

VOLUME 149 NO.6 NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2019

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Retail Success: Jennifer Furniture Rises
Retail Charitable Giving Ideas
So-Called Knowledgeable & Friendly Salespeople

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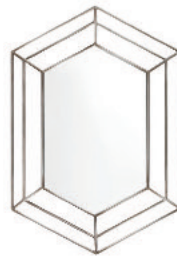
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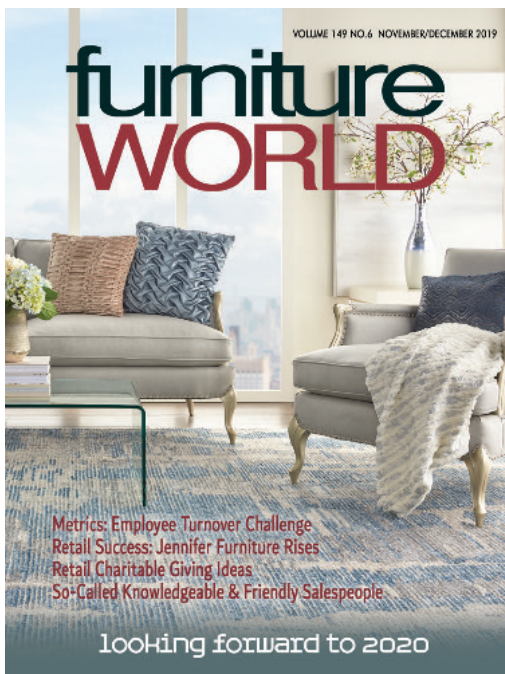
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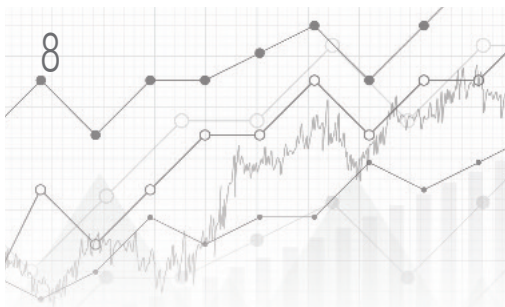
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Your Attitude Stinks Today... You're Fired!

In this Furniture World edition, David McMahon explains why every home furnishings retailer should track employee turnover numbers over time. The first part of his article (starts on page eight) explains both the obvious and hidden costs that come along with high turnover, and presents an easy to apply formula for calculation and tracking.

David then lists 10 action points to consider that can reduce employee turnover. Number 10 on his list, "Remove Bad Attitudes" caught my attention.

Poor closing rates and average sales metrics are used by retailers to evaluate and coach, but what about bad attitude metrics? I guess it depends on the circumstances, and what each curmudgeon on the sales floor or in the accounting department brings to the table.

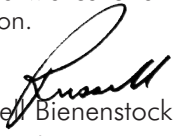
Retailers are in the business of selling furniture, not normally coaching the depressed, the paranoid, the serially fearful, mean, inappropriate, narcissistic, or disappointed.

Recently, a NYT opinion piece by David Brooks, "The Wisdom Your Body Knows," quoted Lisa Feldman Barrett of Northeastern University, "You might think that in everyday life, the things you see and hear influence what you feel, but it's mostly the other way around: What you feel alters your sight and hearing," Barrett writes in "How Emotions Are Made." If the perception of facts is subjective and based on attitude, that's not great news for any retailer looking to provide a consistent customer experience because talent and skill are devalued by bad attitudes. As the psychologist, Dr. Karl Minninger, noted, "Our attitudes are more important than facts."

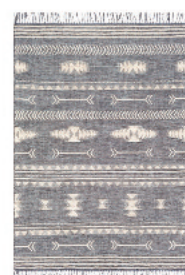
What can be done? First, hire to support a corporate culture that sets standards for interacting with customers and co-workers. Next, hold people accountable. Define behaviors that cross red lines, and list consequences. Accountability may look like, "Your attitude stinks... you're fired!" Or, "You've earned another 22 sessions with our on-staff life coach."

Gordon Hecht observes (see his article starting on page 56) that true FRIENDLY salespeople can turn a shopper into a friend by simply treating their store like a home and inviting guests to visit. That's a great starting recipe for setting sales associate attitude expectations. Fill in the blanks for people who work in management positions, customer service, operations, the retail back end, and even for yourself.

Best wishes for a happy attitude and a peaceful holiday season.


Russell Bienenstock
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THE TURNOVER CHALLENGE

by David McMahon

Tracking employee turnover will lead to greater sales and profit. It will, over time, create a vastly better organizational culture.

"We can't find good people!"

"People don't stay around long."

"The time to get a new employee up to speed seems too long."

"My sales are flat because I don't have enough people."

"I get too many customer service issues due to mistakes."

These are statements I regularly hear from individual clients and in performance groups. Finding and keeping good employees are top challenges for retail business owners, sales managers, and warehouse operations managers.

I think we all can agree that lowering employee turnover is extremely beneficial to any business. However, when business owners are asked what their turnover percentage is, they usually give general answers such as, "Too Much!" When sales managers and warehouse managers are asked what their departmental turnover percentage is, they often

respond with blank stares. They have no idea or just guess.

Can you imagine, if an owner was asked the question, "What is your net profit margin?", and the answer was, "not enough", or, "I don't know"? Turnover is a critical business metric just like profit margin and yet it is largely untracked. In fact, turnover directly impacts sales and

"When I ask sales managers and warehouse managers, what their departmental turnover percentage is, I often get blank stares, as many times, they have no idea."

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What Does Designer Michelle Workman...

say about High Point's Bienenstock Furniture Library?



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

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gross margin. So, if you want to improve sales, profitability, and cash flow, start by measuring employee turnover.

Measurement

There are theories and excuses regarding how turnover should be measured. Some say that it should only be measured for employees who remain employed for more than a couple days, for example. To me, that may be fudging the numbers to cover up poor hiring practices.

Here is a simple and accurate equation to use. Calculate the number of employees who left over a certain time period, divided by the average number of employees for that time period, expressed as a percentage.

Employee Turnover percent, for a period of time = employees who

left or were let go for any reason / [(Employee number, at the start + Employee number, at the end) / 2]] x 100.

To show this equation in action, let's look at a company we will call XYZ Furniture that has three major departments: Sales, Distribution, and Administration.

The table below lists the annual number of employees for a 10 million dollar company and the corresponding turnover rate. The highest turnover is the Sales department with a 57 percent turnover. They had eight salespeople that left the business during the course of a 12-month period. Three were let go and five quit. They started with 15 salespeople and now have 13, so there is an average staff size of 14 salespeople.

The other departments fared a bit better with 42 percent turn-

over in the DC and 31 percent in administration. The company total is 46 percent. You might think this is terrible. I agree. Unfortunately, it is a common and a totally realistic retail example. The National Retail Federation reports that according to a survey, employee turnover was 60 percent in 2018. The national

"To show this equation in action, let's look at a company we will call XYZ Furniture that has three major departments: Sales, Distribution, and Administration."

XYZ Furniture Employee Turnover Calculation 2019

Employee	Sales	Distribution	Administrative	Company Total
Number of Employees That Left	8	5	2	15
Number of Employees At the Start of The Year	15	12	6	33
Number of Employees At the End of The Year	13	12	7	32
Average Number of Employees	14	12	6.5	32.5
Turnover Percent	57%	42%	31%	46%

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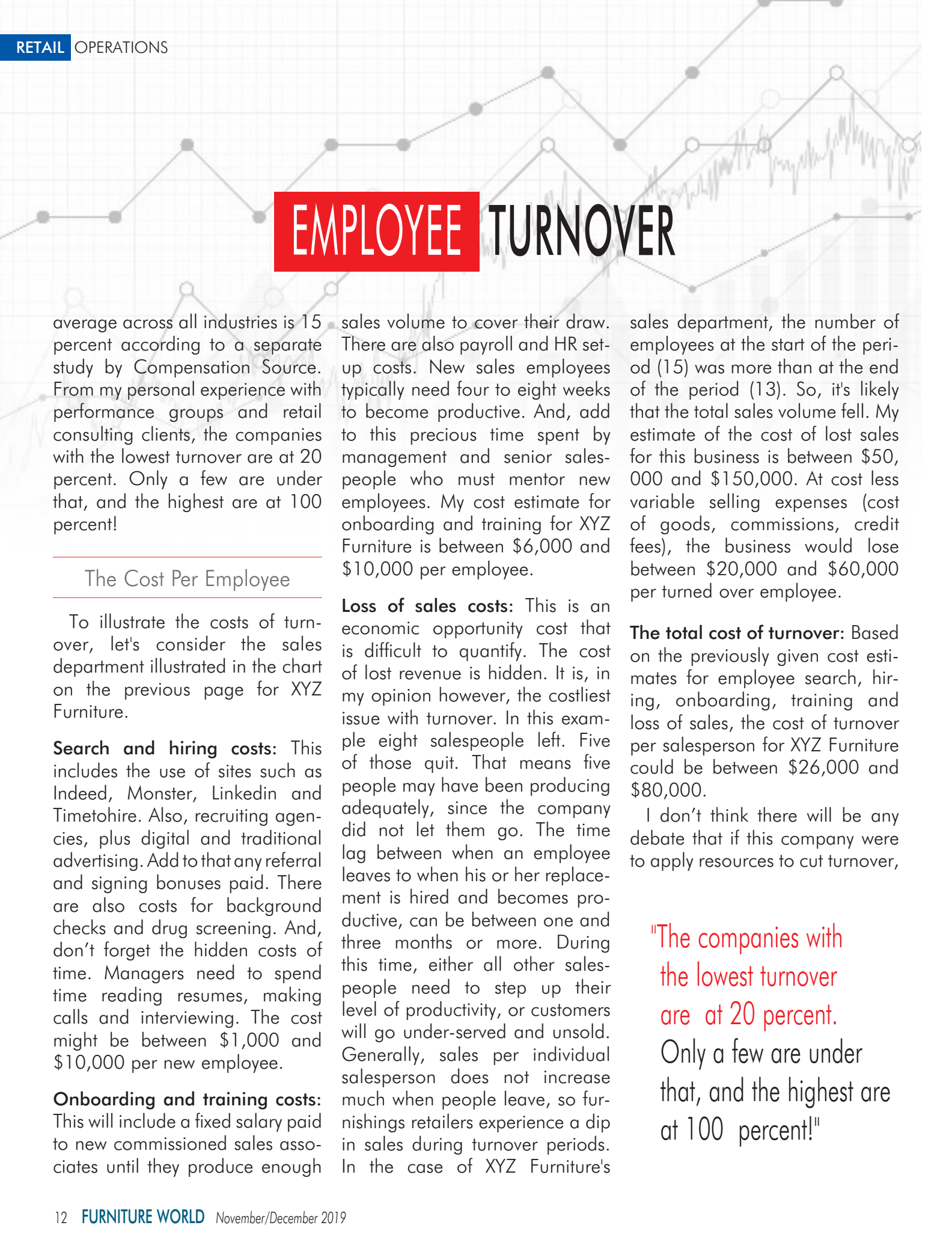
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EMPLOYEE TURNOVER

average across all industries is 15 percent according to a separate study by Compensation Source. From my personal experience with performance groups and retail consulting clients, the companies with the lowest turnover are at 20 percent. Only a few are under that, and the highest are at 100 percent!

The Cost Per Employee

To illustrate the costs of turnover, let's consider the sales department illustrated in the chart on the previous page for XYZ Furniture.

Search and hiring costs: This includes the use of sites such as Indeed, Monster, LinkedIn and Timetohire. Also, recruiting agencies, plus digital and traditional advertising. Add to that any referral and signing bonuses paid. There are also costs for background checks and drug screening. And, don't forget the hidden costs of time. Managers need to spend time reading resumes, making calls and interviewing. The cost might be between \$1,000 and \$10,000 per new employee.

Onboarding and training costs: This will include a fixed salary paid to new commissioned sales associates until they produce enough

sales volume to cover their draw. There are also payroll and HR set-up costs. New sales employees typically need four to eight weeks to become productive. And, add to this precious time spent by management and senior salespeople who must mentor new employees. My cost estimate for onboarding and training for XYZ Furniture is between \$6,000 and \$10,000 per employee.

Loss of sales costs: This is an economic opportunity cost that is difficult to quantify. The cost of lost revenue is hidden. It is, in my opinion however, the costliest issue with turnover. In this example eight salespeople left. Five of those quit. That means five people may have been producing adequately, since the company did not let them go. The time lag between when an employee leaves to when his or her replacement is hired and becomes productive, can be between one and three months or more. During this time, either all other salespeople need to step up their level of productivity, or customers will go under-served and unsold. Generally, sales per individual salesperson does not increase much when people leave, so furnishings retailers experience a dip in sales during turnover periods. In the case of XYZ Furniture's

sales department, the number of employees at the start of the period (15) was more than at the end of the period (13). So, it's likely that the total sales volume fell. My estimate of the cost of lost sales for this business is between \$50,000 and \$150,000. At cost less variable selling expenses (cost of goods, commissions, credit fees), the business would lose between \$20,000 and \$60,000 per turned over employee.

The total cost of turnover: Based on the previously given cost estimates for employee search, hiring, onboarding, training and loss of sales, the cost of turnover per salesperson for XYZ Furniture could be between \$26,000 and \$80,000.

I don't think there will be any debate that if this company were to apply resources to cut turnover,

"The companies with the lowest turnover are at 20 percent.

Only a few are under that, and the highest are at 100 percent!"



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"Start tracking by department

each month for the prior 12 months. Establish your benchmark over a few months of tracking. Then define and implement improvement actions."

it would increase its profitability. In this example, if it was able to keep three of the five good sales employees who left, it could add \$78,000 to \$240,000 to its bottom line. At \$10 million in revenue, the median profitability increase would be 1.62 percent.

Actions to Decrease Turnover

Searching Google will reveal many articles and books written on each one of the following actions. Here is a quick list of some top considerations as they apply to our industry:

1. Hire Well. Getting it right on the front end will save money and disruption down the road. This goes both ways, because sometimes the right hire is passed over due to poor interviewer recognition of talent or a clash of personalities.

2. Train to Succeed. An organized and effective success system needs to be put in place. Retailers often complain that the person they hired is "not the same person" they interviewed. My question back is, "Were the promises you made to the candidate during the interview process fully

realized?"

3. Employee Buy-in: Ensure existing employees are 100 percent committed to helping new employees succeed. Do not allow intimidation from current employees. "Scaring off" new hires is rampant in this industry, especially among salespeople.

4. Management Leadership: Ensure your managers are also leaders. Management and leadership are different. The best are able to do both. Higher turnover will result from managers who are lacking in leadership abilities.

5. Employee Values: Good people only want to work with others who share similar values. Build a team with people who have workplace attributes that will complement and be well received inside your organization.

6. Salary & Growth: Pay competitively and show your employees a path for advancement and increased compensation.

7. Elevate Learning. Minds must be stimulated. Employees will get restless if there are scant opportunities for mental stimulation and career advancement. If you hire people who are motivated to succeed in your orga-

nization and give them the necessary tools, you will keep the employees you want to keep.

8. Reviews & Meetings: Conduct performance reviews and improvement meetings separately. Combining these can have negative effects.

9. Grow Your Business. People want to be a part of growing companies. If you want to attract and keep the best talent in your industry, you must be among the best yourself.

10. Remove Bad Attitudes. Firing employees who have bad attitudes will increase your turnover numbers in the short term but lower them in the long run.

"If XYZ Furniture was able to keep three of the five good sales employees who left, it could add \$78,000 to \$240,000 to its bottom line."

The Process

Employee turnover is one of the most important retail business metrics and yet it is rarely tracked. First, start tracking by department each month for the prior 12 months. Establish your benchmark over a few months of tracking. Then, define and implement improvement actions. If you make this work, you will not only

find that you have less turnover and greater sales and profit, you will also build a much-improved organizational culture.

About David McMahon: *David is a retail financial and operational professional. Through his business PerformNow Inc., David, directs multiple consulting projects, and is proud to lead six business mastermind performance groups: Ashley*

Gladiators, Kaizen, Visionaries, TopLine Sales Managers, Lean and Sigma DC Operations.

David McMahon is a Certified Management Accountant and also a Certified Supply Chain Professional. Questions about this article or any other topic can be directed to him at: www.linkedin.com/in/davidwcmahon/ or david@performnow.net.



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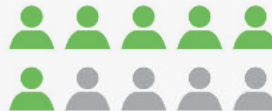
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JENNIFER FURNITURE

by Russell Bienenstock

Jennifer Furniture has risen like a Phoenix following a chapter 11 bankruptcy filing in 2010 and its acquisition by Morris Holdings.

Jennifer Furniture currently operates at 19 locations in the New York/New Jersey Metro area and has ambitious plans to open eight additional stores in 2020. Furniture World spoke with Jennifer Furniture's president, John Garg, who joined the company in 2013 as a store manager and was elevated to president in 2016. Since then, he's orchestrated the dramatic consolidation of over 70 small footprint stores, rebranded the company, and restored it to profitability.

John Garg: Origins

"I started my business career in India at Panasonic, selling nickel cadmium batteries, while pursuing an undergraduate degree in mechanical engineering. Within about six months," Garg told Furniture World, "I was promoted to branch manager, then to marketing manager.

"Panasonic sent me to the United Kingdom to finish my graduate education at the London School of Business while managing Panasonic's division for the UK, Dubai and parts of France. I met

my beautiful wife who lived in New York through a dating website and moved to New York where we were married.

"After sorting out some visa issues," John recalled, "I applied for positions at Bose, CompUSA and Levitz Furniture. Levitz offered the best salary, so despite my total lack of experience in the furniture industry, I was hired to manage their Garden City store. Once there, I saw that most of the Levitz salespeople only worked four days a week while I was working six days. So, I asked to forgo my

"We are planning on opening eight new locations in 2020.

We will continue to expand our e-commerce and Jennifer Wholesale divisions in 2020 as well."

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management responsibilities and become a retail salesperson to be able to spend more time with my young family.

"When Levitz Furniture went bankrupt, I was their highest earning salesperson at 3.8 million dollars in sales. It was a good life while it lasted, but nothing is permanent.

"Soon after that I found a job managing an under-performing Jennifer Convertibles store, turned it around in about six months, then moved to Jennifer's number-one location in Farmingdale, New York. There I helped to increase sales from two to six million in

sales in less than a year."

Bumpy Ride

"To be honest, Jennifer Convertibles was a troubled company in 2016 after Morris Holdings invested in the company and I became president. We had no idea where we're going. We sold just one product category, convertibles. Our merchandising was a mess and we didn't offer financing or have an ecommerce website. It was a bumpy ride.

"The biggest challenge was cash. Morris Zou at Morris Holdings basically told me, 'John, we are handing over Jennifer Convertibles to you, there isn't any money to work with.' So, I thought, 'okay, no problem! Let's see exactly what

I can bring to the table.'

"First, I fired all of the highly-skilled, highly paid managers at the home office, shut down 15 store locations and opened eight larger footprint stores, which took a while. We also closed down the West Coast operation, seven stores that were doing insignificant volume."

Rebranding the Company

"Jennifer Convertibles was rebranded as Jennifer Furniture to reflect expanded product categories, a complete home furnishings shopping experience.

"An ecommerce website was launched with immediate results, quickly growing from one to six million dollars in sales.

The Sixth Avenue (NYC) store (pictured below) is at a hip and trendy location, an up and coming area of New York City. Opened July, 2017.



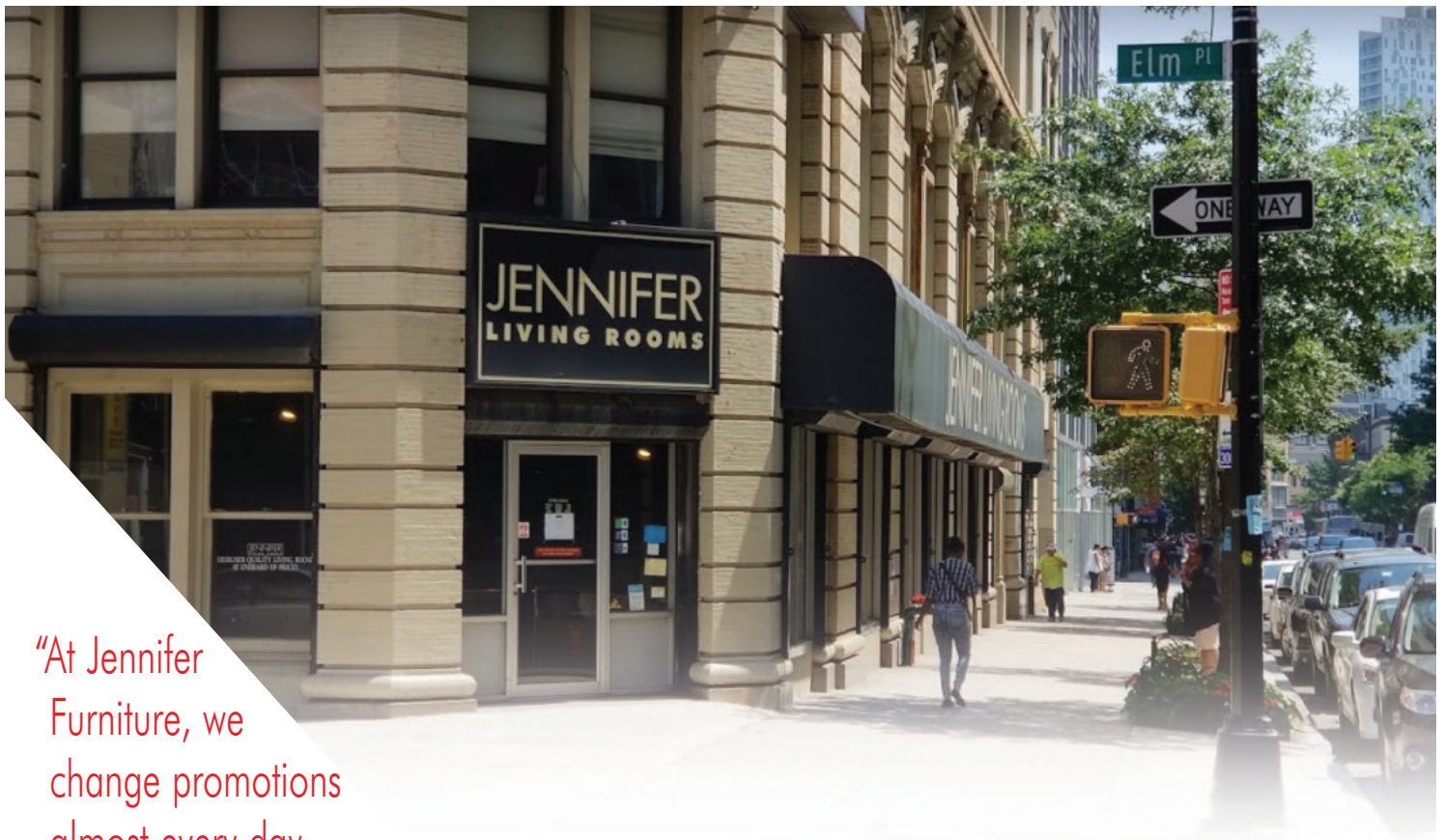
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"At Jennifer Furniture, we change promotions almost every day and hit our audience hard with different kinds of sales and financing options."

"To capitalize on our history of selling convertibles, we launched a second ecommerce website called sofabed.com that's been very successful."

Advertising Changes

"We also cut our advertising expenses. Jennifer Convertibles had used expensive outside advertising agencies. We in-housed everything, saved the commission and launched unique TV commercials. This was important because people knew us as a [sofabed](http://sofabed.com) company. The new ads take a

lifestyle approach, showing happy people shopping multiple product categories. We also produced music videos created especially for YouTube and Facebook that have helped us to connect with customers. Social media plays an important role, telling them who we are, what we are trying to do, and what we sell. Promotions are changed often, and we advertise consistently.

"We've chosen to use Facebook marketplace, Pinterest and Instagram, which have proven to be important tools to bring people in. We use Bing, Google Shopping and invest in keywords to create website visibility.

"A great website is the face of any successful retail operation. The many furniture retailers who just put up a website and don't pay attention to metalinks, keywords, reviews and continually changing content, are not living

Brooklyn location (pictured above) opened in June, 2015.

up to their potential. A lot of mom and pop stores are closing these days because they can't keep up, have trouble being trendy, aren't focused, and don't know or show exactly what their customers are looking for on their websites.

"At Jennifer Furniture, we change promotions almost every day and hit our audience hard with different kinds of sales and financing options.

"Right now, our website features lots of sale merchandise because the holiday time period is all about creating action. Shoppers want instant gratification, the right product, right price, and right time frame. If we don't get them now, we won't grab them at all. Once we move past the holidays we will resume a more lifestyle approach."



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- Increase in-store traffic
- Engage with automated chat bots
- Use Visilytics for accurate shopper counts
- Customer Relationship Management

"Working with designers

has become more important. They bring in higher average sales. Instead of five or six thousand dollars, it's \$20,000 or more. That helps."

Sell to Everyone!

"Our philosophy is to sell furniture to everyone with a good, better, best selection. Whatever special requirement a customer has, be it a specific color, sectional configuration, arm style, slip-cover, leather or fabric, we can

deliver it. Jennifer Furniture sells to the Bob's Discount Furniture customer as well as the Ashley and Raymour and Flanigan customer. We also do a good job with special order and Made in America merchandise, especially with Klaussner and Craftmaster to make every customer happy in terms of the price point, function, style and color.

"Jennifer Furniture launched its own brand of sleeper called Everyday Sleeper that retails from \$600 to about \$3,000. Our mattress business is year-to-date up 5,000 percent, yes, 5,000 percent! We joined hands with Kingsdown and it's working out extremely well.

launched an elite wholesale sales business (Jenniferdirect.com) offering Jennifer Furniture products to other businesses. Any company that can meet our minimum and order in some depth, for example a mom and pop furniture retailer, hotel or design firm, can take advantage of Jennifer's buying power at cost plus a small mark-up.

"It's a new philosophy that adds to our baseline. It's been especially popular with smaller dealers in the New York/New Jersey metro area."

Operations

Jennifer's customers can track their orders online, scheduled from 8AM to 9PM. Walk-up charges, re-delivery fees, and repair/exchange policies are all spelled out on the company website. No returns or exchanges are permitted.

John explained, "Our e-commerce returns compared to other companies like Wayfair are neg-

A Chess Game

"Being a furniture retailer is like playing a game of chess. It's not for everybody. We are in the fight every day and face unlimited challenges.

"Back when we had cash flow issues, Jennifer Furniture



Jennifer Furniture's President, John Garg joined the company in 2013 as a store manager and was elevated to president in 2016.

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JENNIFER FURNITURE

ligible. The two biggest issues Jennifer Furniture has with delivery are damage on delivery and customers who aren't home. In our trading area, traffic is increasing every year. It's been a challenge."

Location, Location

"Another key to Jennifer Furniture's growth has been choosing the right locations. We tend to locate next to competitive retailers and high-profile stores in retail corridors like the one we opened in 2019 on Sixth Avenue in Manhattan. Once a customer walks into our store, of course, it's all about how lively the store is, well lit, the signage, how friendly and attractive it appears. Having

The design of Jennifer Furniture showrooms (below) is tailored to be appropriate for each local demographic. Valley Stream (left) was opened April 2018, and Coram (lower right), in 2010.

the right mix of products and salespeople who can demonstrate them is also important."

Financing

"On the back end, financing options and warranty plans are key. We work with Synchrony and Bread financing for e-commerce sales which has worked out extremely well for us.

"For customers who don't get approval, we offer a leasing option. Jennifer Furniture works hard to make sure that there is always a way for our customers to buy.

"Financing terms are out of control in our industry, giving five years, 10 years. I push my stores to offer a maximum six-month term. Of course, we try not to let anybody walk, but don't offer more than 36 months interest-free. If a customer wants longer term financing, we might as well just

discount the price up front. It all works well if it's applied correctly and we advise customers accordingly. They tend to be much more concerned about their monthly payments than the interest rate."

Design Services

As part of Jennifer Furniture's push to being able to sell to just about every consumer in their trading area, they've successfully

"Financing terms are out of control in our industry, giving five years, ten years. I push my stores to offer a maximum six-month term."



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Pictured (right) is old signage on a 22,000 square foot building, soon to be replaced with Jennifer Furniture branding. Interior photo features the message, "Jennifer... style, quality and price have been paramount to our success. We sell our products for so much less than the competition. We have always felt that you don't have to overspend to have good taste." Jennifer Furniture's motto is, "Your dream, your style, love it at Jennifer!"

partnered with outside designers.

"It's part of the elite wholesale sales business I mentioned previously that includes free delivery," said Garg. "We do our best to take care of our design partners.

"As brick and mortar stores are seeing less store traffic, working

with designers has become more important. They bring in higher average sales. Instead of five or six thousand dollars, it's \$20,000 or more. That helps.

"We are actively advertising to find new designer-partners to boost our higher-end and custom

furniture sales."

Accessories

"We are certainly doing well with accessories, though I see them as a kind of a commodity.

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"Back when we had cash flow issues, we launched an elite wholesale sales business (Jenniferdirect.com) offering Jennifer Furniture products to other businesses."

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PROFITABLE EVENTS SINCE 1962





Pictured above is a display in Jennifer Furniture's Carle Place, NY store. When setting up furniture groupings, 10 basic rules for decorating are used: choose a focal point, don't push furniture against the walls, create conversation areas, find balance, consider traffic flow, use the right-size rugs, get the appropriate sized coffee table, put tables at arm's length, let there be light, use the right artwork. At right is the Wondersign that lets customers' purchase, choose color, style, obtain dimensions and other information needed to make an informed purchase.



We will soon introduce a new "scan 'n go" concept area where customers can choose accessories on a computer screen before leaving the store. This recognizes the fact that the majority of salespeople don't like to spend time with accessories. Instead of fighting this, we let customers buy their furniture first and then they

can do the rest online, which is what many consumers like to do anyway. I believe we will see more of this in our industry in the near future."

Hiring

"Hiring good people is a big,

big, big problem. I'm an industry veteran and I love sales! But people in the workplace don't recognize the potential for making good money in our business. They believe furniture sales is just not a good career. As an industry, we need to educate millennials. Let them know that home furnishings is a 300-plus billion-dollar industry, an amazing industry full of opportunities for smart, motivated people. The good news about being a sales professional is that basically you can write your own check. You are running your own entrepreneurial business. Your employer is just giving

"As an industry, we need to educate millennials. Let them know that home furnishings is a 300-plus billion-dollar industry, an amazing industry full of opportunities for smart, motivated people."

"The majority of salespeople

don't like to spend time with accessories. Instead of fighting this, we let customers buy their furniture first. Then they can do the rest online which is what many consumers like to do anyway."

you a platform. I want to tell those youngsters, 'Buddy, THIS IS the industry! If you have the fire, if you want to be in sales, you can be very successful.' It's a shame that we are doing such a poor job of making this case since with every passing year it becomes harder, sometimes impossible to find the right people.

"At the risk of repeating myself, retail is hard — having a sales career takes an investment in time and attention. It's not hard to find people to show up for work, but there's a lot of turnover. That's the situation at retail, industry-wide.

"To combat that here at Jennifer Furniture we explain what's possible. We have a great training program. We also pay salespeople walk-in money, a guaranteed salary while they build their sales skills and commissions."

The Future

"Furniture World asked about the Future of the furniture industry in general and for Jennifer Furniture specifically. "The biggest challenge at retail," Garg noted, "is to keep customers happy. Finding the right customers who are looking to buy is not an easy job. Neither is interacting with them in the best possible ways. So, our focus at Jennifer Furniture is to use our data and engage every day, focus on communicating, work to create loyalty and invest in ecommerce.

"Regarding the near future,"

concluded Garg, "We will be opening a new showroom in Kings Plaza, Brooklyn, within the next four weeks. We will also be opening in Union, NJ next week. We are planning on opening eight new locations in 2020. We will continue to expand our e-commerce and Jennifer Wholesale divisions in 2020 as well."

Finally, Furniture World, asked John if there was anything else he wanted to add.

"To be honest with you," he concluded, "I want to thank the furniture industry for all the opportunities, and for giving me such a wonderful 20 years. I love it."



John Garg (far right) with Morris Zou, Chairman and CEO of Morris Holdings Limited. John Garg (near right) with Sean Ballingall, Vice President of Jennifer Furniture. The Jennifer Furniture team (above) celebrated at the Greater Metropolitan Furnishings Association dinner honoring John Garg as Retailer of the Year 2019.



HFA turns 100 in 2020

Sharon Bradley, CEO



One hundred years ago, women gained the right to vote, and furniture retailers formed an association!

If you're a furniture retailer, let me be the first to wish you a happy anniversary because the association that represents you turns 100 in 2020. What does it take to turn 100? Ask a centenarian that question and they might tell you a glass of wine at night goes a long way! Certainly, a positive attitude helps and, perhaps most important of all, a willingness to change and grow with the times.

As the HFA prepares to kick off its centennial celebration in a few weeks, I've been thinking about what the secret to our longevity is. Turns out those centenarians are on to something. When I think about the HFA, I'm proud to lead an organization that sees the enormous poten-

tial of our industry and is willing to change to keep up with the times. I'm proud of what the founders of this association and those that followed have created over so many years. And, I am so very proud of what I see the next generation of home furnishings professionals doing to impact the success of our industry today and for the future.

One hundred years ago, Woodrow Wilson was in the White House, women gained the right to vote and a group of furniture retailers, realizing that there was strength in numbers, gathered to form an association that would tackle specific issues that affected their businesses. They wanted to share ideas and create a stronger spirit of indus-

try cooperation. They wanted a voice in Washington and exposure to industry trends. In a world that was forever changing, they wanted their furniture stores to be the best they possibly could be.

HFA's centennial is a celebration of our members — their voices and accomplishments, and their contributions to addressing the big challenges of the past century. It's especially a celebration of the next 100 years and what we'll do together to continue that success.

Although many of our challenges have changed, the Association's goal is no different today than it was 100 years ago. We are here to support our members and our industry in every way possible.

Earlier this year we rolled out a major initiative in which we asked members what they needed most from their association. If 2019 was about listening, 2020 will be about doing. In January, HFA will announce an important new member benefit. That's only the start. We'll

What Does Designer Lisa Mende...

say about High Point's Bienenstock Furniture Library?

be addressing other needs – all focused on the key challenges retailers have asked us to help solve — to ensure we're still around for that 200th anniversary.

So kick off the party with us next year at Las Vegas Market where we'll celebrate our anniversary with cake, champagne and friends. Additional celebratory events are planned throughout the year at markets and industry events. If you're not a member, consider joining because this will be the year you won't want to miss as a member of the re-energized Home Furnishings Association. Get ready for the next 100 years; the future is very bright!

"What does it take to turn 100? Ask a centenarian that question and they might tell you a glass of wine at night goes a long way!"



“When I visit the Bienenstock Library I'm working in a magical place. It's wonderful to touch books that represent the best furnishings designs created over the past 600 years. I'm grateful that we have this resource in High Point. It is famous with interior designers, a remarkable place to come and be inspired. Every person in our industry who has an interest in design needs to discover it.”

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Studio 28 was supposed to cater to Iowa's millennials. It does that and so much more.

It's been 16 months since Patty and Beth Artis, mother and daughter owners of Artis, opened a second store – Studio 28 – on Ingersoll Avenue in downtown Des Moines, Iowa. The location made good business sense. That part of downtown Des Moines is in the midst of a rebirth. It also made good emotional sense since Artis Furniture, a Des Moines institution, was located on Ingersoll Avenue many years ago.

Studio 28 is a case study for furniture retailers looking to grab a slice of the millennial pie. Beth Artis set up the new 3,200-square-foot test tube with

two shopper demographic groups in mind. Studio 28 still wants to cater to traditional central Iowan customers who have always known the brand for traditional furniture lines such as Stickley, CR Laine, Theodore Alexander and Bradington Young. Studio 28 also wants to attract Des Moines' 20- and 30-somethings just starting out on their home furnishings journeys with lines like Younger and Noir.

At least that's the plan. Increasingly, Beth Artis has noticed these two groups crossing over the aisle. She also sees the Studio 28 and Artis Furniture

stores feeding clients to one another. Artis says it's not uncommon for sales associates at Artis Furniture in Urbandale to send customers downtown to Studio 28 and vice versa. "So, we're constantly directing new traffic to both stores," she says.

Beginning in the 1950s, Artis Furniture operated on Ingersoll Avenue furnishing homes in central Iowa. When Ingersoll and its downtown neighborhood began to lose their luster with shoppers, Artis Furniture and others fled for the suburbs, but the Artis family never forgot its Ingersoll roots.

So, when a retail space opened on Ingersoll Avenue in 2018 (Artis' 90th year in business), Beth Artis didn't hesitate to sign a lease. She said another furniture company's closing, combined with the family business looking to grow, was more than coincidental. "I'm convinced it's a total God thing," she said. "You will never be able to tell me otherwise. We're very grateful."

HFA members Beth and Patty Artis are the owners of Studio 28, a new store in Des Moines, Iowa, that attracts both boomers and millennials.



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"The common thinking

in retail furniture is that millennials and quality furniture will get together the day oil and water mingle."

"So many things had to happen to bring us to where we are," says Beth.

She credits her father, Bill Sr., with pursuing the younger demographic. "Dad has always been very forward-looking with the business," she says. "He knows 20-year-olds will be our regular customers in a few years, so we want to go after them early on in

their buying journey."

She's convinced Studio 28 will win over millennials through education and reaching them where they are in their lives, which is to say on the couch. Artis Furniture tries to educate them at every opportunity, whether that's through social networking, e-newsletters or when they walk through the front door. The new website, revamped and loaded with new product every week, is geared more toward an ecommerce strategy rather than just being a catalog of what the store carries.

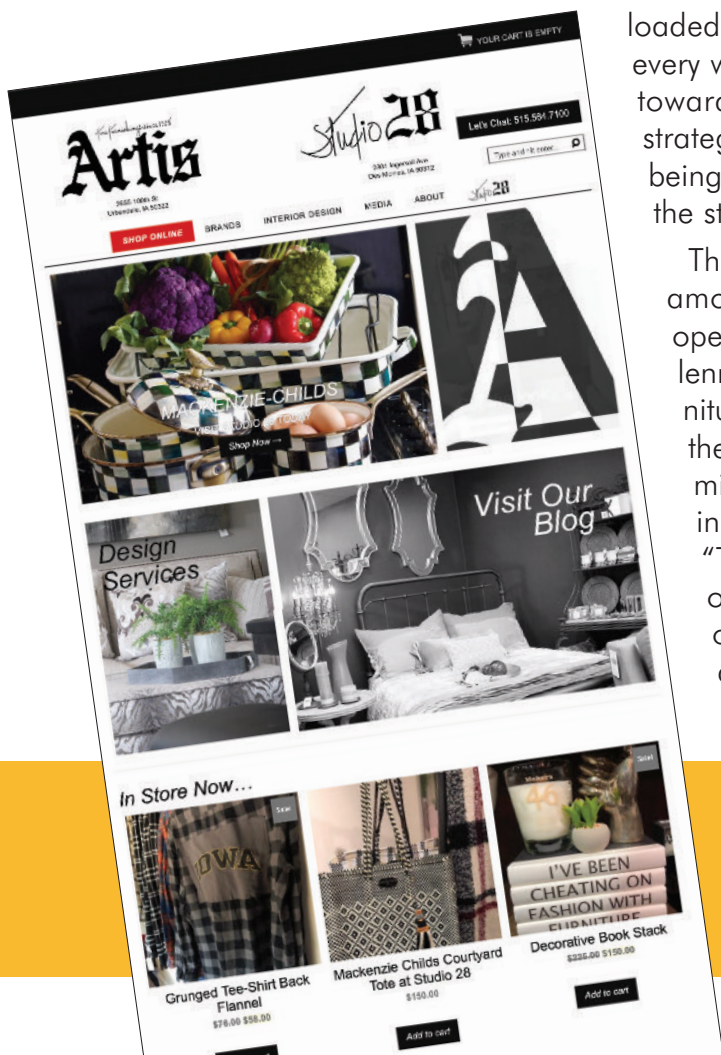
The common thinking among retail furniture operations is that millennials and quality furniture will get together the day oil and water mingle. Beth isn't buying into that theory. "The misconception out there is that Artis or any other brick-and-mortar furniture

retailer is too expensive to compete with online," she says. "I think it's just the opposite. I don't think online has what it takes to compete with us."

Beth likes to tell the story of the man who came into the Urbandale store looking to buy a sofa. She told him that she could order it, but it would cost \$400 more than he could purchase it for on Wayfair.

"I told him he could order the sofa online, but what if he didn't like it?" she said. "I told him how hard it would be to return that sofa online as opposed to how we handle returns locally. I told him we'd deliver it to his house and set it up wherever he wanted, or he could buy from the online company and someone would drop the piece on his driveway and leave. I could have gone on and on, but he waved his hands and said, 'You're right, you're right. It's just not worth the hassle.'"

Artis Furniture had won over another customer.



The new website (<https://artisfurniture.com>) has been revamped and loaded with new product every week. It is geared more toward an ecommerce strategy than just showing a catalog of what the store carries.



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Participants in the CEO Summit discussed the toughest issues affecting the furniture retail industry.

Retailers discuss strategies for recovering market share from giant online furniture vendors.

The Home Furnishings Association launched its inaugural CEO Summit Oct. 27 with hopes it would provide value to its entire membership.

"The things we're going to learn here, the things we're going to talk about will have ripple effects for every one of our members and everyone in the home furnishings industry," Mark Schumacher, HFA's executive vice president, said as the event began in Pebble Beach, California.

As the summit concluded Oct. 30, those aspirations were confirmed.

"Great things happen when we bring retailers together," Schumacher said. "It does not matter their size. It does not matter what part of the country they come from. This is an industry that is about relationships, and when we as the Home Furnishings

Association bring them together in a purposeful fashion and then allow them to connect and discuss, great things happen."

Fifty owners, presidents and chief executives of Top 100 retail furniture companies assembled for the conference. Collectively, they operate thousands of brick-and-mortar stores, which are buffeted by the strongest headwinds. The executives addressed some of their greatest challenges.

What quickly became clear is that leaders of the largest retailers confront the same currents opposing small, family furniture stores. They're looking for the same answers.

The CEOs discussed strategies to recover market share from giant online furniture vendors, connect more effectively with customers in digital channels and achieve greater productivity from

existing staffing levels.

"They left with takeaways to better their businesses, to be more resilient in the face of these dynamic challenges," Schumacher said.

The HFA will share those takeaways in future blog and social media posts and HFA Insights Magazine articles. The summit also established a successful model for further conferences for a wide array of HFA members.

"This just proved it works," Schumacher said. "It's what we're going to do on all levels."

"The first annual CEO Summit was three great days and evenings of meetings, networking and fun at world-famous Pebble Beach," Host Committee Chairman Keith Koenig said. "Top retail CEOs shared ideas and built relationships that will benefit them and their businesses," the CEO of City Furniture added. "My bet is this will become the one event we all want to come to every year."

For more information on the CEO Summit, call HFA Executive Vice President Mark Schumacher at 916-757-1173.



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haritable giving has become more important in recent years. Three home furnishings retailers explain why it pays to give.

Independent furniture retailers have always been plugged-in to their communities. They're the ones whose name is featured on the backs of Little League jerseys, who sponsor the town parade and furnish the middle school teachers' lounge.

In the past decade, the role of charitable giving has taken on much more meaning. Studies show a direct connection between charitable giving by retailers and increases in store loyalty from those who benefit.

Coconis Furniture

"It's not the reason we help our community, but I've definitely seen the appreciation and support returned our way," says HFA member Randy Coconis of Coconis Furniture in Central Ohio.

Asking Coconis to pick a favorite furniture promotion is like asking a mother to pick her favorite child. You're wasting your time. But ask Coconis to pick his most meaningful promotion and there's

no hesitation. Coconis Furniture's five stores handed out dozens of certificates in October – Breast Cancer Awareness month – offering free mammograms to women with no health insurance or whose insurance doesn't provide for the testing.

Coconis says it's a promotion he and his staff get excited about because it extends beyond just selling furniture and appliances. "Not every promotion has to be focused on your business, and this is one of those that's about



HFA members David and Joey Gunn of Knight Furniture in Sherman, Texas, are regular supporters in their community – from youth athletics to school choirs and everything in between (Joey Gunn, near left).

Dorian Stacy Sims (far left) of Stacy Furniture in Grapevine, Texas, says her father and grandfather taught her the importance of giving back to the community your store serves. "It's something that stuck with me," she says.



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the community and helping people who might otherwise not be able to help themselves."

HFA members, Knight Furniture and Stacy Furniture can relate. They are always lending a helping hand in their respective Texas communities with fundraisers and sponsorships or lending space in their stores to various community groups.

Knight Furniture

Joey Gunn, who, along with his father David, runs Knight Furniture in Sherman, Texas, can't recall a time when their stores were not giving of their time and talents to the communities they serve. "Ever since I was crawling on the showroom floor in diapers, we've been part of our community," says Gunn. "We do it because we want to, but let's face it, it makes good business sense. Why would

you not want to support the community that's always supported you?"

In this season of giving, these three HFA members' stories can serve as a vivid reminder to other furniture retailers of the power of giving.

A Cone Communications and Echo Research study found that 82 percent of U.S. consumers consider corporate social responsibility when they shop. According to the study, two demographics particularly interested in philanthropy are coveted by furniture retailers – mothers and millennials.

"We want people to know that we're a part of this community and that we're not going anywhere," says Gunn. "We're going to support everything that makes our community great."

Stacy Furniture

Dorian Stacy Sims says everything she learned about giving came from her father and grandfather. Rick Stacy, Sims' father, founded Stacy Furniture in Grapevine, Texas. "He recognized the importance of con-

necting and engaging with your neighbors," she said. "It's something that stuck with me."

Sims says it's important for furniture retailers to find a cause or charity they are passionate about. If you do that, the benefits will fall into place. "We never go out there thinking this is the right business decision to make. We think it's the right thing to do, period. You've been given the time and talent to do great things through your store, so why not do just that?"

Final Thoughts

Knight Furniture donates its time and resources to all sorts of groups in Sherman. Little League baseball, Chamber of Commerce events, school choirs, women's shelters, teacher-of-the-month celebrations and so much more.

"What's cool is being the store that's going to be at the Little League games and Chamber events," says Gunn. "That's something the big boxes can never do. That's what sets your local store apart."

Coconis agrees. He knows a promotion like free breast-cancer

"When people go looking for furniture or an appliance, I want them saying to themselves, 'Coconis deserves a shot.'"

-Randy Coconis



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CHARITABLE GIVING

screenings makes good business sense, too. When furniture and appliance superstore Big Sandy moved into Central Ohio a few years back – Big Sandy's store

community.

The company was even the official sponsor of a Veterans Day Parade in Zanesville, Ohio, this year. "We want people in this community to know we're here for them in ways beyond just furniture or appliances, but obviously there for those, too. When people go looking for furniture or an appliance, I want them saying to themselves, 'Coconis deserves a shot.' And that's all we really want is for them to give us a shot because then I think we can win them over."

For other retailers looking to become more involved in their communities, Coconis, Sims and Gunn offer a few tips:

Find a passion. "If you believe in what a group or organization does, you're going to be more invested yourself," says Sims.

Open your doors. It's not all about money. Once a month, Knight Furniture invites an elementary, middle or high school choir to perform in its showroom. "They get a nice-sized audience to perform in front of and the store gets exposure, too," says Gunn.

Just say no. Not every opportunity is the right fit. "You have to be smart with your time and allocations," says Sims. "Sometimes sponsoring a football game isn't the best return for your store. Sometimes a private school asking for help is going to have to take a back seat to a public school that's really in need. You have to be able to say 'no' sometimes."

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

"According to the study, two demographics particularly interested in philanthropy are coveted by furniture retailers – mothers and millennials."

in Lancaster is a mere 300 yards from Coconis Furniture – Coconis knew he needed to be more aggressive in getting his store's name and message in front of the

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The recently concluded Autumn edition of the IHGF Delhi Fair, drove home a thought-provoking message on sustainability and responsible manufacturing. In keeping with the theme of 'Refuse, Reduce, Reuse, Repurpose & Recycle', colossal installations of animals, butterflies and trees at the fair venue, were crafted from 50 tons of industrial waste including plastic, metal, wood and fabric. The exhibit perfectly exemplified an amalgamation of traditional Indian lifestyle values and practices that were reimagined, using cast-off everyday materials.

As a nation, India prides itself in its long history and tradition of harmonious co-existence between man and nature, with craft practices contributing to sustainable lifestyles. IHGF Delhi Fair-Autumn 2019 endeavored to complement this affirmation of being one with nature by showcasing sustainable trade and living.

3200 Exhibitors

The fair featured eco-friendly home lifestyle lines, gifts & decoratives made from recycled materials, as well as interesting assortments of fair trade products. Over 7000 trade visitors from 110 countries engaged with 3200+ exhibitors spread across nearly 1.8 million square feet in 14 display areas.

Everything to Create Unique & Exciting Retail Experiences

The IHGF Delhi Fair offers anything

and everything home furnishings retailers can use to create compelling in-store experiences. The show serves up a huge selection of lifestyle and home fashion products. The 2019 edition showcased home textiles and furnishings featuring contemporary styles, regional nuances and the zealously practiced weaving traditions of India.

Furniture & Accessories: Furniture for every room in the home including outdoor furniture, lamps, lighting, art metalware, EPNS ware, wood carvings, home accessories, glassware, fashion jewelry, hand-printed textiles, shawls, throws, scarves, embroidered goods, lace, toys, housewares, decorative gifts, general handicrafts, home textiles, home accessories, candles, incense, pottery, terracotta, ceramics, nautical instruments, Christmas and floral decorations, dried flowers, potpourri, handmade paper products, leather crafts, lacquer and marble, were just some of the products on display. The exhibition also included decorative objects, dimensional art, vases, frames, mirrors, vintage toys and relic replicas, alongside furniture and woodcrafts that formed a well-curated and timely selection for any forward-thinking retailer.

Soft Goods: A stunning blend of unique natural organic fibers, examples of dyeing, printing, embroidery and hand painting offered plenty of choices. Carpets, rugs and flooring manufactured in craft clusters from different regions of India, flaunted their color, design and construction.

Bathroom: Bathroom accessories

offered a blend of the old and new with sheer opulence, rustic ethnic and stylish contemporary for home baths, spas, resorts and hotels.

Regional Crafts: Regional crafts brought in from the length and breadth of India reflected unique local cultures, native uses and indigenous techniques in staged exhibition areas, theme pavilions and collective displays. Repurposed materials and new design alignments were showcased.

Largest Show for Handicrafts

IHGF Delhi Fair is certified as the world's largest congregation of handicraft exhibitors under one roof. It is the place for the international sourcing community to connect with the work of millions of Indian artisans.

April 2020 Edition

The 49th edition will be held from April 15-19 2020 at the India Expo Centre & Mart, Greater Noida Expressway, Delhi NCR. The fair is being organized by the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts (EPCH), the apex national body representing Indian Handicrafts manufacturers and exporters.

For more information, contact: Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts, EPCH House, Pocket 6 & 7, Sector - C, LSC, Vasant Kunj, New Delhi - 110070, India. Email: visitors@epch.com.





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A review of national and local legislative and regulatory activity initiated on behalf of home furnishings retailers in 2019.

The work of tracking legislative and regulatory activity in the nation's capital and all 50 states is shared by HFA's Government Relations Action Team, the Washington, D.C., lobbying firm Dutko GR and an Association staff member. Together, they recommend policy positions to the HFA Board of Directors and project the association's voice to Congress, administrative agencies and state decision-makers. In addition, the HFA often joins coalitions with other industry groups to multiply its impact.

Some of the issues addressed during the year were:

Flame Retardants

With industry allies, HFA successfully pressed Massachusetts Governor Charlie Baker in January to reject a bill that would have banned the use of flame-retardant chemicals in home furnishings products.

HFA contends that a national approach is better than enacting inconsistent laws in various states. HFA instead supports SOFFA, the Safer Occupancy Furnishings

Flammability Act, a bipartisan congressional initiative that would apply California's TB 117-2013 across the country.

QIP Tax Correction

An error in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act limited the ability of retail businesses to write off the costs of investments in Qualified Improvement Property, or QIP. HFA joined a broad business coalition to push for a correction. Bills introduced in the House and Senate have drawn strong bipartisan support, thanks to coalition lobbying, but have not yet passed either chamber.

Stability

The last few months have seen intense activity in Congress and at the Consumer Products Safety Commission, in addition to changes in the ASTM voluntary furniture stability standard. HFA has sent a consistent message to its members: Don't sell clothing storage units unless they meet the latest ASTM standard. HFA also advises members to urge

their customers to anchor those chests and dressers to a wall or baseboard to prevent tip-over accidents.

Website Accessibility

Plaintiffs' attorneys continue to file lawsuits, or demand payments, contending that business websites fail to accommodate consumers with impaired vision,

"Plaintiffs' attorneys continue to file lawsuits, or demand payments, contending that business websites fail to accommodate consumers with impaired vision, thus violating the Americans with Disabilities Act."



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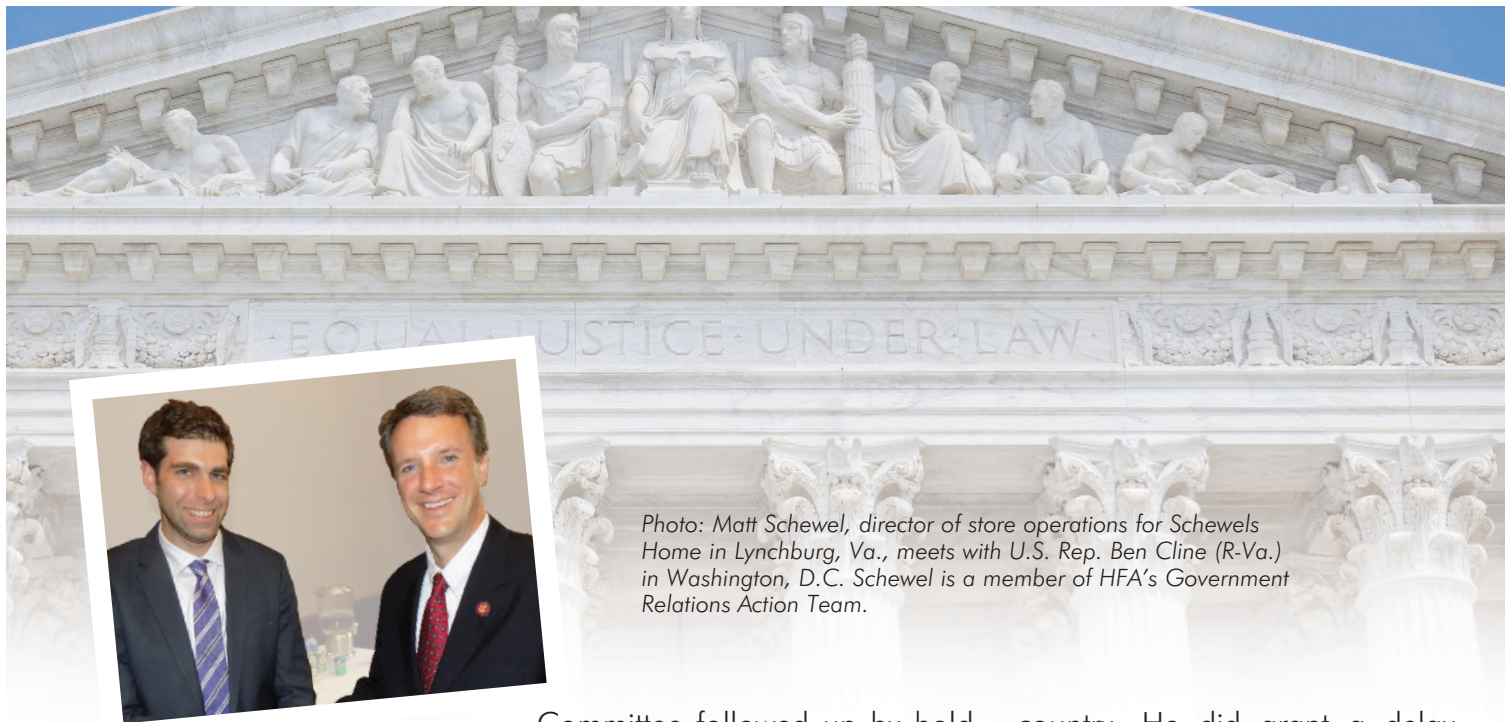


Photo: Matt Schewel, director of store operations for Schewels Home in Lynchburg, Va., meets with U.S. Rep. Ben Cline (R-Va.) in Washington, D.C. Schewel is a member of HFA's Government Relations Action Team.

thus violating the Americans with Disabilities Act. Furniture retailers are not immune. HFA encourages its members to improve website accessibility, but it also recognizes there are no clear standards outlining how compliance can be achieved. On behalf of one Florida member, HFA has initiated meetings in the offices of Florida Senators Marco Rubio and Rick Scott to urge a congressional remedy. The staff of Sen. Rubio's Small Business

Committee followed up by holding a roundtable discussion of the issue in Orlando on November 15, inviting Jeff Smith, general manager of HFA member Walker Furniture in Gainesville, to participate.

Tariffs

HFA wrote to President Donald Trump in September supporting his goals for a comprehensive trade deal with China but asking him to delay an increase in tariffs on furniture imports from that

country. He did grant a delay, but the bulk of the tariffs remain, adding costs that must be passed to consumers. HFA is part of the Americans for Free Trade coalition that is working to inform the public about the harmful impact that tariffs have had on the U.S. economy.

The coming year is likely to be even busier. All HFA members are invited to get involved and join the association's Government Relations Action Team. Contact staff member Doug Clark at 916-757-1167 or dclark@myhfa.org.

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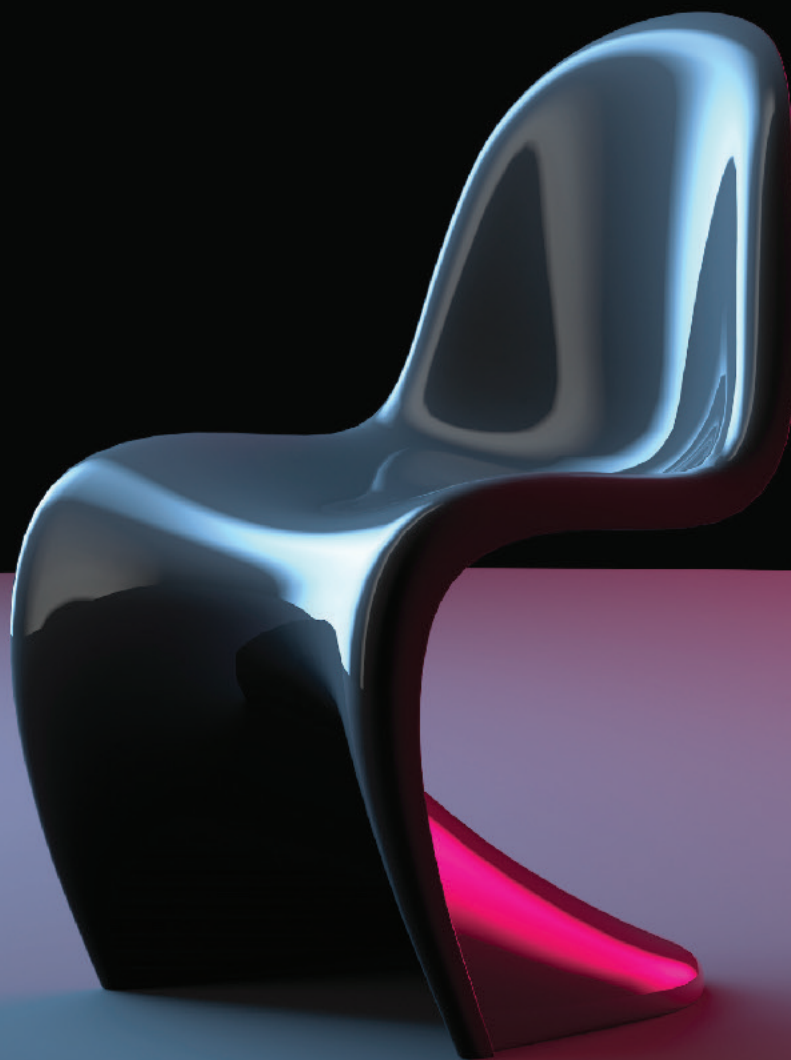
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Omnia

The Zane collection is made with 100 percent top grain leathers and optional wood finishes. Handcrafted in America.

Contact information on page 80

Whittier Wood

The Addison 72"H x 39"W bookcase provides a new angle on storage. Looks outstanding alone or combined with other Addison Living and Media items. Made of American Alder and Black Walnut hardwoods.

Contact information on page 80



Elran

The Rikki collection features modern design with clean lines, panel padded back and full panel chaise seat. It is enhanced with a two motor design for power recliners and power headrests. Also available with manual recliners with a ratchet five-position headrest. The chair is available as a swivel glider.

Contact information on page 80

Twin Star Home

The Media Mantel with ClassicFlame® Pano-Glow™ Electric Fireplace is finished in Bloomfield Oak and accommodates most flat screen TVs up to 70" and up to 105 lbs.

Contact information on page 80



Arason

The Madrid features clean lines, with brushed aluminum hardware and a wire brush finish. Its storage drawer provides 5.5 feet of storage space. That's plenty of room for pillows and bedding.

Contact information on page 80



Country View Woodworking

The Champagne Dining Set, part of the Elite Dining Series, features Brown Maple finished in 122 stains, available in 12 sizes, 14 shapes and edge profiles. Pictured with the Salida side chair.

Contact information on page 80



Best Selling DESIGN



Jaipur Home

From the Expressive Impressions collection, the Rudyard sofa features an antique black finished Mango Wood frame with extensive hand-carved and routed detail.

Contact information on page 80



Null

The small-scale six piece 9919 collection features transitional styling that combines aged antique brass tubular metal and a brown cherry wood finish.

Contact information on page 80



Furniture of America

Contemporary dining group features a tempered glass-top table with beveled edge, a unique geometric pedestal base with a striking two-tone finish and plush cushioned leatherette dining chairs. Tapered chrome chair legs and a high-gloss white finish complete this elegant set.

Contact information on page 80

Kas Rugs

Distressed color patterns overlay an ornate all-over Persian rug design in this dramatic vintage rug from the Majestic Collection. Subtle Abrash grey, light blue, gold, and navy, spread over wool and nylon fibers give a plush luxurious look.

Contact information on page 80



Collection Tuff

The Valencia dining table features a marble effect top, brushed stainless steel base and an extension system on smooth ball bearing glide.

Contact information on page 80

Klaussner

The Flagler two-piece sectional with chaise is scaled for extreme lounging and comfort.

Contact information on page 80



Best Selling DESIGN



Surya

The bright global bohemian Khavi pillow collection utilizes embroidery to create patterns that mimic ornate tile. Available with color combinations that include blue, green, yellow, purple, pink and teal.

Contact information on page 80

Craftmaster

This new wood accent chair and matching ottoman from the Paula Deen Home collection features a rush seat base, spindle back, and sweetheart shaped top rail. The fabric is a detailed geometric embroidery in shamrock green.

Contact information on page 80



Legends

The Avana collection is made of Acacia solids and veneers with a smoky greige finish. The collection features English dovetail joinery, ball bearing glides, felt lined top drawers, jewelry tray in dresser, USB ports on both sides of headboards, and beveled mirror.

Contact information on page 80

Norwalk

The Rowan chair is a fun platform-style chair with a distinctive wood base that tapers from front to back. This chair is reminiscent of mid-century style furniture, with arms that flare out into a tray shape, offering a very distinctive look.

Contact information on page 80



Horizon Home

Part of the new Big Timber Collection, this 84" trestle table is made of solid heart Pine. Reclaimed beams highlight the trestle base. Chair backs and metal accent corners round out the Lodge look. Also available in entertainment, bedroom, occasional, bar, and home office.

Contact information on page 80

Huntington House

Adopting the feel of a tete-a-tete, this open back sofa is amazing from any angle and the perfect piece to float in a room or across from a conventional sofa. It is shown here in a sophisticated leather-fabric combination.

Contact information on page 80



SO-CALLED KNOWLEDGEABLE & FRIENDLY SALESPeOPLE

by Gordon Hecht

Many store owners claim that their sales teams are knowledgeable and friendly, but it is probably wishful thinking!

Traveling and working at the Las Vegas Market is great! Along with all the new styles and innovative merchandise, I get to meet with old friends, make new friends, and celebrate an active day at a world-class restaurant. At one such dinner I was asked about how many retail store-fronts I have visited in my career. After a few minutes of thought, I estimated that I've been in over 1000 furniture, mattress, appliance or flooring stores.

When an opportunity presented itself during those numerous visits, I would ask store owners why their customers choose to shop at their store. They almost always replied: Great Selection, Great Prices, Great Service, plus KNOWLEDGEABLE and FRIENDLY salespeople. Good reasons, for sure, but those terms are so broad that they don't differentiate any retailer.

Not Just Product Knowledge

KNOWLEDGEABLE may seem

to imply knowledge of the inner workings or component parts of merchandise. Many factory reps and even more point-of-purchase material seem dedicated to preaching that information. It's great information for TELLING, but in SELLING, people knowledge will out-perform product knowledge. If I had to choose between hiring two sales candidates, one with excellent product knowledge and another with good people knowledge, I would choose the latter every time.

People knowledge is a rare quality. It is the ability to engage shoppers in a conversation, dominated by the shopper, in which the sales person learns the shopper's motivation for seeking and purchasing new products. A second step is to mold the sales presentation so that the store's offerings meet or exceed each shopper's expectations. It is this second step that requires an understanding of the construction and function of furnishings items (what it is) and using that information to solve the customer's

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SO-CALLED KNOWLEDGEABLE & FRIENDLY

needs and wants (what it does).

In retail, there is more to understand and present than just product information. Many sales are closed (or lost) in the telling and selling of store operations and policies. The true knowledgeable salesperson can explain the value of using credit, why the delivery charge is an excellent value, and patience in waiting for a custom order.

Knowledgeable salespeople gain their information by investing 10 minutes talking with their shoppers before showing any merchandise. They believe that it's foolish to show solutions before understanding the

problem. Using the "Reporter's Questions"—Who, What, Where, When, Why, How, and Tell Me, they can diagnose the needs and wants of the shopper and present a well-crafted presentation based on the shopper's answers.

Friendly is an Attitude

FRIENDLY used to mean greeting every shopper with a smile and a handshake, but friendly is an attitude, not just forced actions. Being friendly means treating your store like it is your home (not a stretch, because you probably spend more hours there) and your shopper is a friend that just dropped by to say "hi".

In the good old days before Facebook (even before My Space and Blackberries) people "just visited" friends, even without an appointment. They would knock on your door, and you would welcome them in. The first part of the visit would be catching up on news, discussing jobs, kids, mutual friends, vacations, and more. It was usually done over a cup of coffee or cold drink. Conversation flowed freely and before you knew it, you were caught up on what was on their mind. Chances are

good that your friend stopped by because they knew you were a "good listener".

Turn Shoppers Into Friends

True FRIENDLY salespeople can turn a shopper into a friend by simply treating their store like a home and inviting guests to just visit. Everyone knows someone is there to sell, and someone is there to buy, but are willing to put that goal on hold until they get to know each other.

The friendship extends beyond the initial sale. Just like a true pal, the friendly salesperson will call (not text or email) after delivery just to make sure everything worked out well—and fix any problems that may have come up. They may call back after 60 or 90 days, just to say "hi", and see if the customer has any friends who need furnishings products. They may even send a birthday or anniversary card. It's easier to keep an old friend than try to make new ones.

Conclusion

Store owners and managers

"True FRIENDLY salespeople can turn a shopper into a friend by simply treating their store like a home and inviting guests to just visit."

may claim that their sales teams are knowledgeable and friendly. But, unless they practice People Knowledge and a Welcoming Attitude, this claim is probably wishful thinking. The prescription for creating a truly welcoming and knowledgeable operation is using training and repetition to ensure that sales teams engage with the following four axioms of retail selling.

1. People love to buy but hate to be sold.
2. People will buy from a friend, but cannot be sold by a stranger.
3. All things being equal, people will buy from a friend.
4. All things being unequal, people will buy from a friend.

About Gordon Hecht: Gordon Hecht is a Senior Manager for Serta Simmons Bedding's Strategic Retail Group comprising over 400 locally owned and operated bedding stores across the country

selling Serta Simmons branded and America's Mattress branded mattresses. He started his career in Home Furnishings as a delivery helper and driver, later moving to sales and management.

Gordon has been a store manager, multi-unit Manager and National Director of Sales and has been recognized for outstanding achievement with Ashley Furniture HomeStores, Drexel-Heritage, RB Furniture, Reliable Stores, and Sofa Express. See all of Gordon's articles at www.furninfo.com/Authors/List. Questions and comments can be directed to Gordon Hecht at ghecht@serta.com.

"Just like a true pal, the friendly salesperson will call (not text or email) after delivery just to make sure everything worked out well, and fix any problems that may have come up."



2020 LOADING...



by David Benbow

Here's a look back to what was, where our industry is today, and some actions retailers are well advised to take in 2020.

"The Times They Are A-Changin'." If you remember this Bob Dylan song (also referenced by Ed Tashjian in the Point/Counterpoint feature in the March/April 2018 edition of Furniture World) when it was new and popular, you may very well be a great grandparent by now. This song, which Wikipedia describes as Dylan's "deliberate attempt to create an anthem of change for the time," is now 55 years old and counting. And, not surprisingly, a half century later, the times are still changing, probably faster than ever.

So, what does this have to do with selling furniture at retail? To quote another earlier poet, "Let me count the ways."

How it Used to Be

Let's spend a couple of lines on this subject, if only because it can give us perspective on just how far we've come in the last 28 years (the era of my experi-

ence in furniture retail). In 1991, almost all retail furniture sales were done in brick and mortar type establishments. Why? The reason was this: at that time it was about the only way to sell major home furnishings and appliances. You advertised in the newspaper, on the radio and TV. It was to be hoped, people would come into your store and buy your merchandise.

How it is Now

Almost everything you read in the above paragraph is still true today except that on the eve of the year 2020, brick and mortar establishments are clawing, tooth and toenail, for a declining slice of the traditional "store" retail pie. This is not to say that all stores are suffering. Some are flourishing, but in today's market, they look more like the exception than the rule.

So, where has the missing (or declining) slice of the pie gone?

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2020 LOADING...

We are not breaking any blockbuster news here. Ironically, it has

"So, where has the missing (or declining) slice of the pie gone?

We are not breaking any blockbuster news here. Ironically, it has sort of gone back to the future, to the way Sears and Roebuck USED to operate."

sort of gone back to the future, to the way Sears and Roebuck USED to operate. The customer picked up the catalog, thumbed through until she found what she wanted, and placed an order. After a time, the item was delivered to the happy and expectant purchaser. The difference is now, of course, a galactic online catalog, has largely replaced the old catalog. It is interesting to note that Sears, with the increasing urbanization of America, decades ago de-emphasized catalog sales, and opened thousands of retail stores, mostly in suburban malls. Sears was an early adapter of e-commerce, but failed to execute properly. The rest is, as they say, history.

Why Has This Happened?

Over the past decade, some really smart MBAs, retailers and manufacturers have wrung their hands over why this sea change in retail sales has taken place. Is it the seventy million strong millennial generation with their post-modern culture? Is it the rapid onset and omnipresence of social media? Is it something else, entirely? Or, is it a combination of all of these? And, most important of all, what can be done about it?

Social Media

Twenty odd years ago, there was a brief, tepid debate over whether the "internet" was a temporary flash in the pan or a permanent fixture in our culture. We now know the answer to that question.

The next question concerns the so-called millennials. There seems to be prevailing wonderment as to why this generation,



Sears was an early adapter of e-commerce, but failed to execute properly. The rest is, as they say, history.

defined by “experts” as anyone born between 1981 and 1998, has turned out to be so different from their parents and especially their grandparents.

To me, the answer is pretty clear. Let me start out by saying that I think the arbitrary date range of 1981 to 1998 is flawed since there are pretty big cultural differences between virtually all older and younger millennials. What the members of this gen-

eration have in common is that most, if not all, of their entire lives have been molded by their total immersion in the social media phenomenon. This is especially true of those born after 1990.

Of course, social media is now “everything, all the time!” for a lot of people. How often have you been out in public and noticed a group of what appear to be friends or at least acquaintances sitting together, and everybody is

"On the eve of the year 2020, brick and mortar establishments are clawing, tooth and toenail, for a declining slice of the traditional “store” retail pie."

What Does Designer Libby Langdon... say about High Point's Bienenstock Furniture Library?



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glued to their smart phone; with not a word spoken by anyone?

Now, the funny thing to me is that this group of friends may not be a millennial crowd. They might even be people in their 40s or 50s or older.

Social media has not only shaped and sculpted the millennial generation, it has also strongly influenced the culture of older generational groups, for better or worse. And, it's probably not going to change, at least until the next culture-shifting technology is unleashed upon an unsuspecting world.

"Without expressing partiality or social and political biases, it should be clear to any rational person that we have seen at least three important cultural shifts in the last fifty years."

The Result?

Before we go any further, let's spend a few words on the evolution of sourcing home furnishing products and the effects of those changes. Over the last twenty-five years, much of the furniture manufacturing industry has been shipped off-shore. This sourcing change didn't necessarily have a destructive effect on retail stores. Products were just "jobbed out" by existing brands, supposedly to lower costs. Retail stores were largely unaffected by these sourcing changes, except for some product quality issues and the reality of plant closings and loss of domestic manufacturing jobs.

The mattress industry, interestingly, avoided off-shoring until the "bed-in-a-box" phenomenon took off. Today, perhaps fifteen percent or more of the entire bedding market is now purchased directly online, and the products sold are manufactured primarily in Asian facilities. For many retailers, a fifteen percent decline in business can be the difference between profit and loss.

But, it's not just the mattress business that is affected. More and more, especially by the millennial generation, furniture is purchased online and shipped

directly to the customer.

Now, let's return to the millennials.

How Different Are the Millennials?

There seems to be a widespread perception that the millennials are different, and it's been suggested that they are somehow deficient and inferior to previous generations. I'm not sure I agree with this assessment, and suspect that, like virtually every other generation since the dawn of time, there is the usual distribution of superior, average and sub-standard beings present in the population.

Let's address briefly why the millennials seem so odd to more mature observers.

Without expressing partiality or social and political biases, it should be clear to any rational person that we have seen at least three important cultural shifts in the last fifty years. First, many parents are more indulgent to their children than parents used to be. Second, the educational establishment, both at the public school level and at the collegiate level have made significant philosophical changes in curriculum emphasis and expectations

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of achievement. Evidence hints that many standardized tests have been “dumbed down” to maintain a certain parity of test scores. And, third, the tidal wave of social media is in the process of drowning everything that it touches.

I am sure I have opened myself up to criticism with these observations, but I will gladly listen to counter arguments.

Before we pass judgment, however, let’s look at a few millennial statistics. According to the Brookings Institute, Pew Research, Business Insider and others:

- *The millennial generation is*

the most “diverse” in American history.

- *More are college graduates, but the cost of this achievement is carrying a heavy college cost debt load.*
- *Millennials are the most populous generation in history, at 70 million plus.*
- *They are marrying less and having fewer children.*
- *They have fewer close friends and personal acquaintances.*
- *They entertain at home less than their parents or grandparents.*

- *They are much more likely to live in apartments.*

- *Some estimates suggest that as many as thirty percent of all millennials still live at home with their parents.*

- *They have lower credit scores than previous generations. Due to high unemployment, they have less disposable income.*

Not many of these attributes are positive for our industry.

They don’t seem to have much money or credit. Where do they spend their limited money?

On average, the largest single

“The largest single

expense outlay for millennials is a smart phone. Other big expenditures are coffee, tattoos, computer games and alcohol.”



expense outlay for millennials is a smart phone. Other big expenditures are for coffee, tattoos, computer games, drugs and alcohol. They don't buy much furniture and what they do buy is temporary and easily disposable. This stuff can be purchased online and assembled on the living room floor, so they never have to go into a furniture store. We need to remember, however, that this much-maligned generation has also produced doctors, scientists, engineers, teachers, and other productive members of society.

So, what do we make of this? As I recall, if you take away the social media elephant in the room, my (baby boomer) generation wasn't much different, making bookshelves out of cinder blocks and pallet wood. My first mattress set was a mismatched set that cost \$99 each piece. The Millennials may eventually resemble their parents or, the parents will start resembling their offspring. But, what do retailers do in the meantime?

For an excellent survey of millennial culture and retail potential, I highly recommend the "Evolution of Millennial Shopping Behavior" by Bill Napier and Ed Tashjian in the September/October 2019 issue of Furniture World.

The Future

I can predict the future just as

well or as poorly as the next person. The furniture retail business is not a get-rich-quick investment. Many stores are multi-generational and I suspect that they will continue to remain that way.

Let's look at some realities that exist in today's turbulent world. Our country sadly seems to be divided along political fault lines. It has been at least eleven years since our last so-called recession. The stock market has gone for years without a major correction. Some surveys suggest that nearly half of millennials do not have a favorable opinion of our free enterprise economic system. This is a worrisome fact for business owners who are invested for the long haul. If even some of these concerns became reality, what would happen to business, life and the economy? It's hard to say.

And, let's not forget there is another oncoming generation, curiously named Generation Z. These people are starting to enter adulthood as we speak. How will they change the culture? I wonder what dystopia comes after Gen Z, since we will be out of letters to assign to them.

Is There an Answer?

Let's pretend that worst case scenarios will not happen. How do store owners cope with reality as it exists today? Some experts

think that if you own a brick and mortar store, you will not survive unless you focus on ecommerce. Let me say this. Not every retail operation is ready to sell online. And, if you are not ready, don't even try it.

To sell online successfully, the retailer must consider at least a

"There seems to be a widespread perception that the millennials are different, and it's been suggested that they are somehow deficient and inferior to previous generations. I'm not sure I agree with this assessment."



"Amazon has changed the retail world."

If you aren't enthusiastic about executing the points described above, on-line retailing might not be for your store."

few of the following points:

1. You must have a website that SELLS.

2. Developing a website that sells may be even more complicated than opening a store.

3. You must have a practical, timely way to collect payment and fill orders.

4. You must keep more inventory on hand than you normally do.

5. Here are a few realities to consider, in addition, that have been substantiated by industry statistics and surveys.

- a) Up to thirty percent of all online orders are returned.
- b) Forty nine percent of online retailers offer free shipping.
- c) Seventy nine percent of consumers want free RETURN shipping.

d) Ninety two percent of consumers will buy if returning is EASY.

e) Sixty seven percent of consumers check the returns page before buying.

f) Forty seven percent of consumers expect an "easy to print" return label.

g) Sixty two percent will buy online if they can return it in-store.

(h) Eighty four percent consult social media before buying.

The above statistics were derived from US Department of Commerce figures.

Amazon has changed the retail world. If you aren't enthusiastic about executing the points described above, online retailing might not be for your store.

Easy Alternative

An easier alternative that you

can work on today is to spruce up your store and your website to pull in more customers. As we said earlier, a lot of brick and mortar stores are prospering. How about a little analogy? Even with all the games and entertainment on TV and the internet these days, Disney's throngs get larger every year, even as the cost of admission spirals into outer space. Does this teach us a lesson about making our stores more attractive destination locations?

Co-Operating

We used to hear about cross-advertising, meaning different non-competing businesses using each other's message to advertise their own products and complement the other store's message. Stores are installing coffee shops, restaurants, and other entertainment as part of their overall store package. Short of installing a tattoo parlor in the recliner department, I'm sure

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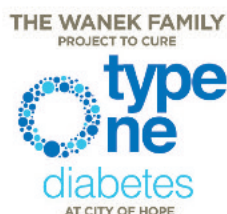
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- Down, kapok, or other natural wraps
- Spun wraps from recycled bottles
- No FR chemicals added



WOOD

Healthy forests are critical. Look for:

- Wood certified by a reputable organization like FSC
- Solid North American hardwoods
- Reclaimed and recycled materials
- Plantation-grown wood, such as Mango
- Fast-growing alternatives like Bamboo



LEATHER

Leather production over-uses land, fuel, and toxic chemicals. Look for:

- Vegetable-Tanned and non-toxic dyes
- US or EU leather production and manufacture
- Genuine leather rather than PVC substitute
- Reclaimed and repurposed



FINISHES

Finishes can off-gas toxins called VOC's. Look for:

- Water-based lacquers, not acetone
- Natural finishes like waxes and natural oils
- Powder coating for metals
- Certified no or low VOC



TEXTILES

Textile production is chemical-intensive. Look for:

- Certified organics, especially for cotton
- Other natural fibers such as wool, linen, hemp that require less water and fewer chemical inputs
- Recycled content, especially in synthetics
- No FR chemicals, fluorinated stain treatments, anti-microbials, or PVC

LCA

Life Cycle Assessment As you specify products, think

about their environmental impact. From extraction of raw materials and processing, all the way through manufacturing, transportation, use, reuse and recycling! Will these products return to the earth as nutrients or toxins?

Photos courtesy of Lee Industries, Fermob, Avasa, Enspire Leather, Home Trends & Design



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there are many other ideas that can enliven your store's image and pull in more customers.

Consider one more point. Even if you don't engage in e-commerce right now, the format and content of your website is critical, and growing more important with each passing day. Your website must SELL, even if you don't sell merchandise online.

Final Thoughts

Has retail changed? Somewhat. Has marketing changed? To a certain extent, yes. Have the basic principles of sales and salesmanship changed? The basic principles of sales and salesmanship have NOT changed. The sales principles outlined in my book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual" are still the same now as they were in 2013, and for that matter, the same as they were in 1983. Fundamental sales ideas and principles will never go out

of style. Anyone who seriously studies, learns and applies them will never fail at retail, no matter how the times change.

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

David is the author of the recently published book, "How to Win the Battle for Mattress Sales, the Bed Seller's Manual", a complete text book for mattress and bedding retail sales associates, beginner and experienced professional alike. The book can be purchased on-line at <http://www.bedsellersmanual.com> or www.mattressretailtraining.com. He

offers hands-on training classes for retailers on a variety of subjects and online classes that can be downloaded from the websites mentioned above. He can be contacted via e-mail at dave@bedsellersmanual.com or by phone at 361-648-3775.

"Short of installing a tattoo parlor in the recliner department, I'm sure there are many other ideas that can enliven your store's image and pull in more customers."



PEOPLE COME INTO YOUR STORE READY TO PURCHASE!

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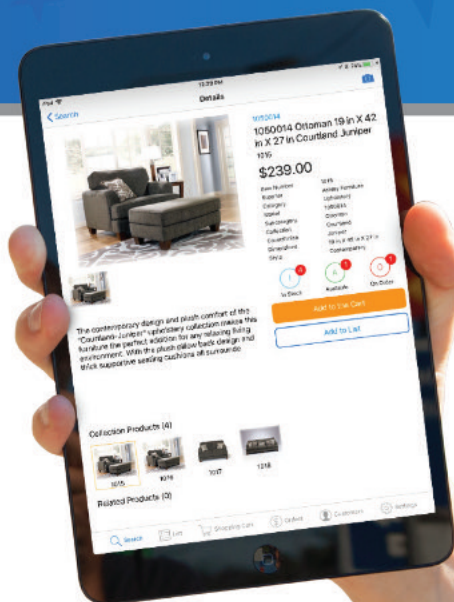


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