is in place, monitoring sites for both positive and negative content is done on a continuous basis. Marketing strategies are then developed to maximize the value of positive content and minimize the damage from negative content.

Consumers enjoy sharing their shopping experiences online and many consider it their "duty" to help others find the "good" stores/brands/products and avoid the "bad" ones. Creating a blog, shooting video to post on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com) and creating content for online consumer opinion websites such as [consumersearch.com](http://consumersearch.com) or [buzzillions.com](http://buzzillions.com), about any experience they've had, good or bad, with your store, gives them complete power over how your

brand is perceived.

Even though you may never have posted a comment or review online, how many times have you looked at reviews or ratings before planning a trip, moving to a new city, buying a new car, technology gadget or major appliance? Chances are you've wanted to see what other consumers are saying prior to making a large investment for two reasons. First, you don't want to waste your time. Turning to the opinion sites and ratings to make sure you're on the right track as you begin to narrow your options is a smart time management move. Then, once you've narrowed your options, you may return to the opinion sites for closer scrutiny to save yourself money and, also the aggravation of buying an inferior product from a poor retailer.

Smart investors have already caught on to the revenue potential in consumer opinion sites and are actively soliciting and paying consumers to post their detailed positive or negative opinions online.

Now, here's the kicker... and why online reputation management is so critical: Online content is almost impossible to remove once it's posted. Your online reputation is yours-forever.

Yes, it's very difficult if the comments are unfairly negative, but this is the new reality and all businesses now have to actively monitor and, then, react to what is being written about them in the online world.

If you would like to see real world examples of how this operates, go to [www.buzzillions.com](http://www.buzzillions.com) and search under "furniture brands." As of this writing, there were 48 reviews on "Kathy Ireland" alone. You will notice that not all of the brands listed have a lot of reviews. That's because [www.buzzillions.com](http://www.buzzillions.com) is a relatively new site but their search features are very powerful and the site's content will grow. If you sell mattresses, make sure to look at [www.epinions.com](http://www.epinions.com). You will be amazed at the level of detail consumers provide. These online consumers will either be the best "sales" team your brand will ever have, or they may destroy you. Unless you monitor your online reputation, you will never know for sure if a review is causing your sales to skyrocket which could then be used to generate more sales or, conversely, cause your sales on a particular product to lag behind expectations and be cause for action.

If you've not already done so, sign up to receive Google Alerts by going to [www.news.google.com](http://www.news.google.com) and click on the "News Alerts" link. Enter your company name and email address and Google will send you an email whenever it finds mention of your company on blogs, news items, websites, etc. You can also do this for your own name and anyone else who may impact your store's reputation. Many consumers and businesses investigate the

See what customers are posting about your store on [www.yelp.com](http://www.yelp.com), [www.complaints.com](http://www.complaints.com) and [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). Sign up to receive Google Alerts and browse the "buzz" on the lines you carry on [www.buzzillions.com](http://www.buzzillions.com), [www.epinions.com](http://www.epinions.com) and [www.consumersearch.com](http://www.consumersearch.com).

people who own or manage the companies they do business with, so make sure that everything being said about you is factual. A site that you definitely need to check in this regard is [www.zoominfo.com](http://www.zoominfo.com). Zoominfo aggregates data about you from the entire web-without your permission. So, something that was posted about you ten years ago is just as likely to show up under your name as something that was posted yesterday. Unless you go in and actively take control of your personal online reputation, this is what anyone looking your name up will see. And it's all free.

You may also want to check out [www.complaints.com](http://www.complaints.com). Enter a few store names and you may be amazed at the volume of complaints as well as the amount of time that customers, who feel that they have been wronged, invest in posting online comments.

Why is the furniture category so ripe for consumer opinions? Because we, as an industry, don't make it easy for consumers to get at the information they really want in order to make intelligent decisions in a timely manner. There are comprehensive product comparison websites for other expensive consumer durables such as cars and electronics, but none for furniture. As an industry, no one has stepped forward to create this and many furniture retailers and manufacturers are still not in favor of it. However, this attitude is backfiring and now consumers are writing a stunning amount of content about furniture and, because of this, they are the ones really in charge of how your brand/product/service is perceived by other consumers.

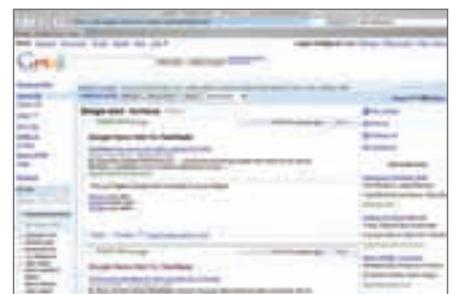
Given this fact, it is imperative to either hire a service to start monitoring all content being created by consumers about the brands, services and products you carry, or create a full time, in-house position. If you fail to monitor the online reputation of the products you buy, offer or manufacture, you simply won't know if influential consumers have already decided against you... that is until your products and services fail to sell.

So, what can you do when negative reviews appear?

1. Hire an outside expert or designate an in house person to create as much positive search engine optimized content as possible. This way, eventually, if the content is honest and non-manipulative, it should come up higher than the negative information in organic search queries.

2. If the opinion is unfairly negative, email the writer and request a face-to-face meeting where possible to find out why they posted the grievance and if there is anything you can now do to make it right. But be careful. Anything you email is in the public domain and can easily backfire. Do not use aggressive language or make threats as these letters can easily be scanned and sent to anyone the recipient chooses. So, once your unhappy consumer is completely satisfied, ask them if they would be willing to go back to the consumer opinion site where the negative comments first appeared and post a follow-up comment explaining how you took care of them so brilliantly. This can be very, very effective from an advertising standpoint. It may cost time, but it is well worth the end result. Customers don't expect you to be perfect, but they do expect you to communicate in a timely fashion and act with the highest ethics if a dispute arises.

3. If the website where the negative review appeared has a "terms of engagement" statement, have your attorney look at it carefully. Many times, this statement will contain language about how people are not allowed to post defamatory remarks that negatively impact your business. If you can prove that a group of comments has hurt or is hurting your business, you can ask the Webmaster if they might be willing to take down the post. They have the right to say no, but if you have documentation, you might have a chance. Even if the content is removed, the negative posts may still pop up for a time on consumer search engine queries. Don't believe anyone who says they can get them off the web right away-especially if you are paying them money to do so. It may be true that the webmaster of a particular site will take them down immediately, but Google still



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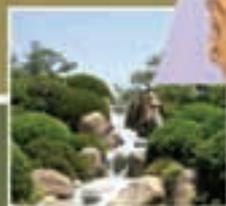
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# "What can you do when negative reviews appear?"

has them indexed and, until they re-index that page, the comments will still appear.

As you can see, all of these strategies are resource intensive-and completely necessary in today's business climate.

There is a flip side to this. Some companies have extremely positive reviews. For a real world example, go to [www.yelp.com](http://www.yelp.com) and search under "San Francisco" and then "Room and Board." You will see how positive reviews on a consumer opinion site can easily drive more business into your store.

Room and Board gets it right. They have an outstanding website, an excellent catalog, products priced appropriately relative to quality and superior customer service. They have worked diligently to create a positive brand image and it is paying off for them online.

The next step, if you have an excellent online reputation, is to advertise it in traditional marketing channels and on your own website. It is free publicity and as trustworthy an endorsement as any retailer could ever hope to receive.

In addition, with the rise of consumer influence made possible by Web 2.0 technologies (blogs, wikis, podcasts, social networking sites, etc.), it is important for all retailers to closely examine every operational area that "touches" the consumer.

Look at these areas objectively to minimize the possibility of negative online comments, and change the processes and people that are likely to cause them.

And, if you have a great operation, leverage this fact by encouraging positive online comments so you can benefit from the trust and loyalty your customers have placed in you and your employees.

Ask yourself this question, "If my husband/wife/partner made a purchase in my store, what would he or she come home and tell me about their experience?" Look at this question from every angle. Consider any interaction he or she might have with an employee, a contractor or a process in your store. Whatever you come up with is what your customers may be saying to a huge audience about you online.

Consumers will continue to seek out

online opinions prior to major purchases. Why? So they can have more of the two things money can't buy- PEACE OF MIND AND MORE TIME. Investing in your online reputation will be the best marketing move you can make-now and in the future.

*Leslie Carothers, is a 25-year veteran of the home furnishings industry and the principal of The Kaleidoscope Partnership - a national company that helps retailers and manufacturers leverage the internet and their websites to powerfully and profitably impact their businesses.*

*Her areas of expertise include: Online reputation management; use of analytics to drive profitable growth through different business units; content writing for retail and manufacturer websites; phone and email inquiry conversion rate enhancement; and website layout for ease of consumer and consultant use and functionality.*

*Questions on any aspect of internet marketing including how to easily manage your online reputation, can be directed to Leslie at [leslie@furninfo.com](mailto:leslie@furninfo.com). She can also be reached directly at 713.705.2482.*

## "I Want A Raise!" by Wendy Liddle

"Hey Joe... I need a price check on that green Flexsteel sofa in the corner."



*Wendy Liddle works in retail furniture sales. Comments? Email [wendy@furninfo.com](mailto:wendy@furninfo.com).*

"Sir... Don't know who patched your cushion with dental floss. My manager is unavailable now... but I take full responsibility."





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# Make A Big Retail Impact With **INEXPENSIVE RENOVATIONS**

## Part 1: Retail Renovation Strategies For Small, Medium & Large Investments.

*Store Design Magic By Martin Roberts*

**W**hen we look at retail renovation strategies, it's easy to become overwhelmed. How much do you need to invest? Can small changes make a big difference? What are some quick steps you can take to refresh your store and give it some new energy? Are the most expensive renovation strategies necessarily the best?

A grand overhaul will almost always be effective, but you want to make sure you get the most bang for the buck. Times are tough, and perhaps you realize that you need to make some changes to your store to differentiate yourself and bring your look up to date in order to survive, but you don't have a big budget to work with. Or perhaps, like many, you're somewhere in the

middle: you know you want to devote significant resources to a renovation, but you want to keep costs down. In this three-part series, we'll explore what small, medium and large investments in renovation strategies will yield, looking at specific examples from each category.

Barbados-based Dwellings is a small retailer with one 10,000-square foot store in a warehouse location not devoted to retail. They needed to create a name, brand, identity and store design that would make them a destination store — and because they were just starting out, they needed to implement it all on a very small budget.

The first step was for Dwellings owner Louis Carrilo to determine what he was try-

ing to achieve, and what the store's brand identity would be. The name Dwellings evokes a sense of both home and leisure, and the tagline "Passion for your home" promised that the store would deliver quality merchandise with bold, fashion-forward looks. The logo further emphasizes this message with a sophisticated, clean-lined font.

With a wide range of merchandise, including glasses, barware, tabletop, decorative accessories, kitchen products, small appliances, pillows, linens and furniture, the store needed to be configured in a way that allowed the merchandise to really pop, and was also flexible enough to be moved around quite frequently as seasons changed.



*Above: Bright, bold, fashion-forward accessories against simple modular shelves help communicate Dwellings' tagline, "Passion for your home."*

*Left: The addition of quality lighting really shows off the merchandise and makes it pop.*

# Massoud sees bigger picture with ePreVue

ePreVue, the industry-leading, internet-based product visualization software, is opening the eyes of leading furniture retailers and manufacturers alike. Why? It enables customers to browse your entire showroom or catalog on-line, create thousands of custom fabric/color combinations, and pre-select purchases without sales pressure – all from the comfort of home with just a connection to the Internet.

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"MicroD built a world class website for us at a very affordable price making it one of the best investments for Massoud Furniture. MicroD's ePreVue service enables us to create more brand recognition of our products to the consumers, ultimately leading to more sales."

**Ardella Norwood**  
Controller  
Massoud Furniture Company

"MicroD has done an incredible job in redesigning and launching our new website based on its ePreVue platform... it provides real value to our customers by providing them a way to visualize all of our styles and fabrics."

**Chuck Massoud**  
President  
Massoud Furniture Company



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*Cutting a large hole in the second floor to allow for a grand staircase gives customers a view of the merchandise upstairs and helps create an open, airy feel. The graphic motif on the wall also helps draw customers' eyes upwards by taking the color and pattern from floor to ceiling.*

The design process began by sketching designs for the store layout, always keeping the budget in mind. A sleek, minimalist design was created with modular shelving that allows for both beautiful product display and the flexibility to create new displays often, keeping the store's look fresh and exciting, which keeps customers coming back to see what's new.

The floor was kept concrete, which both adds to the modern aesthetic and costs very little. Very few fixtures were added.

Everything was kept simple, with sheet rock walls painted a pristine white, the ceiling a simple creamy white, and a few accent walls painted in bold, striking colors. Painting is one of the simplest and least expensive ways to give your store a fresh look, and accent walls in bold hues can be changed with the seasons to add new flavor depending on the time of year.

White, modular shelving in a standardized size gives Dwellings the ability to move things around and adjust to different

heights depending on the type of merchandise they're bringing in, and hidden tracks were installed in the walls for a crisp, clean hardware-free look. All the shelves are of a standardized size, so they can easily be moved from place to place and accommodate different sized merchandise perfectly. The cash register area echoes this look, built inexpensively with particleboard and white PVC and concrete tops, which are durable and modern looking, yet inexpensive.

## 10 Small Steps For Simple Renovations

- Allow for flexible displays, so you can change the look of your store with the seasons.
- A simple stained concrete floor costs very little and is a great way to add to a sleek, modern look
- Create a crisp, clean look with simple white painted walls, which will let your merchandise "pop."
- Accent walls with a splash of color to create drama and excitement.
- Invest in quality lighting so that your merchandise and your store both look their best. Suspended track lights add to the modern aesthetic and ensure products are well lit.
- Cash register areas built from particleboard, white PVC and concrete tops are both aesthetically pleasing and practical in their durability.
- If you have a second floor, make sure customers can see it from below. Opening up a second floor may mean less space for merchandise to be displayed, but it ensures more customers will take the time to climb the stairs for a closer look.
- Paint a simple graphic motif from floor to ceiling to carry customers' eyes upward and add a splash of color and texture.
- Hidden tracks in the walls make your display areas look clean and professional, and create flexibility.
- Commission a professional display person to regularly change your store display based on seasonality and sales to keep customers coming back to see what's new.

"When I pre-shop for furniture, if a retailer doesn't have **online** catalogs, I'll find another one who does."

**FACT:** 80% to 90% of women age 33 to 45, the key demographic of furniture shoppers, shop online before visiting a showroom.

In today's Internet-driven world, having a website is not only a smart business decision, it's absolutely essential if you want to prosper in retail furniture. But you have to make that site interesting with lots of options and lots of choices.

Nothing does that more efficiently or cost-effectively than MicroD's ePreVue electronic catalog. With it, you can literally display every case good and upholstered furniture item from every PreVue-supported manufacturer you carry. Then, using EasyPlan - ePreVue's software companion, your shoppers can place their selected items into their own custom-created room plan to see how it fits into their home and into their own sense of style.

To find out more, see us at the Las Vegas Market, World Market Center, Bldg. B 10th Floor, Retail Resource Center July 28 - August 1, 2008.

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*The best furniture business technology.*

# "All this was done for About \$20 per square foot.."



*Left: White, modular shelving in a standardized size gives Dwellings the ability to move things around and adjust to different heights depending on the type of merchandise they're bringing in. Concrete stained floors add to the modern aesthetic. The clean look of the store is emphasized with walls painted a pristine white, along with a few accent walls painted in bold, striking colors.*

If there's one thing not to scrimp on, it's the addition of quality lighting that will really show off the merchandise and make it pop. After all, no matter how beautiful

your products may be, if the customer can't see the texture, or if the color looks washed out in a fluorescent haze, you simply won't get the sales you deserve. On the other

hand, if things are well-lit and basked in a warm glow, and light is reflected off of glass and metal accents, it creates an upbeat atmosphere that results in higher sales. Dwellings, started with a simple ceiling painted in a creamy white. Lights were suspended from tracks to provide ambient lighting as well as the ability to spotlight different areas of the store.

Dwellings was working with a location that was two floors, which is always a challenge at retail. Cutting a large hole in the second floor to allow for a grand staircase and a view of the merchandise upstairs gave the store less room for products on the second floor, but helped lure customers up to have a look. A wall that runs behind the grand staircase was painted inexpensively with a graphic motif that also helps draw customers' eyes upwards by taking the color and pattern from floor to ceiling. Opening the second floor also helps create an open, airy feel throughout the store.

But with all this stark, clean store design, it becomes crucial that display is done right. Dwellings commissioned a professional designer to set up the store and make sure the merchandise pops; she now flies in eight times a year to change things for different seasons and sales. With a clean palette background, it's vital that you change your display frequently to keep customers' interest up and keep them coming

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**"A professional is brought in to change displays for different seasons & events..."**

*Hidden tracks in the wall (below) create a crisp, clean hardware-free look. An investment in quality track lighting helps merchandise look its best.*



back often to see what's new.

All this was done for around \$20 a square foot — a minimal investment. Dwellings was able to keep costs down by keeping floor and ceiling finishes simple, cutting down on fixtures, and really focusing on what was necessary for the product display. Opening up the second floor has meant higher sales and traffic, and the investment of a professional designer to change the display frequently keeps customer interest up. The renovated store was an immediate success, and within six months Dwellings' management decided to invest in an expansion. They are now building a new children's store across the way. The main store is pulling in about \$350 a square foot — a terrific payoff for

a minimal investment.

*Martin Roberts is an internationally acclaimed design industry veteran, with over 40 years of credits for retail and product design.*

*With his staff of brand strategists, retail planners, art directors, graphic designers, web designers, environmental and industrial designers, Roberts leads his firm in interpreting brand DNA to the target consumer. The results can lead to increased customer loyalty and improved sales. GRID2's projects with Borders, American Leather, TUMI, and Pathmark, are only a few examples of the success of Roberts' tenets to empower customers to buy more, more often.*

*Roberts' previous works included such*

*nationally and internationally renowned corporations and brands as Bank of Boston, Barnes & Noble, Cartier, Chase Manhattan Bank, Coach, Duty-Free Shops, General Foods, Johnson & Johnson, K-Mart, Marriott International, Nestle, Perrier, Samsonite, Thomasville Furniture, Timberland, and Wal-Mart.*

*With a BA in Industrial Design Engineering and an MA in Design Systems, Roberts has also served as an adjunct professor of Design Management at Parsons School of Design.*

*Questions on any aspect of retail branding or store design may be directed to him at [mroberts@furninfo.com](mailto:mroberts@furninfo.com). He can also be reached directly at 212-432-4834.*

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# Help Bedding Customers To **BUY IT!**

Part 2: Customers need more than just a mattress.  
They are really looking for a good night's sleep!

*Sleep Physiology & Technology by Guy Eckert*

*Editor's Note: This article is the second in a two-part series exploring the physiology of sleep, the evolution of bedding products, value promises and how to accurately convey these messages to consumers at the point of sale.*

Today's consumers are more product savvy than ever. They conduct desktop research, read reviews, and seek the opinion of friends and family in order to make informed purchase decisions. Sleep experts have been effective at disseminating information to the public regarding the benefits of getting a good night's sleep, sleep physiology - what it takes to fall asleep, get in a comfort zone, and stay there for the entire night. A review of this information was covered in the May/June 2008 issue of FURNITURE WORLD Magazine. If you've misplaced your copy, the article can be found in the sales education article archives on [www.furninfo.com](http://www.furninfo.com).

Retailers are now in an enviable position to leverage this information in order to help customers make intelligent choices when purchasing a bed or top of bed products. Those of you who read industry news on the [furninfo.com](http://furninfo.com) website or subscribe to the [furninfo.com](http://furninfo.com) weekly newsmagazine will see that a few retailers already use this information in their publicized promotions, but many more have not capitalized on this opportunity. If the bedding industry is going to grow, we must become teachers first and the sales will follow.

Consumers are looking for much more than initial comfort in their bedding, and we have an opportunity and a responsibility to be their resource for information on sleep physiology, the benefits associated with healthy sleep, and the harmful side-effects associated with running a "sleep debt". Applying that knowledge to the sales floor when called for, will be invaluable to both

retailers and consumers.

The process of educating the consumer doesn't stop at sleep physiology. Retailers must think beyond the mattress purchase and consider taking a system approach to better sleep. A well thought out plan or selling strategy that includes collecting customer information, will go a long way toward creating a sustainable competitive advantage for both retailers and the manufacturers they represent.

Data mining is essential for retailers who want to meet the needs of their customers and provide them with a good experience. Tips for gathering appropriate information can be found in the sidebars accompanying this article. It can be beneficial, for example to find out:

- Are customers side sleepers, back sleepers, or belly sleepers?
- Are they thermally compatible with their partner? Menopausal?
- Do they prefer a firm mattress or a



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Zia Sleep Sanctuary goes beyond the standard offering of mattresses, toppers and pillows to even include herbal teas, aromatherapy candles and earplugs. Their website (far left) allows customers to shop by product or by sleep solution. Select Comfort (near left) takes yet another approach, emphasizing individualized comfort through their adjustable air chamber mattresses.



soft mattress?

- Are there any allergy issues to be concerned with?

Two hours spent on the sales floor selling a mattress can be neutralized, for example, by the purchase of the wrong pillow or the wrong mattress pad or the wrong mattress protector. It's the equivalent of trying on five pairs of shoes, picking one and on the way home stopping off at the local drug store for a pair of arch supports. When you get the supports in the shoes, they feel completely different than they did when you tried them on in the store...the fit is compromised. You may think you're doing the customer a service by selling them your top-end mattress, but if they stop at the nearest department store, purchase two new pillows and after their first night they wake up with stiff necks, that pain will overshadow any potential comfort or benefits that are inherent in the mattress.

Your sales team and your product assortment must support an ability to supply customers with the necessary information and products to maximize their experience. Only then will you enhance your revenue stream and attract repeat business.

Zia Sleep Sanctuary in Eden Prairie, Minnesota has taken the sleep approach to a new level. They go beyond the standard offering of mattresses, toppers and pillows to even include herbal teas, aromatherapy candles and earplugs. On their sales floor, are fitness, holistic and chiropractic experts all engaged in the

## TIPS FOR Bedding Sales

### A Strong First Impression

by Cathy Finney

Giving your full name sets you apart. You sound professional. I've had people tell me over the years, "Cathy, forget it! My last name is too long and too hard to pronounce!" Guess what? The L-O-N-G-E-R it is and the harder it is, the easier it is for them to remember it. It gives them a handle! Give them your title whatever your title is. If you are the design consultant or a bedding sales associate, let them know. If you do not have a title, pick one. Get one now!

Remember, they do not know who you are and what you do. So tell them up front why you're here. This sets you apart from every other "clerk" they've come in contact with who is just trying to "sell them!" When you get their name, repeat it. "Mary, it's great to meet you." Don't just say, "Oh, it's nice to meet you." They have given you their name. They have given you a gift. Treat it as if it is very special to you.

- Shake their hand, look them directly in the eye and focus on just their name.
- When you hear their name, repeat it. "Mary it's great to meet you." This helps to reinforce their name.
- Use their name.
- Make it a top priority. "Focus" on only them and their name. You can't "connect" with them if you can't remember their name.
- You must build rapport quickly! You can tell everyone you greet that, "I'm here to make this easy, painless and fun! My job is to do all of the work so that you have none of the worry!" And remember that "help me out" are instant bonding words. Humans are wonderful. Everyone wants to help. By asking for their help, you have now become "buds." "We're doing this together. We're a team." You've just built instant rapport.
- Let them know how you work. Tell them, "the way that I work with my clients is..." Don't tell them "the way I "like" to work with my clients is..." Just by inserting that one little word (like), the entire meaning changes. Walter and Louise don't care what you would like. It sounds like you're giving them an option. Also, without the "like" your words become a statement of fact.

job of helping consumers to make the best purchasing decisions.

PranaSleep®, engineered and marketed by City Mattress is another brand

bridging the gap between sleep, health and general well-being. Their mission statement is "Restoring Life's Energy" through sleep. The designers of the

# BUY IT!

Prana mattress are so passionate about the merits of yoga, that they offer a free yoga class with the purchase of a Prana mattress. The PranaSleep® message has been carried through to their advertising and point-of-sale materials in order to convey the all-encompassing health and wellness story through imagery as well as the in-store experience. City Mattress has rounded out their Prana mattress line with complimentary accessories to amplify the Prana experience.

Select Comfort takes yet another approach, emphasizing individualized comfort through their adjustable air chamber mattresses. They round out the offering with a complete line of solution-driven, high value-in-use accessories uniquely engineered for Select Comfort mattresses. Their unique ability to focus the sales staff on the brand and control the design and engineering of their mattresses and accessories (which include form fit, temperature regulation and more) places them near the head of the class in terms of system-oriented, solution-driven sales and marketing.

In today's sluggish economy, price is bound to take center stage in many consumers' minds. However, educating the consumer on the importance of a better night's sleep, the impact on overall health, selling the complete system and selling "life cycle cost" versus "sticker price" will go a long way toward positioning you for future growth and prosperity.

How do you start the data mining process with the consumer without getting too personal? There are many ways to do this and some are outlined in the side bars. You may also want to reference the many FURNITURE WORLD articles posted to the furninfo.com website that address issues surrounding the use of open and closed probes, asking permission, questionnaires and establishing rapport.

I can't tell you what the impact will be as you dive into the personalized needs of

## TIPS FOR BEDDING SALES 12 Reasons To Ask Probing Questions

by Ron Wolinski

1. To ask the customer's permission to probe: "Mind if I ask you why you feel that way about innerspring mattresses?"
2. To get information (customer needs, concerns, circumstances): "What concerns do you have about looking for a new mattress?"
3. To create a professional image: For example: "Just so that we make sure that we work together to find you the sleep set that best meets your needs, I'd like to ask you a few questions. How does that sound to you?"
4. To save the customer time and trouble: For example, "In order not to waste your precious time, I'd like to ask you a couple of questions. OK?"
5. To check for understanding (your own and the customer's)
6. To sell add-ons such as pillows.
7. To make the customer feel important.
8. To give information.
9. Get the customer to "think about it" in your store before they turn to you and say, "We'd like to go out for lunch and think about it."
10. To bring the sale to a conclusion, that is, to win the customer's commitment.
11. To answer a question with a question to stay in control of the sale.
12. To answer an objection with a question.
13. To clarify a customer's statement.
14. To ask for the customer's help, especially at the beginning of a sale: For example. "To get you started, I'd like to ask you a few questions, all right?"

### OPEN & CLOSED PROBES

There are two basic types of probing techniques, each with different objectives. The first type is the "open probe," which invites the customer to speak his/her mind in their own words. This approach allows the customer to freely express their experiences, values, emotions and concerns. This technique begins with words like "what... when...where...why...who...how...explain...describe..." These key questions encourage the customer to reveal whatever is on his/her mind.

The second type of probe is a "closed probe," which allows you to direct the customer. You choose the subject of discussion. The answers to these probes are a simple "yes" or "no," or a choice of alternatives which you supply. This allows you to focus on areas which you want to discuss. For example, if you ask the question, "What's important to you in a mattress?" you've used an open probe, leaving the customer free to discuss anything he/she chooses. Closed probes, on the other hand, are the best approaches for dealing with unresponsive customers, allowing you to literally pull out information with "yes/no" questions. Some examples of closed probes are: Are you looking for a pillow top or tight top mattress? Is sagging at the edge a problem? Do you have a queen size set now? Are you often too hot or too cold on your present mattress? Would you prefer a king or queen set? Does your partner disturb you when he/she turns or rolls over? By utilizing professional probing techniques and listening carefully to the answers, you will truly establish yourself as a home furnishings consultant who finds what's important, fills those needs with the benefits of a product and makes specific recommendations. Now you're solving, not pitching.



*Ethan Kap, one of the Traffic Guys, stands with Ian Lipton and his new BMW*

## Former Retailer Of The Year Wins Coveted “Traffic Guys Better Your Best Contest” and Drives Home a \$37,000 BMW 328xi

**Atlanta, GA** — The “Better Your Best” contest, a year long competition between Platinum Club members to motivate home furnishings retailers to increase traffic and sales, concluded Saturday night by awarding a BMW to a deserving retailer from Pottsville, PA. The Traffic Guys, a home furnishings marketing company, sponsored the contest.

The happy winner, Ian Lipton, President of Nathan’s Furniture, was speechless when he was awarded a brand new vehicle. “It is absolutely exciting,” Ian reported. “I can only hope that others will be able to have the success that I’ve had over the past year and able to achieve the results that I’ve had.”

Even though he is the third generation in his family’s retail home furnishings business and a former NHFA Retailer of the Year, Ian wanted to improve his marketing.

“I knew that with the right help we could get to the next level. The Traffic Guys have been able to not just point me in a productive direction, but they have actually taken me by the hand and have guided me through the process.”

Ian’s efforts to improve his marketing were extraordinary and made his store stand out from the other impressive final contestants. His changes resulted in drastically improved advertising efficiency and increase in total sales.

“I realized,” Ian said, “that it’s not only my responsibility as a retailer to *deliver* tremendous value to my customers, but also to *interpret* that value for them.”

Ian began by collecting customer information from every prospect that came into contact with his store by using proprietary “Be Back” systems developed by the Traffic Guys. He later used this information to offer incentives to these customers to come into his store.

Mr. Lipton also targeted potential clients by sending customized marketing pieces to new move-ins and previous customers. Key to the success of this program was the manner in which he systemized the process, thereby saving both time and money.

Better yet, these improvements to his marketing plan all came about with no overall increase in his existing advertising budget. “This new marketing plan has not required a bigger budget, just a reallocation to use our budgeted dollars more effectively,” Ian reported.

Ian Lipton repeatedly expressed his appreciation and gratitude to the Traffic Guys. He couldn’t believe the car was his free and clear. “Not a lease deal...they gave me the whole car!”

He also thanked the Traffic Guys for their personalized help and insightful advice. He advised all home furnishings retailers, especially those struggling in the current economic downturn, to associate themselves with the Traffic Guys.

“Business is tough here in Pennsylvania, just like everywhere else,” Mr. Lipton said. “As a small town merchant we are required to wear many hats...the Traffic Guys have made that ‘marketing hat’ a whole lot lighter and more effective to wear.”

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*The designers of the Prana mattress are so passionate about the merits of yoga, that they offer a free yoga class with the purchase of a Prana mattress.*



the consumer, but I can tell you what the impact will be if you don't!

When done correctly, marketing and communication materials with a clear explanation of technologies and health benefits of each mattress will attract the right people. Mattresses and accessories that offer temperature regulation, for instance, appeal to women going through the "change of life" as well as thermally incompatible couples (i.e. one partner sleeps warm, the other cold). By 2015, half of the women in the US will be going through menopause so the discussion of temperature regulation will become even more prevalent in our society. Our experience has shown that although bedding salespeople may be uncomfortable or inept when discussing "change of life issues", women are not at all embarrassed by this discussion. In fact, many will go well beyond what may be considered "usual and customary" in discussing their battles with hot flashes and other change-of-life related side effects. Most importantly, they're looking for solutions, not stories.

Good POS collateral is an area in which many retailers are missing the mark. That said, some manufacturers/retailers like Kingsdown® have made the point of sale process more experiential. Kingsdown® effectively uses their Dormo Diagnostics® pressure

## TIPS FOR BEDDING SALES

### More Probing Questions

by Peter Marino

Probing is the skill by which the salesperson gathers information and finds out the customer's levels of need. Mixed in with the idea of need are the customer's concerns: their hopes, their fears, their doubts. Secondarily, but still important, probing can be used to obtain the customer's commitment. There are two kinds of probes, closed and open.

Closed probes are used in three different ways.

1. To win a simple yes or no, but without intending to win confirmation of a need or agreement from the customer. Some examples are:

- *First time in our store?*
- *Did you see our ad?*

2. To win a yes or a no in order to confirm the customer's need or to win his agreement.

- *So what you're looking for is a mattress that'll last a long time, right?*
- *Let's see if I have this right. You would buy a queen size sleep set, if you were sure it will go up the stairs to your apartment?*

3. To win the customer's buy-in through an alternate of choice.

- *Want to take it with you or do you want us to deliver it?*
- *Have you decided on a mattress with or without the pillow top sir?*

Note that while the alternate of choice is most often used as a closing technique, it is also helpful in other phases of the sale. For example, a store receptionist might ask a customer after welcoming her: "Would you like me to direct you to the bedding department or would you prefer I get a salesperson to take you there?"

OPEN PROBES are meant to encourage the customer to talk freely as shown in the following examples.

- *Mind telling me why you are replacing your present mattress?*
- *I'd appreciate knowing what about your present mattress makes you feel uncomfortable.*

Note that with the exception of the interrogative words How and Why, the others like What, Where, and When can introduce either open or closed probes. The following examples help to illustrate this.

- *What made you so unhappy with the mattress you purchased the last time?* (Answer: Let me tell you what that good for nothing sold me. La-di-da-di-da.)
- *When did you first notice that?* (Answer: Where do I begin? La-di-da-di-da.)

The best rule is to use the probe the situation calls for. When selling sleepsets, for example, the salesperson must quickly use closed probes for specific information: "What size? Is this for you or for the guest bedroom? Mattress, boxspring, and frame? Will you be taking this with you today? What have you seen elsewhere so far that you really like? How much were they asking for it?"

But once the salesperson has that specific information he must ask open probes: "What's wrong with your present set? What are you looking for in your next set?"

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## "Selling life cycle cost vs. sticker price will go a long way..."

mapping system to personalize the mattress selection process through color imagery. Select Comfort also offers an interactive experience via individualized controls that allow the consumer to tailor the support features of the bed to their own individual preference or Sleep Number®. They also use interactive point of sale materials for their Outlast® temperature regulation offerings.

The bottom line for retailers is that it is important to develop an effective customer engagement strategy supported by a product selection that meets the skillfully discovered needs of customers.

Money's tight. If retailers want their share of the "economic stimulus" checks, they need to refine the way they take products to market and the way they promote them at retail. Leverage the manu-

facturers, don't be afraid to use point of sale materials, sell benefits not features, and sell the system.

Education and the ability to provide a complete, high value-in-use solution for the consumer is not a futuristic idea. It's being done today by some of the top retailers and manufacturers in the industry. If your goal is a sustainable competitive advantage, new and repeat customers, long-term revenue growth and sustainability, then you need to start now. You'll be glad you did!

*Guy Eckert has been with Outlast Technologies since 1999. He is responsible for product development, supply chain management, sales, marketing and the overall performance of the business unit. He is an expert in specialized bedding, top of bed products, mattresses and more. He*

*possesses a unique point of view on how new technologies are advancing the future of the bedding industry and permanently raising the bar for comfort standards. He holds a Bachelor of Science degree from Embry Riddle Aeronautical University. For information on this or related topics, contact him care of editor@furninfo.com or call him direct at 303-581-0801.*

*Outlast Technologies, Inc. a pioneer in developing phase-change materials and applications. As an innovative technology company, Outlast has launched temperature-regulating technology in apparel, footwear, bedding and accessories. Originally developed for NASA, Outlast® fibers, fabrics and coatings contain patented microencapsulated phase-change materials called Thermocules™, which absorb, store, and release heat, providing increased comfort for consumers.*

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# 7 Steps To Easily Reduce FUEL COSTS

Now is the time to look at your delivery systems,  
in-home service/ sales calls and driver education.

*Warehouse Management by Dan Bolger*

Yesterday it took \$50 to fill the tank on my fuel efficient Honda. While I was putting in \$4+ a gallon gasoline at the Flying J where I go, the truckers were fueling at \$4.70 per gallon and spending \$600. It reminded me of the recent Rocky Balboa movie. Rocky wants to get back in the game and tells his son that it's not how hard a hit you can give; it's how hard a hit you can take and keep moving forward. The Economy Hit and the Fuel Hit are combined brutal punishment for everyone. So what are we going to do to get back in the game?

The Nationwide average diesel fuel cost in 2000 was \$1.31 and gasoline was about \$1.50. Prices in 2007 per the Energy Information Agency were \$2.84 and \$2.94 respectively. Their June 9th report showed \$4.09 for regular gas and

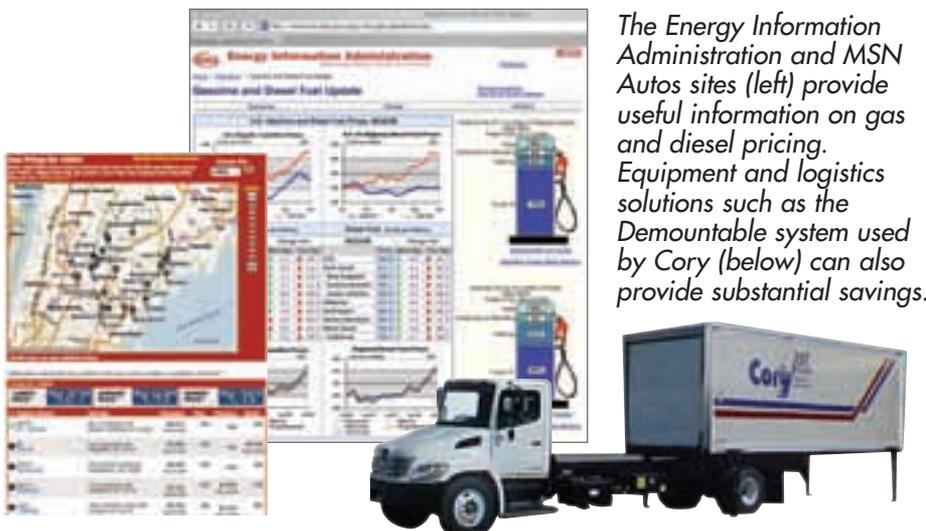
\$4.69 for diesel. Some areas are approximately 30 cents higher.

Check out the Energy Information Administration website to get a detailed update of current Diesel and Gas Prices by region along with trend graphs and other information at <http://tonto.eia.doe.gov/oog/info/gdu/gasdiesel.asp>. And if you are running gas powered cars or delivery vans, check out the useful website <http://autos.msn.com/everyday/gasstations.aspx> that lists pricing data from over 90,000 gas stations across the nation. Just enter your zip code and find the cheapest price in your area.

If you operate your own delivery trucks, or make in-home calls, now is the time to take a proactive approach to fuel conservation measures. UPS operates 94,500 vehicles. Robert Hall at UPS offers some basic recommendations, to

conserve fuel that have been adapted for FURNITURE WORLD Magazine's readers.

- *Plan your route.* Consider the best way to get to the locations without backtracking. When taking a long trip, use routing software, maps or Internet sites to determine the quickest and most direct route.
- *Avoid left turns.* UPS routes are designed to avoid left turns. Idling waiting to turn left wastes gas. Not to mention the cars idling behind you waiting for you to turn. It is also safer to avoid left turns since you reduce the number of times you turn across oncoming traffic.
- *Schedule regular maintenance.* Maintaining your vehicles can affect gas mileage. Just making sure that the tires are properly inflated can save on fuel economy.
- *Drive responsibly.* Driving style can affect the gas mileage of your vehicles. Making a fast start from a stoplight or driving over the speed limit can reduce fuel economy. UPS practices safe driving and a "no idling" policy - no matter how short of a stop a UPS driver makes, the engine is turned off.
- *Reduce the weight in the vehicle.* Unnecessary items in the vehicle can contribute to lower gas mileage. Eliminate anything you don't need.
- *Use the car or truck with the best gas mileage.* If you have more than one,



*The Energy Information Administration and MSN Autos sites (left) provide useful information on gas and diesel pricing. Equipment and logistics solutions such as the Demountable system used by Cory (below) can also provide substantial savings.*

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# "Take a close look at making additional in-home service calls."

use the one that gets the best mileage when making long trips. UPS tries to match its vehicle to the needs of its routes..

That's part of the solution but there are more ways to minimize the fuel costs you can't control.

**1.** Do it right the first time. Inspect furniture carefully during prepping to reduce the number of service calls and rejections. Pay attention to the details of loading all the components to eliminate service calls or re-deliveries.

**2.** Minimize not at homes. In many areas it is a challenge to reach a real person. Some retailers are very firm in saying they must have a confirmation call before the truck can be loaded. If you are not tracking not at homes, you should start immediately and figure out how to reduce them.

**3.** Use routing assists to plan your routes to save 10% or more. Check software options. One excellent software package can link to the inexpensive Microsoft Streets and trips as well as the higher end products like Descartes RouteView. There are options like PCMiller that are specifically designed for truck routing that can be linked to retail software systems or stand alone. Every major retail software vendor has routing solutions available..

**4.** Take a close look at making additional in-home service calls. If there is a problem at delivery, have the delivery team call the warehouse and discuss options. You may even send a picture of the problem via cell phone to clearly communicate the issue. In many cases, it is less expensive to bring the piece back to the DC for repair than to send out a service call and then still have to bring it back and redeliver.

**5.** Motivate your drivers to improve their fuel economy. Reviewing the UPS suggestions is a first step. The next step to post the mileage stats and mpg in a prominent location with small driver incentives to recognize improvement. Retailers have realized at least 10% improvement by implementing this tip alone.

**6.** Examine all your inbound transportation options. Using a good consolidator in key manufacturing and distribution points can result in fuel savings, faster overall service, less damage and lower overall cost.

**7.** If you are operating stores more than 75 miles away, consider Demountable Concepts units. For example, CORY Home Delivery serves Bon-Ton's new Younkers Furniture Gallery in Green Bay, Wisconsin from their Naperville Illinois distribution center, 225 miles distant. Significant fuel and labor savings are gained by a single driver transporting two units on a 53 foot chassis with local Green Bay crews doing the last mile delivery.

**8.** Keep alert for technology changes for future vehicles. FedEx Corp has logged over two million miles on 170 hybrid-electric delivery trucks that improved fuel economy 42% over conventionally powered vehicles. FedEx said the hybrid-electric also reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 30% and particulate by 96%.

The bottom line is that fuel prices are going to stay high. Learn to live with it and be flexible in considering new options. Times have changed and we have to tough it out, just as Sylvester Stallone has done in each of the movies he has acted in or directed.

Daniel Bolger P.E. provides operations consulting services to clients throughout North America. You can contact Dan at [bolger@furninfo.com](mailto:bolger@furninfo.com) or call 740-503-8875. For more information on this or other transportation, logistics and furniture warehousing topics, go to [www.furninfo.com](http://www.furninfo.com) to read all of Dan's articles.

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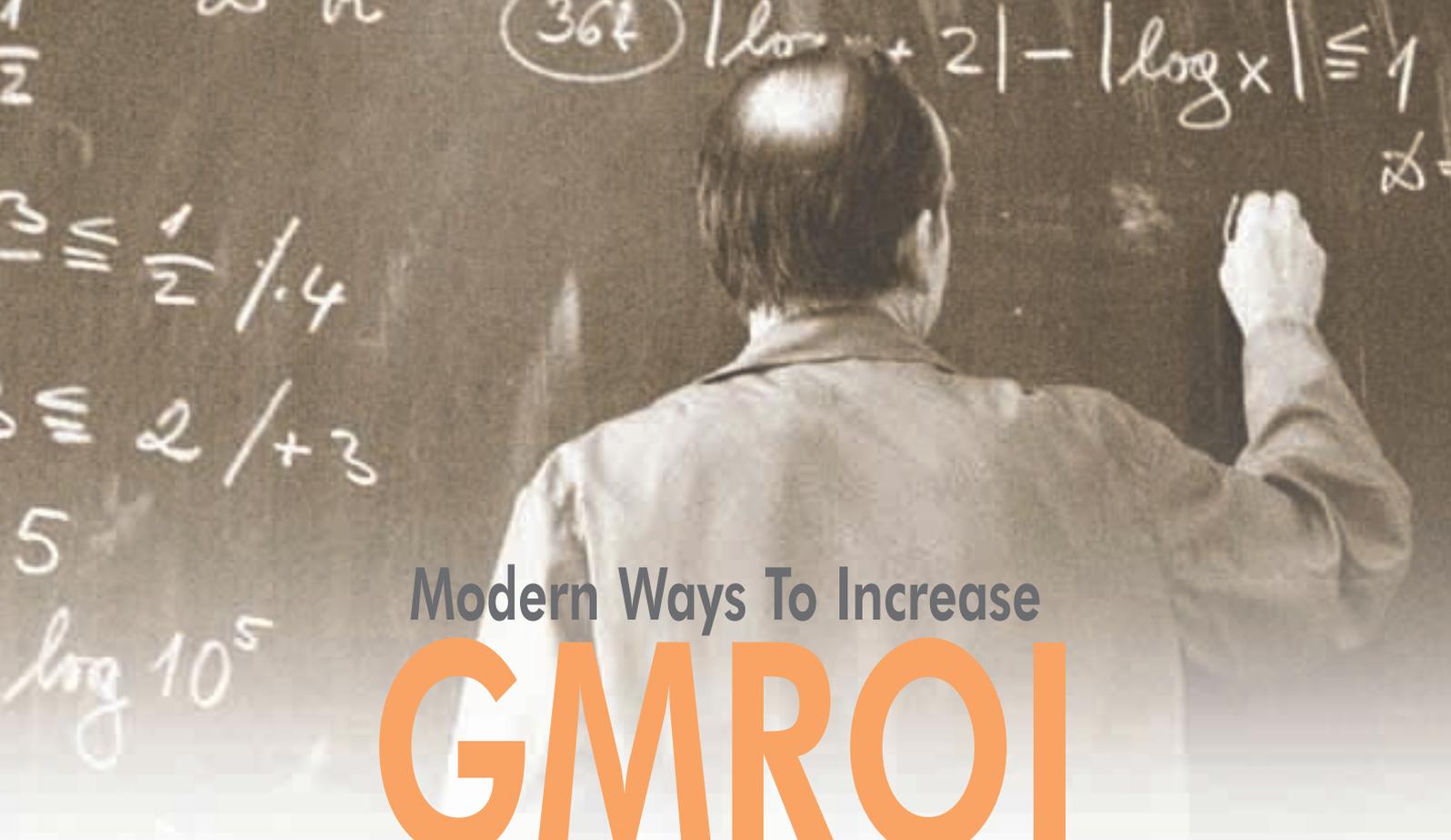


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# Modern Ways To Increase GMROI

Part 1: Old school ways to increase this critical measure are just not enough anymore!

By David McMahon

**Editor's Note:** This article will discuss ways you can boost GMROI by applying technology to improve your business at the point of sale, in purchasing and receiving. The October/November issue of FURNITURE WORLD will conclude this discussion by looking at pickup/delivery, customer follow-up systems, website and advertising considerations.

The economy has changed. Buying patterns are dynamic. Technology is rocketing forward. Some retailers are keeping pace. They are the innovators. They quickly adapt and take advantage of the changing economy and give customers services that match their buying patterns. They do this by embracing the same technology that brought about the changes in the first place.

Have you ever been to a Crate and Barrel store? This is the place where couples go to register for their wedding gifts. Why? It is easy and the merchandise is right. They just set up their account, pick up a scanner and start zapping bar codes. When they are done, they upload their wish list to their gift registry. Automatically, Crate and Barrel creates a

web page for the couple. Emails are then sent to family and friends who go to the site or to the store to view and purchase gifts. Then a box shows up at the couple's house a few days later. There is no clerk interaction needed and Crate and Barrel brings in hundreds of new customers.

Can you use technology to increase traffic, sales and profitability? Sure. The key is to make the process is easy for customers and employees.

That's how innovative retailers increase their return on investment. They seek to implement the latest tools and practices. In the Crate and Barrel example, gross margin dollars and turns are maximized via a social network being created by technology that pulls in extra customers. It also moves merchandise while minimizing costs.

Previous articles in this FURNITURE WORLD Magazine series have covered traditional methods of increasing GMROI (Gross margin dollars per inventory, or turns x (GM%/COGS%). Those methods are not enough anymore! Technology has improved on them.

Innovators like Crate and Barrel are maximizing gross margin and turns. This article will highlight some modern ways that you can increase your GMROI.

## MODERN SHOWROOM OPERATIONS

What do both your customers and salespeople want? They want to find which merchandise works as easy as possible.

An important customer question is, "When can I get it?" Unless the salesperson has a crystal ball, "Duh" sets in. Blank stares, guesses, lies, "I'll check with my manager", or "I'll be right back" are common responses. The customer then waits for the salesperson to get "ballpark" information on available stock levels, incoming orders and vendor lead times. The customer gets cold. The sale becomes less likely as professionalism and trust is compromised. The longer an informed answer takes, the greater the frustration, and the less likely a sale. If customers need to wait 15 minutes to find out when they can get the product, how much do you think they will like it



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## Modern Ways To Increase GMROI

when a standard six to eight week answer is given?

Fortunately, bar coding enables better, faster answers. It builds trust and boosts GMROI.

The reason why bar coding increases GMROI is that in addition to smoothing the sales process, it is the only way an operation with thousands of SKU's can keep its inventory 100% accurate. The salesperson can speak to the customer with confidence if an item is in stock or on order.

A bar code can be printed on the price tag with almost any POS software. A salesperson now can scan the bar code with a wireless device or PDA. Salespeople and customers can immediately access information on stock levels and incoming purchase orders. There is no excuse for playing the waiting game. And this technology does more. Like the Crate and Barrel gift registry, it allows customers to select the item and immediately add it to their cart. This is happening now, and you can see it in place at select Broyhill stores, Target, and some independent retailers.

Without access to this instant information, you weaken your selling strategy and leave sales on the table. With it, you will see increases in GMROI as both gross margin dollars and turns are increased via better close ratios and average sales, provided by shorter lag times.

### MODERN PURCHASING OPERATIONS

Faxing and phoning PO's and

hand keying acknowledgements are going the way of the dinosaurs.

EDI – Electronic Data Interchange – has been functioning in big retail for years. That is one major reason why conglomerates like Wal-Mart can turn their inventory so fast without a sizable store warehouse. In fact, they turn it so rapidly that their inventory is free, as their financing terms fully cover it. Think Wal-Mart. EDI is now cheap enough that any mom and pop store can get on board.

EDI allows for the automatic sending and receiving of data between various and even unrelated computer systems. It does the job of clerks, a billion times faster. It sends the PO on the retailer side, receives it on the manufacturer side, sends the acknowledgement, order update and invoice on the manufacturer side, and receives it on the retailer side. It also checks for errors.

Small retailers can do this through VAN's. A VAN is a Value Added Network or a third party translator. It allows for the sending, translation, and receiving of data between different software systems for a transaction fee. It puts business partners in sync with each other.

EDI increases GMROI, because it enables faster, more accurate ordering, while eliminating "busy work" that may, or may not, get done. Because order errors are reported, incorrect shipments are less likely. The result is that your customers and salespeople experience fewer disappointments. Happier customers and faster sales – is that a win-win, or what?

# "Make the process easy for customers and employees."

## MODERN RECEIVING OPERATIONS

Professional distribution managers don't allow shipments to "just show up." When it just "shows up", your merchandise sits on the dock longer and does not get into your inventory system promptly. In some cases it is missed all together and inaccurate quantities result in your locations.

That's why recording the receipt of merchandise should be done as close to the delivery as possible.

Retailers, who can receive merchandise quicker, with more accuracy, achieve a higher GMROI, since the merchandise is available for sale faster, the inventory is more accurate, and deliveries and pick

ups can be scheduled sooner.

Require your vendors to email advanced shipping notification with a purchase order and item detail. From this, you can print out and organize your bar code labels so that immediate receiving is possible. As merchandise is unloaded, scan and label your merchandise.

As with POS bar coding, affordable solutions are widely available for wireless distribution bar coding. There is zero delay. You know exactly where your merchandise is at all times!

## NEXT ISSUE

The second part of this series will provide more tools and techniques for

improving GMROI in your delivery and pickup operations, customer follow-up systems, website and advertising programs.

David McMahon, is a Business Coach for PROFITconsulting. PROFITconsulting assists retailers in increasing GMROI with traditional and modern methods.

Questions about the topics covered this article or on any other operations management issue can be sent to David McMahon care of FURNITURE WORLD Magazine at davidm@furninfo.com. You can also call him direct at 800-888-5564. Read all of David McMahon's articles posted to the operations management article archives on the furninfo.com website.

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"A chair is a very difficult object. A skyscraper is almost easier. That is why Chippendale is famous."  
*-Max van der Zee*

**form** (fɔrm) \* n. **1a.** The shape and structure of an object. **b.** The body, corp. of a person; figure. **2a.** The essence of something. **b.** The mode in which a thing exists; kind; a force of nature; life. **3a.** Procedure as determined by regularity or custom. **b.** A fixed order of words or procedures, as in a ceremony. **4.** A document with blanks for the insertion of requested information. **5.** Manners as governed by etiquette. **6.** Performance according to recognized criteria. **7.** Fitness with regard to health or training. **8.** Style or manner in literary or musical composition. **b.** The structure of a work of art. **9.** model for making a mold. **10.** A manner

**function** (fʌŋkʃən) \* n. **1.** The action for which one is particularly fitted or employed. **2.** The duty, occupation, or role of a person. **3.** An official ceremony or a formal social occasion. **4.** Something closely related to another thing and dependent on it for its existence or value. **5.** Faith. A rule of correspondence between two sets such that there is a unique element in the second set assigned to each element in the first set. **6.** Comp. Sci. A procedure within an application. **v.** To have or perform a function.

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# **SPECIAL REPORT**

## **Area Rugs For Every Budget**



**Everything home furnishings retailers  
need to know about selling area rugs.**

# AREA RUGS

What a great product! Rugs can beautify your sales floor and compliment your merchandise mix. When properly displayed, advertised and presented, they also increase retail traffic and boost average sale.

Area rugs allow customers to add design pizzazz to rooms that otherwise lack excitement. They add visual and physical warmth, and can inject a great pop of color or pattern into any room. More than any other design element, rugs help to define seating and dining areas. They are also used to break up large spaces to create visual order in what might otherwise be a chaotic scene.

Rugs soften hard surfaces, making them more comfortable on the eyes, the ears and the feet. When used with the proper padding, they provide a non-slip surface for floors and stairs. They also absorb and reduce ambient noise.

## HELP CUSTOMERS CHOOSE THE RIGHT RUG

The first thing most customers look for after size, when selecting an area rug, is color. That's because rugs are often selected after decisions about furniture style and wall color have been made. Because of this, it is a good idea to encourage customers to bring fabric and paint samples with them to ensure that rug colors can be matched.

After color, customers usually consider the design or style of their new rug. Rugs can coordinate with virtually any room setting.

As mentioned previously, rugs can be used to orient furnishings in a space, but many customers will want to purchase a room-size rug. A good rule of thumb to remember when choosing a room sized rug is to leave at least 8 inches of bare floor space around it.

## SIZING & DESIGN TIPS

- Add at least four feet to the width and length of a rug to be placed under a dining table so that chairs can be pulled out without extending beyond the rug.
- For safety sake, try not to let rug corners extend into high traffic areas as they can create a tripping hazard.
- Encourage your customers to purchase and use a rug pad. A good pad helps to keep the rug in place. Rugs wear from the bottom first. A good pad will, therefore, extend rug life by many years.
- Lighter colored rugs increase the perceived size of a room while darker colors create a warmer, more intimate setting.
- Patterns and darker colors are a good choice for high traffic areas to hide marks and wear in these areas.
- To add extra excitement to your design, try angling rugs for a lively feeling. This can open up a room. Angling a rug works particularly well when the sofa is also angled.

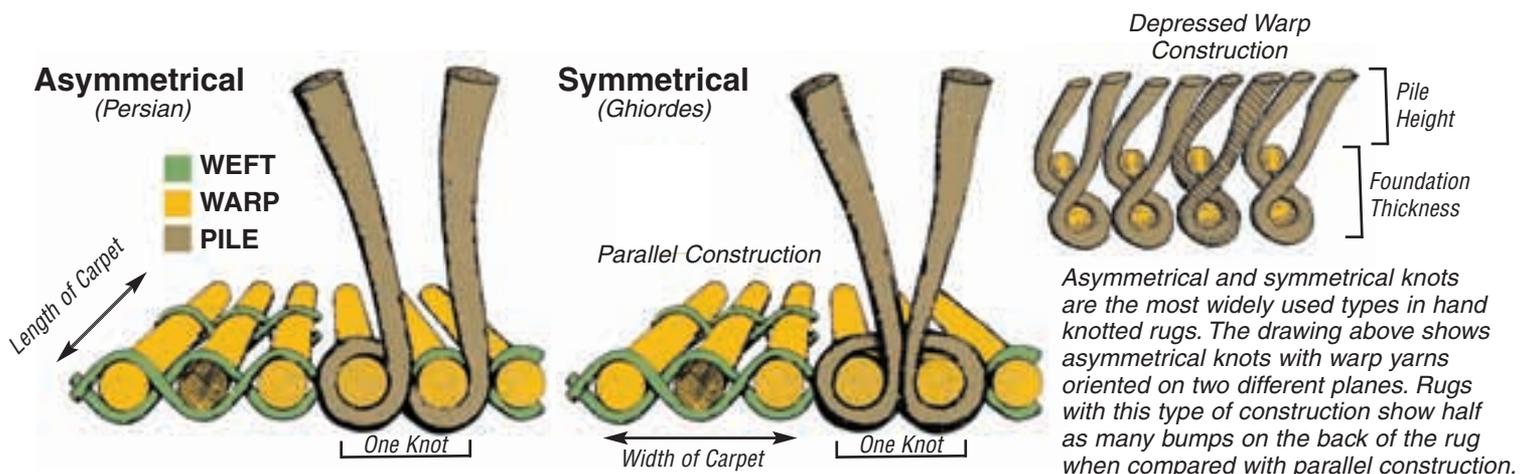
## RUG BASICS

Beautiful rugs are available at all price points. In general, a rug's price, is determined by its construction, the quality of the materials used, and the amount of hand labor involved in its manufacture. Selling a rug is similar in this respect to selling bedding or upholstered furniture. Differences in price are often the result of quality features which are not always obvious, but affect beauty, durability and long term consumer satisfaction. Pointing out these hidden features can convince a customer that a rug is worth the investment, or explain why similar looking rugs may, in fact be very different.

Retail sales associates need not master the complexities of rug weaving, but they should know the quality features and sizes of rugs they have in stock, as well as how to care for them. Basic rug types include hand knotted, tufted, hooked, flat weave, braided and power loomed.

**Hand Knotted:** Hand Knotted area rugs are woven by hand; and depending on size, construction and density, one area rug can take a year or more to complete. The pile on hand knotted rugs is secured to the foundation by knotting, versus gluing, to produce rugs of exceptional density and quality.

**Warp & Weft:** The warp and the weft make up the fabric or foundation of the rug. In a handmade rug, the knots are tied around the warp yarns which end up as the





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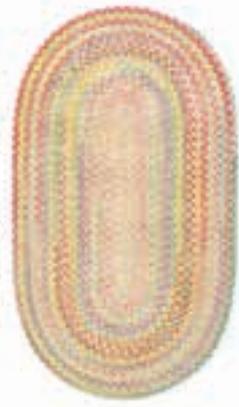
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*Braided*



*Flat Weave*



*Hand Tufted*



*Hand Knotted*



fringe. The foundation stabilizes the carpet and holds the pile in place. Properly constructed foundations ensure that a rug lies flat.

Cotton is the most common warp fiber. It is less expensive than wool, and very strong. In very fine applications, silk may be used because thin strands of silk are very strong. Weft fibers can be cotton, wool or other suitable fibers.

**Knot Types:** Each knot corresponds to two strands of pile. There are three basic types of knots used in the different rug producing regions of the world: the Persian, also called Senneh or asymmetrical; the Ghiordes, also known as a Turkish or symmetrical knot; and the Jufi knot.

Both symmetrical and asymmetrical knots can be used to produce high quality rugs. Knowing the difference can help experienced rug merchants identify the origins of a particular rug. A symmetrical knot completely encircles two warps. An asymmetrical knot completely encircles only one. If you look at the back of a rug and see a bump of one color surrounded by bumps of a different color across a warp, then the rug has been knotted using symmetrical knots. If the bumps of a single color always occur in pairs, you cannot tell for sure which knot was used.

The jufi knot is often used in lower quality rugs to save time. It results in a looser construction and reduced durability. Jufi knots encircle four or more warps, instead of two.

**Hand Knotted Quality:** Probably the best known indicator of quality in hand knotted oriental rugs is the compactness of the weave, measured as the number of knots per square inch. One "rule of thumb" is that oriental rugs having 100 or more knots per square inch are considered good, and that knot counts above 200 are excellent. The number of knots per square inch are counted by determining the number of bumps appearing on the back of the rug (measure the number of bumps in one inch in the direction of the warp and also the number in the direction of the weft and multiply). This

is not a "fool proof" method since in parallel constructions (where the warp yarns lie next to each other) each knot produces two bumps on the back, whereas in depressed warp constructions (where the warps are on two vertical planes as shown in the diagram on the previous page), each knot produces only one bump.

For a given type of knot, the more knots there are per square inch, the greater the amount of labor invested, and the higher the price. Generally, the thinner the yarn, the more knots can fit per unit area.

It is not necessarily true that a carpet with more knots per square inch is more valuable or of higher quality than one with fewer knots. This is because knot count is only one factor affecting quality, and because quality standards for different types of rugs from different regions vary. For example, fine Chinese rugs often use thicker yarns and so cannot have very high knot counts.

Well made rugs have evenly and regularly spaced knots. A pattern that looks clear and regular when viewed from the back indicates quality weaving.

**Pile:** The pile, is made up of yarns knotted into the foundation. It is measured from the top of the foundation to top of the rug (see diagram). Coarser constructions generally have a pile height of between 4/8 and 5/8 of an inch.

The pile on more tightly woven rugs tends to be lower since intricate patterns, a characteristic of these rugs, can become fuzzy if the pile height is too long.

Wool used to create the pile is available in many grades, the choice of which affects the finished look, quality and price of a rug. 4-ply yarns (yarn composed of four strands) tend to be more expensive than 3, 2 or single ply yarns. This is because of the relative fineness and longer fibers in the 4-ply that produce a more even surface effect.

Finer weaves (more knots per square inch) have more yarn ends per square inch and can have the same wear characteristics as coarser carpets with fewer ends per square inch but a higher pile.

**Colors:** All other factors being equal, the more top colors there are in an oriental rug, the more detailed its design and the greater its price.

**Pattern:** Intricate patterns take a great deal of skill and weaving time. Patterns with clean, gentle curves are prized. They are often made in workshops with the help of "cartoons" that detail the color and position of each knot in the pattern.

**Pile Quality:** Pile height should be consistent throughout any rug. Uneven pile, caused by uneven shearing, may cause portions of the carpet to wear out faster than others. Some degree of unevenness may be acceptable in cruder tribal rugs, but not in fine workshop made or power loomed rugs.

**Flat Woven:** The main difference between oriental rugs and flat woven rugs such as Kilims, Dhurries, Tapestries, Druggets and Soumaks is that oriental rugs have yarns knotted around the warp forming loops that make up the pile, whereas flat woven rugs are crafted from warp and weft yarns and have no pile. The different categories of flat woven rugs differ in various aspects of their construction, colors, fibers and motifs.

**Power Loomed:** Power loomed rugs are created on looms strung with a cotton or jute warp and then woven using nylon, polypropylene, wool or other fiber. Computer operated machines faithfully reproduce rugs in various sizes and designs without the variations seen in hand woven pieces. Woven on Wilton, side-woven Wilton and Gripper Axminster looms, power loomed rugs are produced in a wide variety of sizes and styles at excellent price points.

Power loomed rugs have knots that are tied around the weft instead of the warp. Handmade rugs have ridges on the back that run in the same direction as the fringe. Power loomed rugs have ridges that are perpendicular to the fringe. They generally have consistent quality and are tightly and evenly woven.

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**July 8-16, 2008**  
Atlanta International  
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**Las Vegas Showroom**  
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**July 28 - Aug 1, 2008**  
Las Vegas  
World Market

“The first thing that customers look for after size, is color.”

FIBERS

**Hand Tufted:** Hand Tufted area rugs are created by punching yarn into cloth that is attached to a frame. A latex backing is applied to stabilize the construction after hooking the yarn. The surface loop pile is then sheared to produce a flat surface. This process creates an area rug that is plush and generally reasonably priced.

**Hand Hooked:** Hand Hooked rugs are created using a pattern and a hooking device. Yarn is punched through a canvas cloth creating a looped pile. The yarns are then glued in place in lieu of knotting, and a cloth is attached to the back for added protection.

**Needlepoint:** Needlepoint rugs are made with standard needlepoint technique using wool yarns on canvas.

**Braided:** These rugs are made from heavy strips of fabric or yarn braided into long ropes and then sewn at their edges to form a continuous spiral. Oval shapes are the most common. Even though braided rugs were traditionally paired with colonial or rustic styled furnishings, they can be used in a variety of other casual settings as well.

**Flokati:** Hand woven rugs from Greece created by immersing shaggy woolen fabric in water causing the wool shag to unravel, blossom and the backing to felt.

**Wool:** Many Power Loomed and Hand Made rugs are made of wool. It is the traditional fiber used in fine hand made Oriental rugs. Wool not only wears longer, it also keeps its original appearance and stays cleaner looking longer than most other fibers. Its ability to absorb moisture prevents a build-up of static electricity. Wool, therefore, does not attract lint and dust. The crimp in wool fibers and the scales on the outside of fibers helps to keep dirt from penetrating the surface. The same qualities make it easy to clean. Each wool fiber is made up of millions of “coiled springs” that stretch and give rather than break, and so wool is extremely durable. Wool rugs also absorb dyes differently than synthetic rugs giving them a more authentic look..

**Cotton:** is a natural fiber of great durability, strength and absorbency. Each cotton fiber is made up of twenty to thirty layers of cellulose, coiled in a neat series of natural springs. When the cotton boll (seed case) is opened, the fibers dry into flat, twisted, ribbon-like shapes and become kinked together and interlocked. This interlocked form is ideal for spinning into a fine yarn.

**Polypropylene:** Polypropylene or Olefin fibers are petroleum products, derived from propylene and ethylene gasses. The polypropylene fiber is characterized by its resistance to moisture. It is strong, quick dry-

ing and colorfast. It is also mildew, abrasion soil and stain resistant. Polypropylene fibers have the lowest density of all manufactured fibers giving olefin textiles a very lightweight quality.

Heat Set Polypropylene is a man-made fiber that is created by a process called extrusion. Extrusion involves the pre-dyeing of pellets that are then melted down and extruded into continuous fibers. The resulting twisted yarns are treated with heat to retain their "permanent wave" for better performance and appearance retention.

**Nylon:** Nylon is the generic name for a group of chemically related synthetic protein-like polymer fibers. It is highly durable because of its remarkable resistance to abrasion. It also resists mold, mildew, insects, stretching and wrinkling. Nylon can be dry cleaned or washed. It dries quickly, resists soiling and can be spot cleaned .

**Polyester:** Polyester, a long-chain synthetic polymer can be produced with a semi-bright to dull sheen and a crisp to soft feel. This fiber is very strong, durable and has good resistance to abrasive wear. It also resists deterioration when exposed to mildew, sunlight, water and insects.

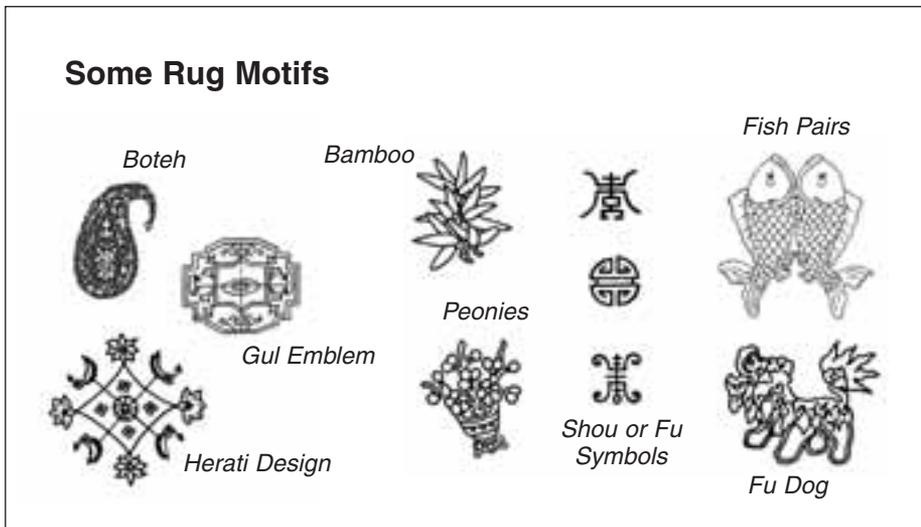
**Silk:** Cultivated, reeled silk is a fine, strong, continuous, protein filament produced by the larva of certain insects, especially the silkworm. The silkworm cocoon is softened by immersion in warm water. The silk filament is then reeled off and rendered soft and white by steeping and boiling in soap baths.

Silk is strong, resilient, long lasting and expensive. It resists abrasion, soiling, mildew and insects but will not stand exposure to sunlight. Silk is stronger than steel pound for pound when pulled on, but wears when walked on.

CARE & CLEANING

Although consumers should always follow manufacturer’s cleaning instructions, there are a few simple, general rules that can be followed to keep natural fiber area rugs in top condition.

**Vacuuming:** Many experts suggest that all parts of the rug be vacuumed at least weekly to reduce the possibility of moth infestation



Machine Loomed



Wool Flokati



Photo Credits: Braided rug from Capel Rugs. Others used in this guide from Hellenic Rug Imports.

in wool carpets and to remove soil before it gets ground into the foundation, becoming difficult to remove. Suction type vacuums may be desirable on low pile carpets or antique rugs where the use of a "beater" model might break wool foundation yarns. Rugs should always be vacuumed width-wise (perpendicular to the fringe) to avoid getting the fringe caught.

**Cleaning:** Most experts recommend periodic professional cleaning of fine rugs, outside the house at least every 1-5 years (depending on the amount of traffic).

**Stains:** Spills and stains should be taken care of immediately before they have a chance to set. Spot cleaning of water soluble stains with a mild soap is often recommended. After cleaning, air should be allowed to circulate under the damp area to prevent mildew. For difficult stains like pet and wine stains, professional cleaning may be required. Gum or wax can be scraped off with a knife. Always test over-the-counter cleaning products on a small corner of any rug first to make sure that it will not cause damage.

**Mildew:** Aside from incontinent and "scratch happy" pets, mildew is the worst enemy of natural fiber rugs. Storing rugs in damp places may cause them to rot. Flowerpots placed on rugs can cause discoloration and rot.

**Turning:** Oriental rugs should be turned periodically to even out wear in high traffic paths.

**Sunlight:** Avoid direct sunlight which can cause fading.

## ADDITIONAL RUG TERMS

**Field:** The area of a rug that lies just within the borders. Fields can be "open" (a single color) or decorated

**Fringe:** The portion of the warp strands that extend beyond the main body of the carpet. Power loomed Oriental design rugs may have fringe sewn onto the ends.

**Medallion:** A large, defined emblem or motif normally placed at the center of a rug.

**Motif:** A single or repeating design or color such as a floral or geometric design.

**Spandrels:** A corner space with scrollwork or other decorative filling. Rugs often have

spandrels which lie between the borders and the field surrounding a central medallion.

**Symbols:** The plants, animals and everyday objects depicted on Oriental rugs often have meanings rooted in the religion, philosophy and culture of the people who weave them. Many individual symbols represent ideas, as do groups of symbols and entire compositions. Alternatively, many rugs are beautifully designed art... having no literal or figurative meaning. In either case, a rug can be the perfect beginning or ending to the consumer's purchase of home furnishings.

- Chinese Rug Symbols: There are hundreds of symbols and combinations that are woven into Chinese rugs. Here are just a few: Pairs of fish may symbolize happiness in marriage, wealth and plenty; Dragons embody power, authority and goodness; Bats are a symbol of good luck and happiness; Peonies are symbolic of beauty, affection, love, Spring and wealth; Fu dogs epitomize strength and courage; Butterflies bring luck and marriage happiness: The Shou symbol can represent immortality or longevity.*

- Persian and Turkoman Symbols: Florals may be symbolic of the paradise of Islamic after-life and can take various forms including repeating florals, diffuse florals, formal garden designs, Savonnerie, Aubusson and paneled garden designs; Tree of Life designs can represent the bridge between heaven and earth; Central Medallions are inspired either by Koran book covers or tribal insignia; Boteh or Mir boteh (princely flower) designs resemble the dominant motif on paisley patterns; The Herati design has a central diamond pattern, surrounded by four crescent shaped leaves or fish... possibly symbolic of Persian mythology in which the world is supported by four fish; The Gul emblem is an ancient Turkoman lozenge shaped motif usually presented in rows. Rugs originating in Bokhara often contain the gul design. Gul emblems range from variations of hexagonal to round to diamond shapes.*

**Washing:** After clipping, hand woven rugs are washed to remove any dirt or insect infestations that may be present. Often chemicals can be added to the wash to change the color and surface characteristics of the finished product. They can impart an antique look, fade out colors or give a lustrous sheen.

## Rug Sales Tips From Retail Experts

**Nebraska Furniture:** "I believe the key is having an organized merchandise presentation that shows a wide variety of selection in area rugs. A retailer must stay on top of current fashion and color trends as well as maintaining staple sellers. Customers want to experience the possibilities and understand the differences in what their options are in a quick and efficient manner. A wide selection of product types and styles in a variety of price points is key to maximizing the customer experience. The ability of sales staff to qualify the customer's desires and present viable options then becomes the most important factor." -David Snedeker, Area Rug Buyer

**I.O. Metro LLC:** "The right product at the right price. This goes for all products that we sell; high quality and unique look (transitional to contemporary) for a great price. As a result of our low to mid price point our rugs had to fit the equation as well. You can't have a solid wood, hand-made table that retails for \$499.95 sitting on a thousand dollar rug. In terms of the quality, we don't sell high end Persian rugs, but we do sell a great look at a great price (\$299.95-\$499.95) In addition, the patterns and colors that coordinate with our furniture sell best, especially when placed on the floor in a room setting.

"I.O. Metro provides customers with Instant gratification, by keeping our top selling patterns in stock. We choose a core collection for each quarter that we offer in 5x7 and 8x11 that is stocked in our DC, so the longest a customer has to wait is 1 week. Along with the core collection we offer a number of skus that are bolder in color and pattern to keep things interesting and it gives the customer a sense of urgency on those items knowing that we have limited availability." -Lauren Christmann, Accessory Buyer.



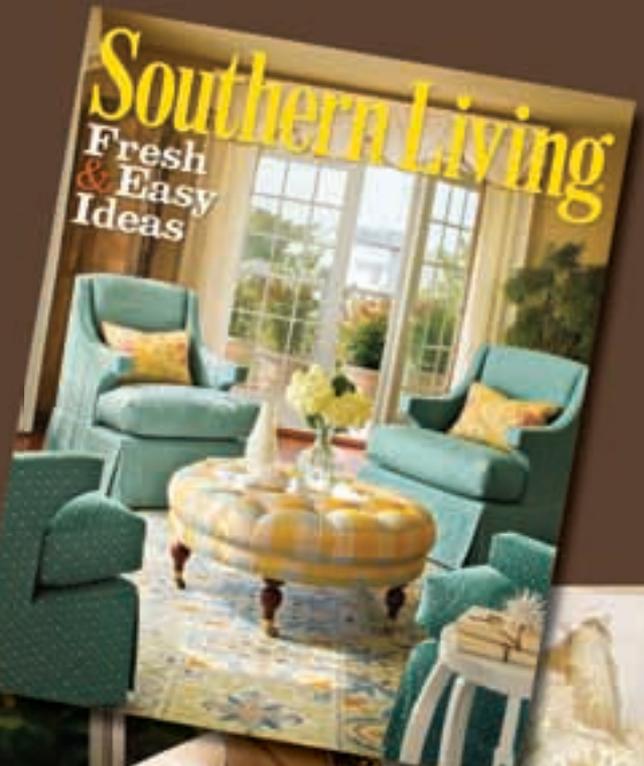
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Las Vegas World Market

**July 28**

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# Staying Alive During TOUGH TIMES

Part 6: What do you do when 20% of your traffic disappears?

*Sales Management Magic by Joe Capillo*



**A**lrightright already! Almost 18 months of tough times for our industry is a little hard to take. This is one of those rare times when most things I thought I knew, and everything I've learned in my 35 years of experience in the industry become questionable. That's because this kind of economic environment is new for all of us and I, for one, am learning that the same old, same old (thinking) doesn't work here.

Here's what hasn't changed: The lady still wants a beautiful home. That need never changes, and we should all keep this in mind as we try to fine new ways to deal with conditions we've not seen before and over which we have no control. \$4.00 or \$5.00 gas isn't in our realm of control, or even influence. What we can control is how we deal with those customers who still have needs and are still shopping.

In the beginning of this series of articles FURNITURE WORLD readers were asked to consider what they would do if 20% of their customer traffic disappeared? That has been the foundation for most of these articles. If your business is traffic-driven, and you change nothing you do, when traffic declines by 20%, your sales will decline by 20% as well. If you drop your prices through promotions and discounts, but are unsuccessful at increasing traffic, then your sales will decline by more than 20%, and your

margins will be lower. This is the same-old-same-old type of thinking.

So what can you do? Here are some suggestions for staying alive, and maybe even doing better, in these tough times:

## GIVE THE LADY WHAT SHE WANTS

Take the advice of the department store icon Marshall Field, who had a sign on the wall of his office that read, "Give the Lady What She Wants". We already know that she wants a beautiful home – so do what you have to do to help her get it from you. But, don't think that this means simply selling her furniture at a discount or for long finance terms – that's more same-old-same-old. To really connect to more customers who still are shopping so as to improve your closing ratio on those 20% fewer shoppers, you have to provide those hard-to-sell customers with the things they need – more help.

In other words, you have to change your thinking from furniture, to rooms. You have to believe that our business, furniture retailing, isn't really about furniture at all. It's about rooms.

## STAY CONNECTED AND BRING THEM BACK

If you truly measure all of your cus-

tomers opportunities, you know that your store's overall closing ratio is around 20% of all shoppers. Remember, that's your average performance level, so you have some salespeople performing over that level, and unfortunately some salespeople performing at lower levels.

You also will know that shoppers who come to you for the first time on a particular purchase project, make that purchase the first time in your store less than 10% of the time. When some of these people return again on the same project, your close ratio will be 60% or higher. Believe this – we all live on be-backs.

If you historically have a 20% close ratio on all customer traffic, getting only one more customer out of every ten to buy will increase your close ratio to 30% - a whopping 50% increase. This is how you make up for the 20% drop in traffic in these bad times. The way you get one more customer out of every ten (10 more out of every 100 customer opportunities who shop) is to get more of them to come back again on the same project. How? By understanding that your business is not just about furniture, it's about rooms. So find ways to deal with rooms and help people solve problems when you engage them the first time. Provide them with more help than you have in the past (or than your competitors provide) and keep your salespeople attached to these non-buyers with follow

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**Jimmy Goree**

President & CEO, Goree's Furniture Express

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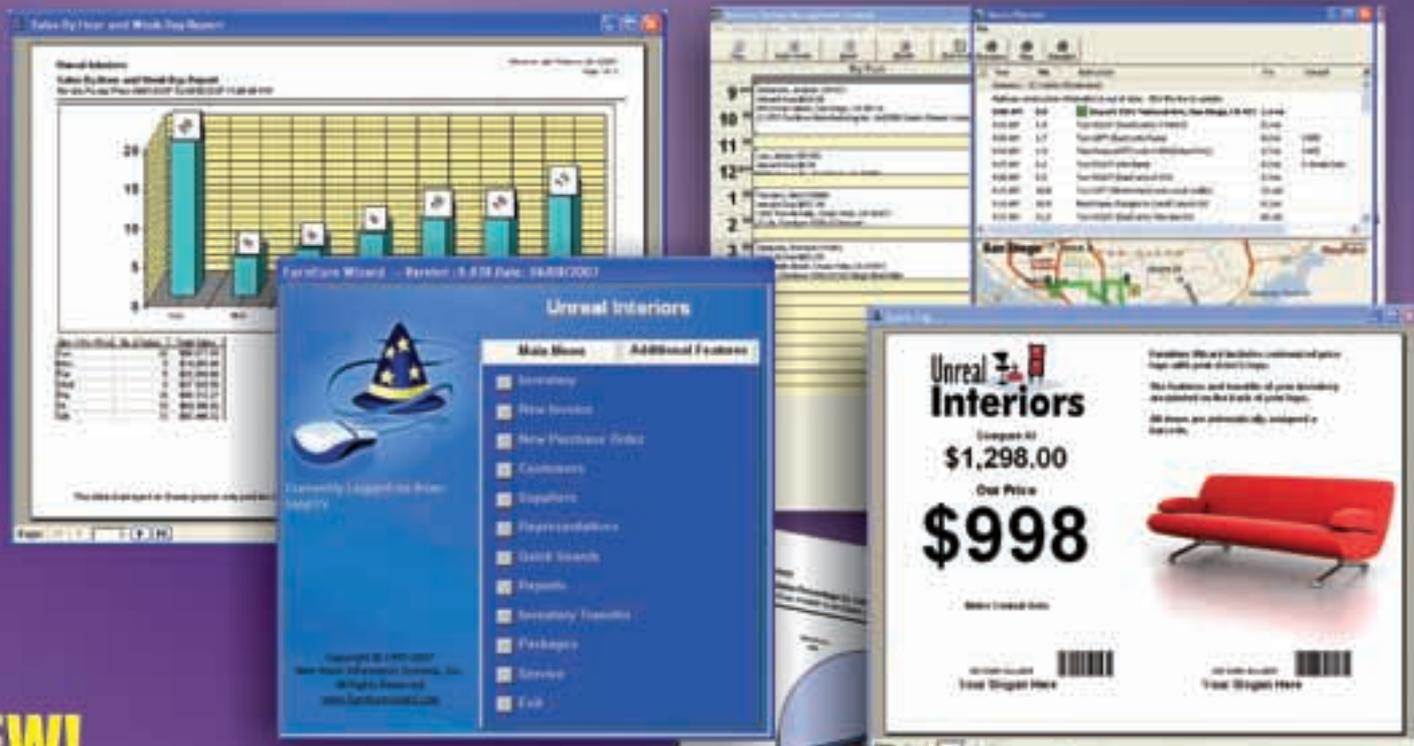
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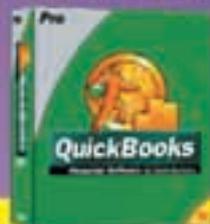


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## “Improve your closing ratio on those 20% fewer shoppers.”

up (See previous articles in this “Stay Alive” series posted to the sales management article archives on the furninfo.com website).

### GET SALES MANAGERS OUT ON THE FLOOR

On the floor is where they belong. Our business, our “game” is one of individual performance by salespeople who are, in most stores, the only people who come face-to-face with customers. All of the information regarding our companies, our products, and our services passes to our customers through salespeople. All of us have special things we would say and do if we got to engage

every customer who comes to us with a home decorating problem to solve.

More important is that if you are a typical store, all of your revenue is generated as the result of these customer/salesperson interactions. A curve of normal distribution, if you could make one for skill, motivation, communications skills, and intelligence, would show that your sales staff ranges all over the chart from great to awful. Knowing this should motivate you to be very specific in what you want salespeople to do with your customers. From scripting the words you want them to say regarding certain aspects of your business, your store and your products, to observing their behavior from the position of on-the-field

coach, you need management presence on your floor – all the time. Another benefit is that customers like having management interaction in big-ticket, highly-considered purchases.

### KEEP MORALE UP

Never forget that if your sales are down, your commissioned salespeople’s earnings are down. The same things suggested above relative to stores overall, also applies to them. This is another good reason to have management involvement on the selling floor because it’s important to place special emphasis on teamwork – all of us working to overcome this economic downturn. Remember this, too: People make your business go, so don’t let great people get away from you for the wrong reasons.

### GET BETTER AT EVERYTHING

If you’ve been selling pretty much the same way since around 1978, make the necessary changes in your thinking and execution of your selling strategy. Direct your efforts at dealing with rooms and generating be-backs. Measure everything, and use the information to manage better. Get involved on the selling floor – manage like a football coach, on the field, and remember that you have an advantage over the football coach – you can play, too.

*Joe Capillo is a furniture industry veteran with 35 years combined experience as a retail consultant and retail industry executive.*

*He is a contributing editor to FURNITURE WORLD and a frequent speaker at industry functions. Joe makes himself available for private consultations on any aspect of retail sales management and sales education. He can be reached at [joecapillo@furninfo.com](mailto:joecapillo@furninfo.com). See many more articles by Joe Capillo on the FURNITURE WORLD website [furninfo.com](http://furninfo.com).*

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# A Cure For The Furniture BUSINESS BLUES

How some furniture entrepreneurs are turning the tide in a negative business climate.

*Advertising Strategies by Larry Mullins*

The best is yet to come? You are probably thinking, “You have got to be kidding. Don’t you watch TV? Don’t you read the papers?”

Yes, I do. And there is truth in the observation that public confidence has been seriously eroded by the media, which seems to put a maximum-negative spin on everything. Their underlying take home implication is that Washington must fix things, and do so soon. However, I can assure you that Washington never does fix all that much. Never has, never will.

The home furnishings industry will be fixed by the same breed of mavericks that have fixed it so many times before—the ones who innovate and dare in the face of challenge. They are not necessarily the big shots. These are not the guys with a cushion of millions of dollars who can afford to wait things out. These are individuals who do not have that luxury, who are striving to find ways to turn the tide now. They are more than survivors, the “spirit shines through” them.

Corny? Perhaps to some. But to repeat Mark Joyner’s comment from the May/June issue of FURNITURE WORLD Magazine: “Some people may read these words and want to vomit, and that’s OK. Cynical and sarcastic people may not like guys like me, and that’s cool. My [Brand] will sort right through them. I don’t want to be around them and they don’t want to be around me. No worries.”

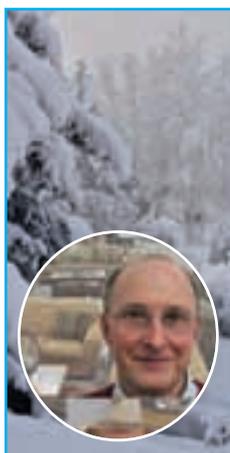
More in a moment about some of the “ordinary” entrepreneurs and what they are doing in these tough times to “fix” our industry. First, let’s take an intermission from this “Lost Secrets” series to briefly revisit your personal brand (a subject featured in the last issue). Quite a few favorable comments were received from readers reacting to the importance of cultivating an extraordinary personal brand. But one furniture entrepreneur wrote me along these lines: “Larry, I like the idea that my store’s People Media™ begin with me. I like the idea of having a dynamic personal brand. But, how am I

supposed to remember all of these branding qualities you and Mark Joyner list?”

Good question. Regarding your personal brand, your associates, customers, and vendors will not value so much how dynamic and charismatic you are. They may not remember much about how you look, what you say, how you say it or what you do. If all you are thinking about is you, you have it wrong. What customers, associates and vendors will never forget is how you make them feel. Your personal brand—and your store’s brand—are all wrapped up in how you make other people feel.

We work in one of the most challenging, exciting and noble industries in the world. But it is also one of the most demanding. Why do we do it? Especially now, when things are so tough? Let’s take a step back and briefly review our industry and our motives.

Personally, I love the retail home furnishings industry because we have so many unparalleled opportunities to



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*“The home furnishings industry will be fixed by the same breed of mavericks that have fixed it so many times before—the ones who innovate and dare in the face of challenge. They are not necessarily the big shots. These are not the guys with a cushion of millions of dollars who can afford to wait things out. These are individuals who do not have that luxury, who are striving to find ways to turn the tide now. They are more than survivors, the ‘spirit shines through’ them ...”*

enrich people's lives. You remember, don't you? You have done it so often it is second nature to you now. Remember how hard you worked to make sure that a family's dad got his recliner in time for Father's Day? And how you invested so much time to make sure that a young couple was able to furnish their new home in an affordable way? If you are a rep, remember how you worked to help that dealer find a way out of his cash-flow problem? Or, as an entrepreneur, how you sat down with that sales person and restored her self-confidence?

This is a great industry going through rough times. This is not the first time. Some of us recall several other times when it seemed the customers were just not responding like they used to, and they would never come back. They always did. First of all, the reality is that people are still buying lots of furniture, mattresses and floor coverings. In fact, according to the Canwest news service, "Retail sales in the U.S. rose twice as much as forecast in May as Americans snapped up electronics, clothes and furniture. Purchases climbed one per cent, the most in six months, following a 0.4-per-cent April gain that was previously reported as a drop, the U.S. Commerce Department said. Sales excluding gasoline increased 0.8 per cent last month. The figures suggest consumers are helping stave off a deeper downturn."

Without exception, the dealers I talk to agree that the mainstream media is hurting business. If my information came exclusively from the mainstream media I would be depressed too. My job as a consultant, however, is to probe deeper. For example, gas prices. Contrary to conventional wisdom, Kiplinger's famous letter tells me there is another

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## Careless ads equal reduced effectiveness.

*This ad was well designed, has adequate copy, and yet its impact is hopelessly compromised. The headline states: "Pick a Room" and then promises that I can, "Create a room full of comfort for one low price." So far so good, but the rest has nothing to do with a room group purchase. It is all price-item and credit offer, but nothing about this being a decorator-coordinated room, designed by an expert to be fashion-perfect and mistake-proof. The "Pick a Room" theme suggests that I can select from several rooms. Although this retailer has many beautiful decorator rooms, no mention of this is made. The reverse side of the flyer features two other rooms but they are not priced as groups either! Modern customers will not take time to figure out what is meant by "one low price" nor to determine the advantages.*

bubble about to burst, this time all for the better. About one quarter of the price of oil is on the future's market, and cannot be sustained. The prediction: crude oil will average out to \$96 a barrel this year. No recession, the economy will grow at a slow 1%. Trends magazine crunches the numbers and also predicts slow growth, but no recession, gas under \$100 a barrel and a 15,000 Dow by the end of 2008.

The bad news for the furniture industry is that the housing market will continue to suffer into 2009. So, how do we survive until then? While it is true that people are still buying furniture, they are not responding to traditional media and the old appeals. So, what do we do? Rather than feed you advice from an ivory tower, let's look at four stories of real furniture entrepreneurs in real time.

### FURNITURE NORTH'S BIG PROMOTION

Randy Terrio is accustomed to the rugged winters of northern Minnesota, but last winter was one for the record books. In January, the temperatures were staying well below zero degrees, and February, normally Randy's slowest month, was off considerably from 2006. So he was very nervous as he anticipated February of 2008. He knew that he needed to do something different, and it had to be a winner.

Furniture North is an old-line store, in

business since 1960. In normal business cycles Randy's philosophy works well: Maintain good curb appeal, have attractive displays, and hire good, honest people. But the housing turndown and historic bad weather were taking their toll on sales. He had discussed the situation with his wife Kathy, and she encouraged him to fight, to dare to do something different. So he crafted a selling story and added a legitimate, irresistible offer to his marketing. The results were remarkable: Kathy and Randy doubled 2007 February sales, plus more than doubled 2007 March sales—even though his 5 week promotion ended March 17th.

Fortunately, Randy and his wife refused to stay frozen in the headlights. And then, in the face of Minnesota weather that only got worse, they followed through with their decision to promote while other stores were pulling in their horns. The message to take home is that if you think hard enough, you will discover new possibilities and options to act upon, even in the toughest of times.

### HINELINE EXPANDS

Hineline Home Furnishings is a traditional family-owned store that has operated in Harlan, Iowa since 1961. In a small city (population 5,500) and in the virtual shadow of Nebraska Furniture Mart, Gary Hineline has managed through some challenging times. The current downturn did not seem to faze him when he announced to his general

manager, Linda Knoell, that he had purchased a large, vacant building and was going to open a new store in Storm Lake, Iowa. Linda was taken aback. Kyle Beggs, the general manager of Hineline's other location in Maryville, Missouri was equally surprised.

As luck would have it, early spring storms resulted in construction delays at the Storm Lake facility. So, in the interim, he devised a way to make lemonade out of the lemon he was handed. The team planned an interim promotion based upon the Storm Lake delay for Gary's other two stores. The weather story was credible and successful because it was true. In the meantime, Linda Knoell had the opportunity to tour the new Storm Lake facility and gain a better understanding of Gary's plan. She said that the real turning point for her came in the Ashley Furniture showroom in Las Vegas. "Ashley's merchandising and display inspired us to reach another level in our preparations," Linda said, "and Gary was better able to communicate his vision to me."

At this writing Storm Lake is preparing for its grand opening. "The huge building is gorgeous and the community is welcoming us with open arms," Linda said. The Hineline team is geared up and the morale is high. The soft opening is going well and things look great. Gary Hineline can be proud that they dared to expand with a new location in such challenging market conditions.



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# Copy starved furniture ad, but complete Information on the grill.

Furniture retailers can speak eloquently about their merchandise, but in print, they are too often tongue-tied. The half page furniture ad at left gives a group price, but only the purchased separately price of the "walnut" sofa. Not much information for the home maker who wants to know more about the value-added benefits this great company offers.

Compare that with 1/16<sup>th</sup> page Home Depot ad for an outdoor grill. In a small fraction of the space we are told this about the "Charmglow" grill:

"\$599 ... as low as \$19 per month ... RED 3-ZONE GAS GRILL ... The 100% infrared heat locks in flavor and keeps foods moist and juicy, not dried out. Features 34,500 BTUs for a wide cooking range from an intense searing at the cooking surface down to slow-and-low barbecuing and rotisserie cooking. 750 sq. in. cooking surface with three stainless-steel burners and porcelain-coated cast iron grates."

There were a total of 15 complete grill presentations on the same page, leaving no doubt who has the best selection and who knows the most about their products! Someone worked very hard on the Home Depot flyer... it takes time and extra effort to put together effective copy presentations such as this.

The take-home lesson: A smart furniture independent can learn—or assign someone to learn—to use selling copy and white space with many times the effectiveness of the lackluster efforts of many of the big boxes. This can go a long way toward leveling the advertising playing field.



## MIDDLE TENNESSEE FURNITURE & APPLIANCE OUTLET INNOVATES

Dwight Woods of Lawrenceburg, Tennessee never fails to be positive and full of ideas. While many furniture dealers are hunkering down and waiting for an upturn, Dwight decided to expand the Middle Tennessee Furniture & Appliance Outlet and rock his market. He planned to liquidate his entire television department and replace it with a more profitable floor covering program. He was going to do this by absorbing a successful local carpet store. Naturally, this called for a dynamic promotion.

One of the first lessons a copywriter must learn about selling is wrapped up in this principle: People do not like to read advertisements but they love to read stories. Here is how his story rolled out in his preferred customer preview letter.

"Back in 1984 when we started business Ronald Reagan was elected to his second term in office in a big landslide, the Discovery Space Shuttle flew for the first time, and a movie titled *Terms of Endearment* won the Academy Award. As a retired school teacher and principal, I didn't know much about running a retail business. But I had some common-sense ideas that seemed to some people to be revolutionary.

"I decided I wanted a store that simply will not be undersold. There would be no frills, no fancy showrooms. I decided to sell directly to the public out of a huge warehouse. I made special deals with big manufacturers. I elected to buy furniture, mattress and appliance close-outs, scratch and dent items and sell them at close to—and sometimes below—dealer's

original wholesale cost. I wanted sales consultants who are salaried, and who are trained to focus on our customers' needs and not worry about commissions. We offered famous brands and big-city selection, plus gracious and dedicated hometown service. My 'formula' worked beyond my wildest dreams, and people began to call me the 'king of mini-pricing.'

"But times have changed. I feel challenged to take things to another level. After some long discussions with my wife Connie and our team, we generated a fabulous idea ..."

No wild hard sell, no five-year free interest, no screaming. Just an authentic, captivating narrative that grabs the readers attention and reveals how she can benefit from this "happening." Regardless of the event you plan, learn to tell the story behind it. Of course, in your private letter, you will also need to include all the stratagems of good selling direct mail copy. (See the FURNITURE WORLD article "Powerful, Productive Direct Mail" 06/2002 posted to the marketing article archives on [www.furninfo.com](http://www.furninfo.com).)

Dwight Woods has learned to connect with the Lawrenceburg community, population approximately 14,000. His theme "Good folks, great brands, low prices" may sound saccharine to a cynical ad man, but it resonates with a very neighborly community where citizens and officials work together for continuous growth and prosperity.

## CLASSIC INTERIORS BRAND PRESERVATION

I saved Pat for last because his story is both heart-rending and inspiring. It's tough for a



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-Don Olsen, Owner

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## "Four stories of real furniture entrepreneurs in real time..."

smaller store to do business in a big city when several big boxes dominate the media. This wasn't so much the situation in Reno when Pat opened Classic Interiors several years ago. But since then Reno has become a bloody ocean of big box competition. To add to the difficulties of a smaller store, as the economy turns down there always seems to be an interminable GOB going on somewhere in Reno.

Pat came to Reno with a partner, but he bailed out when the competition intensified. In spite of a less than ideal location and limited showroom, Pat gradually created a niche and built a following. He developed a relationship with India's largest manufacturer and distributor of solid wood furniture made from

Sheesham—an exotic two-tone hardwood. Pat was inspired to develop a company and create a distributorship for this product in America, Monsoon Pacific. This idea worked out well for him.

But as the retail situation in Reno foundered, a serious illness in the family drained away much of his resources and energy. Then came the catastrophic Angora fire that completely destroyed his home and possessions. By then Pat knew that circumstances demanded that he close his retail store. However, Pat had developed precious relationships with his customers and he did not want to jeopardize his credibility with a down and dirty store-closing promotion. So his story unfolded something like this:

"...My wife and I have made many friends in the Reno area, and we have developed some wonderful business relationships. Our dream of creating a different kind of furniture store seemed to have come true. However, a series of events has made it impossible for us to continue, and the time has come to say goodbye. Fortunately, for a limited time we can offer our friends and neighbors the latest in world-class furniture fashions at unheard of prices. Some customers have dropped by just to say goodbye, and we have appreciated that... Indeed, I truly want to continue to serve Reno, even after family illness, economic conditions, and even after the loss of our home and all our possessions by the Angora fire. (That was especially ironic, since I was one of



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- We have been described by *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL* as the sales promotion firm that furniture "dealers say is reliable."
- We are the only firm that has coordinated 200 sale events for Ethan Allen dealers.
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the volunteer fire-fighters battling that historic blaze!) But, realities must be faced. On the positive side, if you are able to buy now, you can make a wonderful furniture purchase. And, it's win-win, because in doing so you will be helping us meet our financial challenges and begin again ..."

The operative words are: "begin again." Customers read this story and they responded. Not just to buy furniture. Many truly came by just to wish him and his wife well. His successful store-closing event has left him in a much more advantageous position. The sincere disclosure to the public preserved his integrity and left the door open for Pat to set into motion the second part of his strategy: Pat will revive his retail operation and sell to the public out of his Monsoon Pacific warehouse four days a week.

Few other furniture retailers have been hit harder than Pat Hennessy. But through it all he has always been a gentleman, always courteous and cheerful. These attributes are a large part of Pat's brand. Even as one venture folds for Pat, since he took steps to preserve his brand, his new venture has a much greater chance of success.

We read enough of the tough times in furniture retailing. More needs to be said about the "ordinary" men and women who are out there making it work in spite of economic conditions, weather, and negative mainstream media. I hope these stories and exhibits inspire you to come up with solutions of your own. America's recovery will spring from where it has always originated — in the inexhaustible energy of its grass roots.

Next issue, we will pick up on the Seven Lost Secrets series.

Contributing Editor Larry Mullins has 30+ years experience in the front lines of furniture marketing. Over the past ten years he has developed a Visionary Management program that can impact the culture of an entire organization and bring it to life. He also produces state-of-the-art promotional advertising packages for everything from quick cash flow to complete exit strategies and store closings. Larry is the President of UltraSales, Inc.. Questions about this article can be sent to Larry care of FURNITURE WORLD to [mullins@furninfo.com](mailto:mullins@furninfo.com).

See more articles by Larry in the marketing management archives on [furninfo.com](http://furninfo.com) or call him direct at (904) 794 9212.

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## A Retail Niche Well Realized

# KARGER GALLERY

"The decision not to buy is logical.  
The decision to buy is emotional."

*Furniture Trends by Janet Holt-Johnstone*

Ontario's historic grist mill, transformed a couple of decades ago into an up-market hostelry. Originally crafted by Scottish stonemasons, the limestone mews now surrounds a cobblestone courtyard fringed by an attractive and eclectic handful of shops, boutiques and studios. Karger Gallery occupies a dominant position, curving around the end of the mews. Enter at peril of your pocketbook!

"Bedazzled!" was the over-the-top-exclamation of an Israeli tourist recently as she staggered from The Gallery laden with many shopping bags, "An oasis of earthly delights!" She left Renate Karger completing a shipping invoice to Tel Aviv for a unique table and chairs.

Flooded with natural light from floor to ceiling windows, there are 2600 square feet of eccentric retail space on several carefully structured levels to explore, each devoted to the display of irresistible treasure. Profit pockets abound, high-end one-of-a-kind casegoods in juxtaposition with

readily affordable wooden place mats, stone coasters and hand thrown pottery. Greeting cards are around the corner and up the stairs from provocatively displayed designer/ballerina Olga Saras' hand-knit shawls and jackets. Out of the ordinary jewelry, some Renate's own design, are positioned on and within the central counter and backing display cases, as well as dangling from the occasional piece of sculpture elsewhere. Silk cushions from Minerva, woven blankets from Kennybunkport, minimalist upholstery from Canadian manufacturer, Romano, unique metallic chairs from local artist/sculptor Sarie Marais. Turn another corner and there are rosewood Sheesham occasional tables from India. Look up and be captured by C & I's top designer Kenneth Cobonpue's stunning lighting. All of which keeps the customer in the store, moving from one space to another, never leaving the gallery without making a purchase, some large, some small. "Well, hardly ever!"

Imagine an enchanted village at the confluence of two rivers emerging from the shifting mists of time. A romantic, craggy gorge, waterfalls, rapids, and lush green spaces conjure up A Midsummer Night's Dream, or maybe Brigadoon.

Stretch a bit more and picture a 150 year old mews, a stone's throw from Elora,



*Profit pockets abound. High-end one-of-a-kind casegoods are in juxtaposition with readily affordable wooden place mats, stone coasters and hand thrown pottery. Photo bottom right is a Sarie Marais "guardian".*

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100 Table Lamps x \$12.40 = \$1,240

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---

Total Annual Savings\* \$5,260

\* Savings calculations incorporate: Average hours per day lights on, Average days per week lights on, Average kilowatt hour rate, Average cost per lamp change, Rated average Lamp life, Lamp cost.



## Wake Up!

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**Go Green!**



## “Many purchases are made from women’s cooperatives...”

It takes insight, instinct, talent, creativity, financial savvy and chutzpah to perceive and exploit a promising niche not yet adequately served in the essence of circa 2008. Then to take it and flow with the prevailing winds to build a positive, productive yet flexible entity.... something else again.

Renate Karger saw indicators 15 years ago. Unlike many more cautious entrepreneurs, those who conceive a concept then quietly gestate for months or years,

Renate jumped feet first into action. A corporate franchise consultant working across Canada, she left the bandwagon in 1992, and spent a year developing her skills as a watercolourist. When her work was not given wall space by a less perceptive gallery owner in Stratford in 1993, Renate opened her own gallery at Elora. “I chose the area because of the beauty, nature, the Elora Gorge, the tranquil, historic village, the existing and growing arts community. My soul comes to life in a little village.

“It was to be an all original gallery, showing my own paintings and leasing wall space to 14 others. Shortly after, I expanded to include handcrafted iron and contemporary wood furniture.

“The mews location just happened. There was a tiny spot available in the courtyard. It was and is a prime location in the village of Elora. (Central to London, Hamilton and Toronto, Ontario, and all the surrounding bedroom communities, an hour to an hour and a half drive to the cities, and a popular heritage tourist destination.) I had 650 square feet at first. I moved to the centre of the mews when a two-storey space became available, 450 square feet on the bottom, 350 on the top! Sales skyrocketed! Then the space next door became available and we now had about 1,300 square feet. A year later, that was too small, so I leased more space next door for a total of 2,600 square feet.

“Placement and merchandising are amongst the most important things in creating sales. The greeting cards are on the mezzanine because customers enjoy reading them and like the private space. It also avoids traffic jams on busy days. The jewelry and clothes are near the counter to avoid shrinkage and to provide immediate assistance.

“Our ‘Canadian’ room only displays original artwork and one of a kind furniture. We try to avoid clutter in this room, and focus on larger more dramatic pieces such as the marvellous C & I ball lamps, accompanied by Juta’s original canvas from SoHo, New York, or Tim Murton’s dramatic water series, oversized paintings of the Elora Gorge and river rock. And to complement these we’re featuring a Koletic root\* dining table, showered in felt rocks by Ronnel Jordaan, of South Africa.” Renate emphasized, “This room is my creation without thinking of what customers will buy.” But her instinct is bang on.

“There are definitely hot spots for pick up items. For example, our potter, Paul Stewart, brought in a basket of beautiful

### TIMELESS DESIGN TIPS

Developed by Renate Karger as an in-store or design workshop hand-out, a sidebar to feature articles or a mailer following television appearances.

1. **Buy what you love** and feel it is a part of your character.
2. **Spend a little more for quality pieces, hand crafted with care.** (You really do get what you pay for.)
3. **Be careful with trendy colours** when it comes to large pieces of furniture. Order the base in a solid or in textured neutrals, and add colour with removable cushions, draperies.
4. **Stick to classic, clean lines.**
5. Look for a firm, yet **comfortable seat and backrest.**
6. **Avoid buying everything at once.** Take your time, the right piece will make its way to you when you least expect it.
7. When looking through decorating magazines, **mark or pull out everything of interest** and keep in a storage box or binder.
8. **Find out what colours make you happy.** It does often relate with what colour clothing you feel good in.
9. **Save for your favourite original piece of art.** It will be well worth it. You will cherish it for a long period of time, and it does not have to be priced out of this world. Our local Canadian artists are talented and reasonable.
10. **Collect interesting articles** from your travels that tell a story about a place or person and mostly about you.
11. **If your budget is tight,** frequent scratch and dent sections in high-end retail stores and antique markets. Wood can always be re-polished for a fraction of what you’ll save.
12. **Create your own style.** Trends will come and go, but you are an individual with your own likes and dislikes that take many years to change.
13. **Create balance** between the elements, wood, stone, metal, with fire, water and fabric to soften the edges. Fire and water can be expressed with warm and cool tones.
14. **Make the experience** of buying your piece a good one.



Artwork by Notable movie set designer Tim Murton (with cap) is a best seller at Karger Gallery. Tim also designs incredible wire and paper monsters which are mounted on buildings and illuminated on "monster night" in Elora. At left, Renate being helped by David McCord, blacksmith and furniture maker with the 40-inch Cobonpue ball lamp.

hand made pots retailing for \$6.95 to be used for sauces, trinkets, anything. Before he left, he said please place these near the counter and they will sell themselves. It wasn't two minutes after our appointment ended that someone came in and bought six of these little pots. The same thing works with anything interesting enough to pick up.

"A store owner must walk the floor and study the patterns as customers wander in. Watch which direction they turn, where do they stop and what do they miss. The floor space must have flow or else areas will be missed either by not being enticing enough

to walk towards, or the flow of traffic gets jammed up and the customer turns and walks in the opposite direction. It's all carefully thought out. At times I get tired of keeping the flow the same way, and I try to change things. Usually, we go back to the way things were," she laughs. "But this doesn't mean the store looks the same. We change things all the time, and not out of boredom but out of a constant change in inventory."

She talked demographics. There are both immutables and variables. "Recently we've had more local customers," Renate explained, "Like the three bears. We must

carry pieces that are attractive to mama bear, papa bear and baby bear. I let the young people buying their first home, just starting out, put things on layaway. Then there are the drop-in tourists who want souvenirs of their visit; they buy lots of jewelry, sculpture, small items, but sometimes they surprise you with big things! And the retirees, beginning all over again, fresh from the big city, needing to furnish their heritage home or condo. They're creating the ambience for their new lives, no children to consider."

Dr. David Foot, Canadian economist and best selling author of "Boom, Bust and

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Far left bookmark. Near left is a small magazine ad. Renate also maintains a huge preferred customer list.

Echo", accurately defined a new "immutable". Boomers are leaving their city careers, or perhaps reconstructing their lifestyles. Increasingly they're bolting

concrete jungles to focus on old Ontario hamlets and villages originally settled in the early to mid 1800s. There's an implicit lure in ancient stone and brick, structures that resonate with history, narrow streets and quiet neighbourhoods. Artists perceptively lead the exodus. There are many professional sculptors, musicians, painters, writers, potters, blacksmiths, glass blowers and weavers well established in rural Ontario, and they create their own happy ambience for new residents to share.

Canny local builders began to construct extensions to existing villages with, for the most part, well-planned developments, many single storey bungalows with pleasant garden areas, on winding roads. Almost in the centre of Elora, a tasteful bungalow/condo apartment complex, Station Square, occupies the site of the former train terminal.

More than 25 years ago, the Elora Singers mounted an annual professional summer Festival now of international renown, attracting classical and jazz stars who, in turn, attract a flood of visitors, some of whom stay permanently. A. J. Casson, one of Canada's Group of Seven painters, spent years here capturing the landscape, and his spirit lives on at the Centre for the Arts, an 1850s public school now transformed into galleries where exhibitions and concerts are ongoing.

A perfect and completely logical setting for Renate's concept for the Karger Gallery. A burgeoning boomer population of affluent new residents, and an established community of older retirees from the surrounding universities and businesses. Then the tourists, "Thirty per cent of them from over-

seas. Some of them come back regularly; they have relatives here to visit, or they just enjoy the region". And day trippers, bus loads from the United States, southwestern Ontario, and all the surrounding cities.

"It took five years to become profitable. In a tourist destination, it was about finding the right merchandise mix. You need a balance of high ticket and small pick up items that visitors can walk away with."

If you are wondering how Renate manages her suppliers and inventory, of course there is a computer somewhere out of sight, behind the scenes in her 150-year-old building. "We have a retail system that keeps track of inventory. We can easily access quantities of our stock for a customer, but I confess that I'm the laughing stock of the industry because our system is still in dos. I'm having problems with printers reading the information, and this becomes extremely stressful when trying to print out mailing labels for open houses. But the system still works, and I'm too stubborn to change it. I don't blink an eye when it comes to spending money on art or furniture for the gallery, but I don't like to spend it on things that would actually make life easier!"

Renate does maintain a "huge" preferred customer list, particularly useful when it's time to issue invitations for the annual Christmas party. "It's usually the first week in December, and is a lot of fun. We love to entertain, so there is always lots of delicious food, live music and many artists milling about. This event is always very well attended, but expensive to host. We usually just break even, but it is a service and it gets people talking. Our customers look forward to their creatively made invitations every year."

And she uses e-mail to advertise the "Huge sale once a year, the week of Boxing Day."

Renate is as "green" as it's possible for her to be at this point in time. "I respect nature and human rights, and environmentally sustainable furniture is very important

to me. Our wood products are all from reclaimed wood, old fallen trees or grown on government regulated plantations.

"Long before Al Gore's 'Inconvenient Truth', working in the art world you become more naturally sensitive to issues that affect our planet. You think and consume differently than most. I feel that if one is to buy material things they should last and be enjoyed for a long period of time. I am ashamed of how we humans abuse nature and take it for granted.

"Since part of our building is from the mid 1800s, we've conserved as much of the limestone as possible by incorporating it into the design of the gallery. For example, exposing some of the beautiful limestone walls and re-using the stone from our expansion. We found fossils of various creatures, and had them built into areas where our visitors could enjoy them. We've used old TV antennae as lighting fixtures, and re-used the tile previously in one of the rooms to create a mosaic with recycled glass. The floor in one of the rooms is re-used old pine boards.

"And with all the limestone walls, we save energy by not using air conditioning as often.

The Gallery's handouts and the website speak to "shipping worldwide". And, of course, a great deal of inventory is sent on a regular basis to Elora. "This is a small business and I find it best to split containers with someone. Shipping overseas has become very costly. We used to foam pack glass and clay pieces so they would arrive safely. Now we are re-thinking the whole concept because the foam packing of the past was not biodegradable. Corn chips and re-used paper products are what we're looking at. Shipping wood is the trickiest because you have to produce the papers from the woods' origin and, to be honest, at times you can't get your hands on these papers. The furthest I receive from is Australia, our eco friendly and naturally antibacterial cutting boards. It can cost up to \$700 for shipping 30 cutting boards by

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air. These are items you have to plan for far in advance, and ship by sea. Cuts the cost in half."

Renate's suppliers also include ION Designs and Ewest, fabrics from India, from Something Extra and "some from San Francisco". David McCord, a Gallery regular since 1993, is "one of the few traditional blacksmiths in the area. Everything is hammered out by hand, never soldered. He masters every-



thing from iron gates and amazing fences to wall mounted candle holders, bed frames, birdbaths and absolutely wonderful tables." Like the steel-based, cherry-topped table made of two free form horizontal shapes with a spaced centre, covered by glass. An extraordinary conversation piece.

Sarie Marais "miraculously appeared". Renate fell in love with her sculptures, amongst them tall, standing "guardians", and immediately took them on consignment. Later, Sarie designed and produced 30 one of a kind metal chairs, a commission from Ottawa's National Gallery now used in their atrium. Both guardians and chairs are popular with customers.

Gundi Viviani also appeared in 1993, "with her beautiful and fragile three foot glass sculptures made from hand cut window glass. They sold then for \$375, now world wide, the same size, for no less than \$2600-\$3600. Most of the pieces we've sold have been shipped to the West Coast."

Tim Murton is "another talented artist. A movie set designer, well known for more than 30 major box office movies. Tim's passion is painting incredible oils of forest and trees and nature oriented scenes, semi modern in style yet very realistic. My best selling artist at the moment." Civic minded and wildly whimsical, Tim conceived "Monster Month" in Elora, and Renate has worked with him on building the incredible wire and paper monsters which are mounted on buildings and illuminated at night.

Pottery comes from Victoria, B.C. by "a lovely man named Junichi Tanaka, originally from Japan. Porcelain is created by Pauline Pelletier of Quebec City".

Renate says, "the majority of my buying comes from contacts at the gallery, some from art shows and word of mouth through other artists. It does work itself as an energy. On more than several occasions, I felt a need for something and within a short span of time it appeared at my door step."

But some conventional buying is conducted in Toronto and

## "Renate plans to mount workshops for boomer newcomers..."

New York, "furniture at the Toronto Furniture Show in January. I always attend to check on my existing upholstery suppliers."

Many purchases are made from women's co-operatives in Africa, Nepal, Mexico, Thailand and Vietnam. "When I first opened the gallery I was broke. One day a lovely couple from India came in and tried to sell me cashmere cushions. I loved them but couldn't afford them. After an hour or so of chatting, they walked away with a post-dated cheque and I had delightfully handmade cushions to sell. Funny thing is they couldn't cash my cheque because they didn't have a Canadian bank account. Luckily they met a kind man who cashed it for them and became their lifetime friend. Fifteen years later, we've all come a long way. Ragu and Junkie are still my good friends and they are long time suppliers of Indian Sheesham furniture."

Breakdown of profit bases is presently 25 per cent for furniture and lighting; art is 22 per cent; jewelry, 28 per cent; clothing, 1 per cent, porcelain/china/pottery, 3 per cent.

Renate's marketing vision for the future includes ambitious but realizable plans to mount design workshops for David Foot-style boomer newcomers. And certainly others who would enjoy and benefit from such activities. The "how-tos" of home décor with other designers, placing special emphasis on individual expression. Others in the community could offer their expertise to the workshop mix, horticulturists, landscape, pond and swimming pool designers as well as real estate professionals who could provide leads to incoming residents.

"My next step is to purchase a building (preferably heritage!) in Elora where I can not only work, but live and create."

The life of an independent retailer is not always simple, even one who has "found her niche". A few days ago, a 40-inch Cobonpue ball lamp (a hanging fixture, eco-friendly of wire, papier-mache and resin) was delivered to the mews. Renate arrived just in time to receive it from the truck driver who then left. "I glanced at it and then the gallery door. It looked overwhelmingly large. I measured it. Forty inches. I measured the door, 36 inches. The truck has gone and I have this giant ball outside that needs to come in before it starts to rain. The damn thing wouldn't fit. Here is a \$1200 light fixture sitting outside and I can't get it inside. Customers are now arriving at the mews in crowds, and I have this thing wedged in the front door. People start taking pictures and tourists become involved in the dynamics of getting it in. Bob, the ice cream man at the corner and I finally manage to remove the door and the frame and gently squash the lamp inside. But now, I realize, when I sell it I'll have to go through the same process to get it out! OK, I know. Measurements and a bit of planning would have helped from the start. I was really beginning to think I might have to camp outside with this lamp!"

Renate Karger's personal story is vintage John Le Carre. A short bio and can be found with the online version of this story on the furninfo.com website [www.furninfo.com](http://www.furninfo.com).

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# Design



## Philips Collection

Shown is the expanded Terra Collection, Copper Wall Panels and one-of-a-kind Origins Console. The panels are from Indonesia. The accessories and console are from Thailand. Contact information on index page 80.



## Ecosmart Fire

The "Tower" is a free standing visually striking fire tower inspired by the 'Padella Romana', used as lighting inside homes of wealthy Patrician families during the Roman Empire. It burns environmentally friendly, non-polluting denatured alcohol. The flame can be regulated, and shuts off with a lever, leaving no mess or cleanup. Contact information on index page 80.

## A.R.T.

Contemporary bedroom from the New Impressions Collection is crafted from hardwood solids and quartered hickory veneers. The many drawers make this bed a total bedroom.

Contact information on index page 80.



## Avenue Six

The Curves Lounger features an innovative RTA design with a retro-contemporary look. Features include a classic plush multi-tufted back and seating area with rolled neck and foot area accents. Solid wood spindle and curved legs further accentuate its distinct, seductive styling. Contact information on index page 80.

## Elite Leather

The combination of San Remo Scarlet leather with polished stainless steel sleigh legs demonstrate the design forward aspect of the Mr. Easy Chair & Ottoman designed by Stanley J. Friedman. Contact information on index page 80.



## Dinec

This group gives the ultimate in freedom of choice to your customers. It can be customized with choice of finish, fabric, legs or base, size and shape. Contact information on index page 80.



## Laurier

Urban and sophisticated design is highlighted by ceramic finished glass accents and strengthened by made in Canada quality. Crafted from maple veneers, the group features sliding door on the dresser, and a beveled mirror. A storage bed is also available. Contact information on index page 80.



# Design



## Dutailier

Gliders from the renewed and reengineered AvantGlide Collection come in a choice of three different bases and nine backs including four with adjustable headrest. Chairs will be offered in a choice of three microfibers, one leather match, and two grades of leather. Dealers can now offer models at a retail price suitable for their market from \$999 to \$1,999.

Contact information on index page 80.



## Easels by Amron

Over 300 styles, colors and sizes of easels, stands and holders. Shown is the 60" Black Iron Adjustable. Contact information on index page 80.



## AdenWorks

This unique Root Coffee Table is a new addition to AdenWorks eco-friendly rustic teak collection. Due to the organic nature of this piece, size and shape will vary, but the average size is 48"w/18"d/24"h. Consumers can add this root coffee table to indoor or outdoor living spaces. Contact information on index page 62.

## Bermex

Contemporary set features round table with new base, chairs and buffet. Table comes with choice of 4 tops, 5 aprons, 10 legs and 11 bases including base shown. It is available in 86 finishes which can be combined. Over 140 fabrics are available, plus COM. Matching buffet features 3-way touch lighting system, dove-tail drawers mounted on Quadro glides and garnished with protective felt. Contact information page 80.





## Artisan House

"Cross Current", from this manufacturer of fine-quality metal sculptures for wall, floor and tabletop. Sculptures are hand-crafted of rich metals including copper, bronze, brass, steel, aluminum and chrome. Each piece is hand finished with intriguing surface treatments, paints and patinas. This company has closed the gap between exclusive art galleries and mass-produced decorative pieces by creating original sculptures at affordable prices. Contact information on index page 80.



## Wallbeds

This new contemporary styled unit with desk opens into a comfortable bed. Perfect for a studio apartment, den or guest room. Many styles and finishes are available. Contact information on index page 80.

## Elran

This living room group has blanket chaise seating with a sculptured inside back and incorporated headrest. Contact information on index page 80.



# Design



## Classic Flame

The Laguna Home Theater integrates all home entertainment pleasures in one beautifully designed piece. This 23" remote control operated electric fireplace with multi-function media cabinetry, has adjustable shelves and is constructed from high-quality solid hardwoods in an espresso finish on ash veneer. Contact information on index page 80.



## Groovystuff

The Corona Hair on Hide Collection combines the beauty of South American cow hair upholstery with the rustic elegance of the furniture. This never before seen collection includes rocking chairs, bar chairs, dinner chairs, and occasional pieces with a finished flair for the rustic home or retreat. Contact information on index page 80.

## Dynamic Furniture

Offers a wide choice of contemporary and traditional bedrooms. Shown is the York Youth Bedroom with sleigh bed. All assembled products feature high quality solid and or engineered wood, all drawers are equipped with self-closing feature and silent roller glides. Contact information page 80.





## Huppé

The Palermo Collection made of birch is shown in charcoal finish. This contemporary styled bedroom is available in 18 different finishes. Contact information on index page 80.



## Hellenic Rug

From the new Southern Living Home Collection, Ashton is a group of transitional designs that feature subtle color palettes in open free flowing designs. The collection is complemented by the use of hard twist and hand tufted techniques to lend to a casual feel. Contact information on index page 80.



## Serge de Troyer

Manufacturer of a complete line of furniture and related accessories made from the finest leathers. This piece as available in a variety of colors and prints. Contact information on index page 80.

## Newton Furniture

Introducing the Brooklyn Bedroom featuring full extension dovetailed drawers and clean contemporary styling. It is hand crafted from solid wood in five different wood choices and available in over 20 different stain colors. Completely built to order and available in custom sizes. Contact information on index page 80.



# Design



## Harden

*This Wing Chair and Ottoman redefines elegant upholstered seating using raw linen without chemicals from a domestic fabric source and bio-based foam cushions. Exposed wood frame is made from sustainable New York grown Cherry. Contact information on index page 80.*



## Keystone

*Five additional styles in Clear and Wormy Maple are now available as part of the Keystone Classics line of primitive furniture. Each of the new styles can be enhanced by a choice of two new hand-painted designs from the artists at the plant in Lancaster County Pennsylvania, and can be finished in a wide range of options. Shown is the wheat back chair. Contact information on index page 80.*

## Kathy Ireland Home by Omnia

*The Britania Chair and Ottoman are classic pieces designed with the most sophisticated furniture purchaser in mind. Features include attention to detail, deep seating, nail heads and tufting. Contact information on index page 80.*



## Darafeev

The Monaco dining table features a Flip Top for gaming or a Bumper Pool optional insert. With obvious high-end quality, this group appeals to a number of growing consumer demographic groups. The popular #960 High Back dining chair is also available as a gaming chair or matching barstool. Contact information on index page 80.



## Habersham

This simple yet elegant design takes its inspiration from the cozy 18th century reproductions and designs found in the rooms of the Hampton's Sag Harbor Inn. Contact information on index page 80.

## Fashion Bed

This ornate Baroque bed features monstrous four inch posts topped with massive casted finials. The 66" high headboard grill is adorned with a large 19" center casting supported by 60" high posts. Large sloping side rails are as fancifully decorated as the grills. Shown in Gilded Slate finish. Contact information on index page 80.



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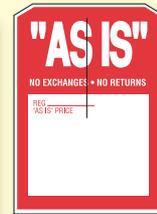
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# FURNITURE WORLD

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