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# HGO merchandiser

FALL 2022

Volume 11, Issue 3

GREAT STORE  
DESIGN SELLS  
PRODUCT


DONALD COOPER  
ON ATTRACTING  
TOP PERFORMERS

DURHAM  
REVAMPS  
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SCOTT REID  
*has something to say*





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## ON OUR COVER:

Scott Reid, the second-generation owner of Reid's Furniture is seen here in the showroom of his 24,000 square foot store in Thunder Bay, Ontario. He is becoming one of the most influential independent furniture, mattress and appliance retailers in the country, not because of the size and sales volume of his store, but due to his thoughtful approach to his business.



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The second-generation owner of Reid's Furniture in Thunder Bay believes in independent retail and will tell anyone who asks that the furniture business has been wonderful to him and his family. He also supports the buying group he belongs to and the vendors who provide the goods on his floor but fervently believes both can and should do better. To find out what and why, check out our profile, written by HGO publisher and editor Michael J. Knell.

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Strip away the frivolities and misconceptions, interior design has one goal in a retail environment. To help the store owner sell more product at a better margin. That's how Carole Vallières defines her primary responsibility as commercial design director

for Mega Group. "My role is to make the product stand out," she said in an interview, adding design also creates what she calls "the myth of the store." She spoke with HGO publisher and editor Michael J. Knell

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## 23 ON RETAIL WHY CAN'T WE ATTRACT TOP PERFORMERS?

Attracting top performers is the number one challenge facing every business in the world today. There also seems to be a fundamental shift in the attitude towards 'work' on the part of a large segment of the population in the western world. Donald Cooper, our resident retail guru doubts this is a temporary problem and offers some insight into how to buck this trend.

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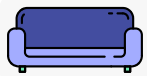
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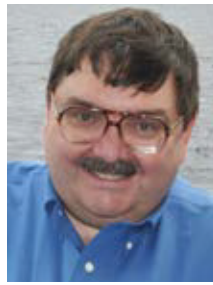
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# Worth a listen



MICHAEL J. KNELL

Ideas are front and centre in this issue of the Merchandiser. Starting with our profile of Scott Reid and Carole Vallières's belief in the well-designed store as sales tool, we're giving you something to think about. Then there's the latest technology innovation from Durham and Donald Cooper's message about attracting top talent.

**I**N THIS ISSUE WE PROFILE AND TALK WITH SCOTT REID, WHO IS beginning to emerge has one of the most influential independent furniture, mattress and appliance retailers in the country. He's a relatively young guy, but packs four decades of experience owning and managing his family's retail operation.

We've been acquaintances for many years, it's only in the past while I have come to realize he's someone other retailers should be listening to – he has something worthwhile to say, it's well-reasoned and clearly articulated.

He is critical of some of the vendors he does business with and organizations he belongs to. Based on his knowledge and experience, he meets the true meaning of the concept. Far too often, many confuse criticism with the rabid, highly partisan insults hurled by person at another over social media. True criticism is based on facts – in the vernacular, it comes from a good place.

Scott Reid has something to say. I think he's worth listening to and, at the very least, he gives everyone in our business something to think about.

For a change of pace, we also visit with Carole Vallières, the long-time director of commercial design for Mega Group. When people in this industry talk about design, they are usually referring to product design – be it a bedroom suite, an upholstery group or a laundry pair. We don't often talk about the design of the cube where it will be displayed and then sold to the consumer.

Carole vehemently believes a well-designed store interior is a critical element to a retailer's success. It's also a far more complex process than selecting pretty colours for the four walls the customer walks through. She believes, properly executed, the design creates what she describes as "the myth of the store."

Finally, our resident sage Donald Cooper gives his perspective on how to find, hire and keep talent. This has become a critical issue in our industry as restrictions and lockdowns end and society establishes a post-pandemic normal. It doesn't matter whether you're a manufacturer, a distributor or a retailer, finding top-notch talent to join the team is mission one for most companies. His thoughts are also worth spending some time reviewing.

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When Tom Reid first built the now 24,000 square foot Reid's Furniture (the exterior is seen here), he located it between the two smaller towns that a few short years later became Thunder Bay, the biggest little city in Northern Ontario.

# SCOTT REID *has something to say*

The owner of Reid's Furniture in Thunder Bay believes in independent retail and will tell anyone who asks that the furniture business has been wonderful to him and his family. He's also supports buying groups but fervently believes they can and should do better. **BY MICHAEL J. KNELL**

Scott Reid is the owner and general manager of Reid's Furniture in Thunder Bay, Ontario. He's been working in the family since he was a teenager and literally born a furniture, mattress and appliance retailer. In recent years he has developed strong views about being a furniture retailer, a member of a buying group, relationships with vendors and owning a small business in Canada.

**S**COTT REID WAS BORN A FURNITURE retailer. Even though he admits that as a child, he thought he'd be a police officer, an accountant or a professional hockey player (he is a Canadian, after all), for the past four decades he's been working in and now running the business started by his father – Reid's Furniture in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

His dad, Tom, first opened the doors in 1968. His first location – on Simpson Street in the downtown area of biggest little city in Northern Ontario, one that's closer to Winnipeg than it is to Toronto –



was small and offered an entry level product assortment. Then called Tom Reid's Furniture, he expanded the store three times, once by punching a hole in the adjoining wall to make one space.

In 1978, a time when Thunder Bay was made up of two municipalities – Port Arthur and For William – Tom made a big move, one that set the business on the path leading to where it is today.

"Tom's big move was to build a new store in a swamp between the two cities," Scott Reid explains. "This turned out to be a great move as the cities merged into Thunder Bay in 1970, so it was only a matter of time until this area was developed. Reid's Furniture is now in a prime location in the intercity area of Thunder Bay."

Initially, the building covered 6,000 square feet but additions to the upstairs and renovations to the basement have given Reid's Furniture total selling space of 24,000 square feet.

During those early years in the then-new building, a teenaged Scott and his brother, Shawn were already working in the business, mostly in the warehouse and on the delivery trucks. "My mother Mary was the book keeper, so it was truly a family business," Scott says.

Reid's Furniture has been a member of Mega Group since before the amalgamation of V.I.P. Stores and Magasins Ameublements B.V. back ▶



in 1992. In fact, Tom Reid served on the group's board of directors for a number of years and was one of the original members of the Countrywide banner. Once they became Reid's Countrywide, Tom retired and passed the baton to Scott and Shawn.

A few years later, Shawn and his wife, Sharon, moved to Barrie, Ontario and opened what would become a very successful La-Z-Boy Furniture Gallery store leaving Scott in charge of Reid's. Shawn and Sharon sold that business 17 years and are now enjoying an early retirement.

## BUILDING THE REID'S FURNITURE BRAND

Scott took the store out of the Countrywide banner when Mega decided to consolidate it with Multi-Meubles to create what is now BrandSource Canada in 2012 (although Reid's remains what is called a 'BrandSource Authorized' retailer). Doing so prompted him to re-examine the retailer's market position.

Drawing on Shawn's experience with his La-Z-Boy store, Scott took a closer look at the motion furniture specialist's support programs for retailers. "While Thunder Bay isn't big enough, in our opinion, to support a free-standing La-Z-Boy gallery, we felt they had a very strong program that we could implement into our full-line furniture store – the Comfort Studio Program," Scott said, adding after signing on they went a little further.

"We adopted their look and feel into our marketing and focused our merchandising to find complementary brands that appealed to a similar customer," he continued, noting Reid's soon signed on with three Canadian manufacturers including casual dining powerhouse Canadel, solid wood bedroom specialist Durham and case goods producer Handstone. "These three great vendors complement our La-Z-Boy display and allow us a great selection in both bedroom and dining."

Under Scott's leadership, Reid's Furniture has moved away from the entry level merchandise profile of its early days, even implementing the La-Z-Boy in-home design program and now has three certified designer on staff. The store also floors product in the 'better' and 'best' price points from a fairly broad range of furniture, mattress and major appliance manufacturers such as Palliser, Décor-Rest, Stressless, Hammery, Monogram, Magniflex and GE Profile, among others.

But this doesn't mean Reid's has abandoned those price points. In 2009, the company purchased what was once a dairy operation in the heart of Thunder Bay just two kilometres away from the store. The original thought was to use the space as a warehouse.

But, Scott remembers, "the building was significantly bigger than what we needed, so we decided



to open 'Reid's Liquidation Centre' at one end of the building.

"The idea was we would display our 'scratch and dents', 'dogs' and our returns in the space," he continues, "and our office team would 'yard sale' the goods should a customer walk in the door. As the word spread, the store got busier, and they weren't finding the time to do their office work, so we hired a sales person. That led to an advertising budget and now that we have expenses, we needed more square feet for product if we had a chance to make a buck. As Reid's Liquidation Centre continued to grow, the store got physically bigger and the warehouse got smaller. Eventually we had to buy a much bigger distribution centre to support the two stores." ►

Top: Reid's is one of only 12 independent retailers selling Stressless, a brand of motion upholstery produced by the Norwegian furniture manufacturer Ekornes, in Ontario.  
Bottom: Reid's Furniture presents a product assortment in the 'better' and 'best' price points as seen in this contemporary-styled sofa, displayed with on-the-mark accessories.



Seen here are Reid's Furniture team members (from left to right) Patricia Poohachoff, manager of in home design; and six members of the sales team including Kathy Phelan, Nelson Forbes, Janet MacArthur, Dwight Creed, Bette Marozzo, and Bill Payetta.

## ADDING ASHLEY TO THE BUSINESS

To round out the assortment in the liquidation centre, Reid's began flooring what Scott describes as the "low end" of the Ashley Furniture line, "essentially executing what at the time was their Furnish 1, 2, 3 program with our logo." As the liquidation centre's business grew, he decided to take it in a new direction.

"We talked to Ashley about their HomeStore concept for years, but didn't want to commit to the sizable investment of a new build," Scott says. "In 2017, they had come out with Homestore Select, which was meant for smaller markets and basically a HomeStore without the big investment in a building. As this was pretty much what we are already doing with our liquidation store, we decided to go down the path."

He admits as the process went along, he decided he couldn't build a "half-assed" store and expect the results he wanted. "This evolved into dropping the 'Select' and investing in a multi-million dollar renovation and expansion of the old dairy located in the heart of Thunder Bay," he said, noting Reid's opened its Ashley HomeStore in the fall of 2017.

True to his character, Scott has given much thought to his relationship with Ashley, which according to the U.S. business publication *Furniture Today* is the largest furniture manufacturer and retailer in the world. While he's generally satisfied with their partnership, he also sees where there's room for improvement.

"I thought my life would be so much easier if I partnered with a goliath like Ashley. I figured that they would provide me with great products at great pricing, easy access to inventory, and a great merchandising plan, which they did!" he enthuses. "I also thought they would provide me with a great marketing plan and a world-class web site. This, they have not yet accomplished, and I would have thought that this would be the easy part. There are days when I feel I bought a McDonald's franchise, but it didn't come with the recipe to make a

*Big Mac*. We are doing well with the store, however, it's more work than it needs to be."

## A PROUD MEMBER OF MEGA GROUP

Scott Reid is a very proud member of Mega Group, the retailer-owned co-operative furniture, mattress and appliance buying group based in Saskatoon. As mentioned previously, Reid's Furniture has been a member since before amalgamation.

"We have been a Mega member for as long as I can remember," he says, adding at one time they were very active in the organization. His father, Tom, was a member of its board of directors for several years while Scott was active on committees and participated in Mega-led performance groups.

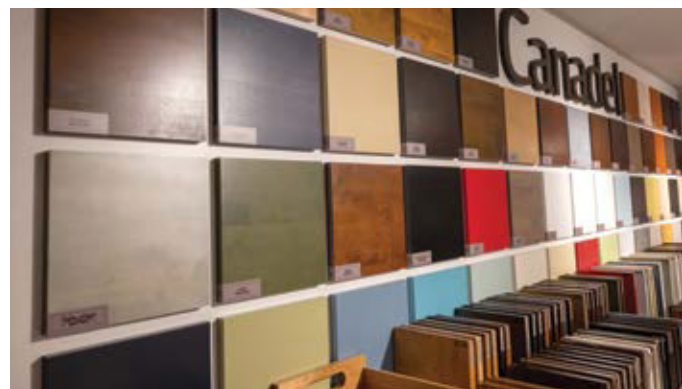
"In the past 10 years, I have been the invisible member," Scott says, admitting with a young family at home and growing frustration with many of the decisions the group was making he became less involved. "Other than central billing, I was not working with their programs at all."

But this going to change in the coming years because he doesn't want to give up the best parts of membership and expresses a desire to make Mega more effective and relevant to the life of the independent furniture, mattress and appliance retailer.

"I really don't like the term buying group," he exclaims. "I believe successful buying is done much better at the local level than it is through a group. When I buy, I develop a great relationship with the rep and factory. I focus my volume so I become important to the supplier, creating a partnership that sees them help to take care of our mutual customers when a problem occurs."

"It also sees them supporting my marketing efforts as my sale becomes their sale," he adds. "I find this so much better than jumping from supplier to supplier chasing the deal of the day."

"Focusing with a vendor also allows you to fill trucks. After all, LTL (less than truck load) shipping is very expensive and something we try to avoid," he continues, adding, "Beating a supplier for a better price only to give it to the freight company ►



When Scott Reid took the family out of the old Countrywide banner and refocused its marketing and merchandising by adapting the La-Z-Boy gallery model for his own use, one of the first vendors he reached out to was Canadel. The Canadian casual dining powerhouse had the up-market approach he was looking for.



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Above: When Scott took Reid's out of the Countrywide banner, he looked to retailers such as La-Z-Boy Furniture Galleries for inspiration, resulting in upholstery displays such as the one seen here.



Below: Seen here are more members of the team at Reid's Furniture (from left to right) including decorator Alisia Robertson with sales consultants Holly Godick, Richard Everett, Rosanne Biloski, and Mat Allan, manager of Reid's Ashley HomeStore.

is a lose/lose. Paying a fair price and optimizing freight is a better way to go, in my mind."

This brings Scott to his primary criticism about Mega. "My frustration with the buying group stems from their buyers needing to justify their existence," he says. "They tell me to buy from vendor 'A' and as soon as I get that nicely set up, they move to vendor 'B' for a better deal. The fact that vendor 'B' and I have no relationship, costs more in freight and has distribution with every other store in town, isn't thought of."

He believes buying groups should really be efficiency groups. "Their purpose should be to make life easier and more affordable for small to medium size retailers," he says, noting big retailers have entire departments to deal with things such as accounting, payroll, human resources, delivery, and websites while most smaller businesses often have trouble justifying the expense or finding the right people to do the job.

"This is exactly why I have started to become more active with Mega," he shares. "The value of their central billing is incredible and well known. The work they are now doing with their e-accounting, their Alta website, the digital marketing, e-mail marketing as well as sales training are all things I'm using or will use in the future. I believe they are on the right track."

He also thinks another potential name for the group is networking group. "The greatest value I receive from Mega are the friendships made during the cocktail hour at the meetings," he says. "There are members, retired members and former staff members that I converse with regularly. I have always enjoyed travelling across Canada knowing I have friends in most little towns I pass through. I love to visit those stores just to say 'hello'."

## AT THE CROSSROADS

"The furniture business has been wonderful to me," Scott Reid says empathically. "I have made great friends all over North America. I have travelled the world and have fond memories of many experiences. I have no regrets!"

As his greatest accomplishment, he cites building a team of talented people who are not only very good at what they do, but have grown Reid's Furniture exponentially from where it started.

"As the second generation in this family business, I find myself at a crossroad where I don't know if I should start thinking about

my own retirement or if I should focus on the future growth of the company," he confesses, noting his two teenage sons – who he describes as "all-round great kids" – are both too young to commit to carrying on the business.

"So, while they are growing up and going to school, I have a responsibility to continue to grow Reid's and provide them with the same opportunity my father provided to me," he continues. "With that said, I have been focusing on removing the hats I wear so that I am not needed to work 'in the business' – allowing me to 'work on the business' around my personal schedule."

## THE CHALLENGES AHEAD

As 2022 comes to a close, Scott Reid faces two challenges he believes are common to almost all independent furniture, mattress and appliance retailers. Both are related to the COVID-19 pandemic. First, for the first time in quite a while Reid's Furniture is over-inventoried. Secondly, the store can't find enough good people to join its team.

"COVID was very scary for us all when it first reared its ugly head because of the fear of the unknown. Once it took affect and people were told to stay home, COVID turned into something positive for the furniture business. It definitely had its share of headaches but business boomed," he says. ▶



Like many other retailers, business was so brisk the supply chain become challenged, which in turn meant the product acquisition process had to change to make sure the cart was full.

"I have always loved 'just-in-time' inventory so the pandemic forced me to ask 'which is the better of the two evils?' – to have no inventory, where expenses will be low, cash will be liquid, sales will drop, and salespeople will starve and potentially leave," he says. "The second evil is to have too much inventory, where you lose all efficiencies, you have to rent additional warehouses, and you have all of your cash tied up in product. Like most, I took the second evil. Now we have another difficult choice to make. Do we bring our inventory back down to the pre-COVID 'normal' or do we beef up our infrastructure to continue the momentum and maintain the sales that will allow us to carry the extra inventory, essentially creating a 'new normal'?"

"Once again, we are choosing the latter. This makes me ask 'are our sales up because of COVID or are they up because we now stock the inventory to provide customers with instant gratification?'"

The dilemma has caused Scott to look for talented people to grow his team, but is struggling to find them. "It appears the entire world is looking for people. I have never had too much trouble finding good people, however, in the past year I have found I'm having similar struggles to what my colleagues have been experiencing for years. When others industries can't find people, they come head-hunting yours. With that said, our people are gold and we need to focus on keeping them!"

He believes the industry needs to be better at telling people that being a sales professional is a great career. "It is a trade that when done right can be very lucrative," he says, "We wear nice clothes, work in a warm environment, and work with happy people every day when we do things right! Like every trade, people become more skilled with practice. It is our job to recruit, coach and cheerlead."



## THINKING ABOUT THE FUTURE

"What is the secret to success in the furniture business in the 21st century?" Scott Reid asks. "As much as things have changed and how quickly things now change, I think the business is very much the same and believe 'relationships' remain a big part of the secret.

"If you have great relationships with your staff, they are happy and they stay! They in turn have great relationships with your customers, so they are happy and return. The volume this creates is important to the suppliers, so they in turn are happy and the relationship allows us to profitably sell quality products while looking after our customers, which ultimately circles back to why the employees stay and prosper and the customers continue to return and refer us to their friends," he answers.

He concedes it's easy for the consumer to buy with the click of a mouse. "Thankfully shipping bulky furniture one piece at a time is not a smart way to do things. It's expensive and riddled with headaches.

"While the internet will take its piece of the pie," he continues, "If we continue to focus on quality products the consumer can touch and try, offer advice from a knowledgeable staff and deliver damage free, there's more than enough market left for us to thrive." **HGO**

Above: A look inside Reid's Furniture where the product on display is always well accessorized. Owner Scott Reid firmly believes while e-commerce will always be a factor, consumers still want to touch and try the furniture they purchase for their homes.

Below: Part of Scott Reid's approach to serving the market in and around Thunder Bay was to cover all his retail basis. While Reid's Furniture drew its inspiration from the standalone La-Z-Boy Furniture Gallery stores, he needed to address the promotional end of the market. This prompted the opening of an Ashley HomeStore in the fall of 2017 in what used to be Reid's Liquidation Centre.

MICHAEL J. KNELL is the publisher and editor of Home Goods Online and all three of its platforms.

The sales area in Wiens Furniture & Appliances features a counter height work surface that serves as a place to congregate and invites the consumer to easily interact with the sales associates. The suspended drop ceiling and lighting amplify the warm atmosphere although surrounded with dark colours. The light color background for the sign accentuates the store branding.

# Great design sells product

Mega Group's veteran design director believes when she and her team create a new interior store design, the focus needs to be on the product displayed with the goal of helping grow the retailer's sales and profits. It also helps define what she calls "the myth of the store." **BY MICHAEL J. KNELL**



CAROLE  
VALLIÈRES

**S**TRIP AWAY THE FRIVOLITIES AND misconceptions, interior design has one goal in a retail environment. To help the store owner sell more product at a better margin. That's how Carole Vallières defines her primary responsibility as commercial design director for Mega Group, a position she's held since 2001.

"My role is to make the product stand out," she said in an interview held during the group's member conference this past October, the first in-person event it has held since the declaration of the COVID-19 pandemic. "It's about making sure that the product is well presented."

Vallières is also quick to point out there are real and distinct differences between interior design, interior decorating and merchandising.

Interior design is about the cube – the space the store inhabits. "I take care of that space and make sure the traffic flow will be easy throughout the entire space," she says, "making sure all of what you want to show in your store is accessible visually. I create the maze for the consumer to go through. The interior decorating will then dress that space."

The interior design will make sure the retailer uses his available space to its fullest potential while the decorator selects the colour palette those entering the space – be they employees or customers – will see. ►





Seen here is the reception desk at Wiens Furniture & Appliances, a BrandSource authorized retailer in Niverville, Manitoba. Located close to the entrance, it's an attractive point of interest for the consumer after walking into the store. The wood arch and beams frame the sign while the minimalistic counter emphasizes the branding shown at the back.

"The merchandising will then decide the selling strategy," Vallières continues, adding the designer creates a grid "and the merchandisers indicate what SKUs (stock keeping units) are going to be placed within the grid."

Working out of Mega Group's office in Montreal suburb of Boucherville, Vallières and her team handle an average of 20 projects a year, which vary from updating a department to a complete store renovation. From what can be determined, the member-owned Mega is the only buying group – and, indeed, one of few retail organizations – in North America with an in-house interior design department.

She also firmly believes there's a direct connection between a well-designed store and sales – in fact, the retailer's top line is the first subject to be discussed and analysed when she and her team take on a new project.

"When we start a project, my first question is how much do you sell? I need to know how much you sell per category because that will indicate where your weaknesses and strengths are. Sales are extremely important," Vallières observes, adding if the retailer's average ticket at the beginning of a project is \$600 – for example – after the project is finished it often goes as high as \$800.

She believes a well-designed store builds customer loyalty and points out there's a reason why shopping centre leases usually contain a clause demanding the retailer renovates the space every five years. "That's because they know if the retailer doesn't renovate, traffic flow will go down and consumers will be less interested in the store," she says. "The retailer always needs to on top of these

trends in order to remain valid to the market."

In her experience, sales climb anywhere from 15% to 25% in the first year after the redesign is finished. "Normally, margins will also go up because when selling a sofa at \$900 (before the redesign project), you're now selling one at \$1,200 and the sofa at \$1,200 normally has a better margin," she notes.

Vallières observes most retailers she encounters don't have a good understanding of what interior design really is – especially in a retail environment. "I'd like to say they understand, but they don't," she says, they often think all she does is choose pretty colours. While she does, indeed, choose pretty colours there's more to the process, which is geared at one goal: improving sales.

A well-designed store has immediate and distinct attributes. "When you come into the store, you're being wowed," she says. This wow factor often comes from two factors: lighting and circulation.

"Lighting is one of the most important things in retail," Vallières maintains, adding she discourages the use of fluorescent lighting because it doesn't shine on the product and usually recommends good track lighting.

Circulation, that is how the customer moves through the store, should also be product focused – a series of vignettes, which she describes as "an ensemble of what needs to be presented...and every time the customer turns around, she sees another one. The customer is attracted from one point to another without even knowing that she's doing so."

The interior design, she says creates "the true myth of the store." ►

The new Barber & Haskill store in Midland, Ontario, combines the appliance and mattress departments. The border between them is a large hallway used to display promotion pieces as well as the customer lounge and children's play area. The hallway leads to the main desk crown (seen in the background of the photo seen here). The retailer's name and brand colour are perfectly consistent from the web site to the storefront as well as instore.



While the laundry and freezer sections are the only spaces dedicated to a single category, each vendor's showcases his entire line-up in a branded environment. Each vendor pod is well identified and benefits from a suspended ceiling that brings a human scale in a rather high store.



## A member's endorsement

One of the Mega members for whom Carole Vallières has undertaken more than one project is Dylan Wiens, the owner of Wiens Furniture, a single unit 'BrandSource Canada Authorized' store located in Niverville, Manitoba.

"Carol's been just amazing for us," he enthuses. "In 2017, she did a 5,000 square foot appliance renovation for us and helped me design something different."

The store was in the throes of introducing luxury and premium appliances to its assortment. "My vision was to have workable kitchens in the store. I really wanted the steam over to be working; the induction cooktops to be working and to show integrated appliances in such a way as to 'wow' the customer. She helped me realize that vision."

Wiens freely admits he hadn't previously taken on this kind of project. "I had never designed 5,000 square feet of showroom before and in talking with her, going through the floor plan and product layouts, she just made it happen. I was blown away by her ability to realize my dream (for the store)."

After completing the appliance department project, Wiens worked again with Vallières to create a new mattress gallery before recreating the entire store.

"We're close to a major centre (Niverville is just south of Winnipeg) and when people walk in, they're very impressed and say 'there's nothing like this in the city. We're like 'yeah, we know...that's how we get you here. And so, it has (the redesign) been the ultimate marketing tool.' ►



The Centre du Sommeil Lalonde is a small mattress specialty store in Valleyfield Quebec that quickly became a strong player in its local market. The expert look and accessories display in the window generates good traffic flow as the store is located between two major restaurants.



“When we start a project, my first question is how much do you sell? I need to know how much you sell per category because that will indicate where your weaknesses and strengths are. Sales are extremely important.”



The entrance to Ameublement BrandSource Serge Prévost highlights the two-level store by attracting the consumer's interest at an imposing sign wall describing the store's engagement with the community. Located in Saint-Agathe-des-Monts, Quebec, the store is close to the famous Mont-Tremblant region and attracts a large seasonal clientele.



The retailer took over an old bowling center and the Mega Group design team transformed it into an attractive centre for home décor by doing a complete facelift to the storefront. The contrasting materials, and the lighting marks the entrance to the store while the lifestyle images on the building communicate the retailer's offerings. The materials choices were chosen with ease of maintenance in mind; the wood printed steel siding is made to last while retaining the warmth of wood. The stone is a noble product, but the use of white steel brings a more modern touch to the building. ►





Left: This is the first view the customer has when entering Ameublement BrandSource Sévigny. This vignette, framed by a drop ceiling, shows a good mixture of products on offer including the fabulous flooring product featured on the wall. The brand slogan (in English, 'love it, live it') is shown as an action item to encourage the customer to embrace the product on display. On the pillar at right is a welcome sign, displaying the sales associates' pictures and business cards.

Top right: Ameublement BrandSource Sévigny partnered with Kitchenaid to install this attractive hooked-up kitchen. The colours and large lifestyle picture at the top of the image enable the customer to find the appliance department from anywhere in the store. Used often for cooking demonstrations, the large island is a perfect cooktop display.

Bottom right: The small kitchen vignettes on the back wall of Ameublement BrandSource Sévigny not only creates a nicer look, but they support packaged sales by displaying the range, refrigerator and microwave together in a very simple setting. The colour blocking above animates the rather high wall and gives visibility to the vendor logos.



He also notes, the pandemic induced up-tick aside, the redesign has been a significant factor in the store's growth in sales over the past couple of years.

## Describing the interior design process

Carole Vallières cautions there is a process to creating a new interior design – one she follows without fail. "It's extremely important for me when meeting the owner to go through the store and understand how he sees his store.

"I want him to talk about his weaknesses and when I sit with him, I ask 'what's the different between you and the store down the street – your competition? What makes you different? What do you think you're good at?'"

The answer to that last question is often: service. However, Vallières notes their definition of service is rarely the same. What she's looking for in that initial conversation is a sense of the owner's personality – something that needs to be reflected in the store's design.

After all, she points out, the store design isn't always nice or beautiful. "A dollar store has a design, and that design is meant to say, 'I have cheap products of every kind'. When the customer comes in, the colours are geared to that, the traffic flow is geared for that – it's the same idea," Vallières says. "A designer did that store as well as I could have done another store in furniture."

She also notes for a store with 15,000 square feet of selling space, a complete renovation project typically takes five months with costs ranging anywhere from \$22 to \$30 per square foot. "The design process usually takes about two months," she says.

Vallières recommends owners look at redesigning their store's interior every ten years or so. "Having said that, I always encourage retailers to update colours, materials, wall-paper and greeneries – anything that captures interest – more often. After all, new is exciting," she enthuses. "The whole idea is to gain more traffic." **HGO**

MICHAEL J. KNELL is the publisher and editor of Home Goods Online and all three of its platforms.



# DURHAM REVAMPS WEBSITE

This country's oldest continuously operating furniture manufacturer has updated its website with a new tool that will allow both the retailer and his customer to customize its quality assortment of solid wood bedroom and occasional furniture. Amongst the advantages, the tech will make it e-commerce ready and proficient.

**BY ASHLEY NEWPORT**

**W**HEN THE E-COMMERCE BOOM started, many people in the furniture industry insisted the brick-and-mortar shopping experience would continue to reign supreme since the idea of someone purchasing a costly solid wood bedroom group or Italian leather covered upholstery suite without first seeing and touching it seemed absurd.

Now, with the shift to online shopping well-ingrained in western culture finding its way in a post-pandemic world, some companies are working to enhance the online buying experience by allowing retailers and consumers to customize their very own pieces and see exactly what the finished product will look like without ever stepping into a store.

As it's part to lead the industry into this new frontier, Durham Furniture recently announced it was partnering with Intiario, a 3D

technology and software company based in High Point, North Carolina to launch a revamped website that offers browsers the ability to completely customize every piece and collection in its offerings.

The Canadian solid wood bedroom and occasional furniture specialist first showcased its new state-of-the-art 3D visualization tool at the recent fall edition of the High Point Market. The tool provides high-quality 3D models of more than 95% of Durham's products, boasting 4K zoom and 360-degree rotation functions.

The tool, which will also be available on Durham's website sometime over the next few weeks, allows users the ability to pick a piece and then see how it looks in any of its wide range of finish and hardware options.

"We've used this as a revamp for our whole website. It's not a significant visual change, but it's a change to the way you access the prod- ▶

Luke Simpson, president and chief executive officer, is seen here at Durham Furniture's factory.



***“This went hand in hand with our whole strategy for the company. We downsized our showroom to about 3,000 square feet, and this made that happen. We invested in standalone touchscreen kiosks so that amongst the furniture we were showing, you could see everything else we had in various finishes.”***

uct, and our website partner has developed a proprietary backend login for our retailers to use,” Luke Simpson, president and chief executive officer of this country’s oldest continuously operating furniture manufacturer, told *Home Goods Online*.

“The third component – where Initaro ([en.intiario.com](http://en.intiario.com)) comes in – is they’ve built a plug-in that’s a product configurator. You can browse any product with any finish,” he said, adding buyers were able to try out the new feature, which also allowed Durham to pare down the size of their market showroom, which it moved from the International Home Furnishings Center (IHFC) to 220 Elm.

“We were able to show our reps what the experience is going to look like and what they’re going to be able to do with it,” Simpson continued, adding the technology allowed them to shrink their showroom from about 12,000 square feet to 3,000.

“This went hand in hand with our whole strategy for the company. We downsized our showroom to about 3,000 square feet, and this

made that happen. We invested in standalone touchscreen kiosks so that amongst the furniture we were showing, you could see everything else we had in various finishes. It’s deming to the retailers how this investment in tech will be an effective selling tool,” Durham marketing and sales support manager Amanda McQueen said.

“The consumer is doing more research at home, and they want to plan that room or design they want to see, and this solidifies what they could be shopping for,” she noted.

Durham decided to partner with Intiario on the tool after vetting several other companies and came at a time when the company was hoping to both downsize its display at High Point and invest in technology to keep on top of trends while finding new ways to generate sales.

“[The partnership] is a lot of things culminating. We needed to reduce our investment in High Point itself from a cost standpoint and we really think, even at brick-and-mortar level, that’s where the selling experience is going to go and that’s where we hope we’re going to gain the sales,” Simpson said, adding should Durham ever decide to sell directly to consumers in the future (although he stresses it has no immediate plans to do so), the Intiario tool puts it in a good position to appeal to those looking to customize case goods to suit their vision for their home.

“The add-on part, and we’re nowhere near there, is that this will position us for e-commerce with our retailers and will position us for direct e-commerce if we decide to go that route,” he said.

But even though Durham sells to retailers, it welcomes consumers – the retailer’s customer – to play with the new tool and learn more about the products directly from the website.

“If people know they’re going to see a retailer, they’ll see their website and that’ll lead them to the manufacturer’s website. We wanted this tool so the consumer could pre-shop, as it were,” Simpson said. “People can put together a shopping basket of what they want, they can take it to a retailer and have them price it as they built it.”

Simpson also hopes retailers will get on board and allow customers to use the tech- ▶

This is one of the new kiosks Durham Furniture installed in its new, smaller High Point showroom just before the fall 2022 industry trade event. It demonstrates the new customization software developed for the solid wood specialist by Initaro, a North Carolina-based technology firm.







Introduced at the recent High Point Market, the Gentry collection from Durham Furniture boasts a transitional style in cherry and features single bore matt black hardware and soft closer undermount drawer guides. The group includes both a high and low headboard platform panel bed with a range of occasional pieces including a writing desk and nightstands.

Amanda McQueen is Durham Furniture's veteran marketing and sales support manager.

nology to browse Durham's inventory and see how each piece will look with different finishes and other features.

"We hope retailers will have this on their showroom floor. Because our product is such a custom line, we have display racks of our finishes, but that's just a small sample of a finish. Now the retailer can show them more," he remarked, adding "We hope our retailers will make an investment in this and show our products on the screen. A lot are moving to sales associates using iPads. If you have an internet connection, you can show this."

As for how retailers responded to the launch, Simpson said those who got to see the technology first-hand at High Point gave positive feedback. "I think we got exactly the response we wanted at High Point," he said.

"They thought it would be a great selling tool, both the consumer-facing part and the backend portion. Particularly with some of the designers, they just thought it was great that they're going to have this ability to show the actual piece of furniture as they want it with the finish, hardware and pricing." **HGO**

*A contributing editor to HGO Merchandiser, ASHLEY NEWPORT is a Toronto-based freelance journalist who writes primarily for trade and business publications. Her specialties include food, hospitality and emerging social/business trends.*



# WHY CAN'T WE ATTRACT TOP PERFORMERS?

Read any business newspaper and you'll soon discover there's an emerging labour crisis in this country. Companies can't find good people to join their team. Our resident retail guru offers some insight into how to buck this trend.



BY DONALD COOPER



**A**TTRACTING TOP PERFORMERS is the number one challenge facing every business in the world today. I doubt this is a temporary problem. There seems to be a fundamental shift in the attitude towards 'work' on the part of a large segment of the population in the western world.

One of my big fears is employers are now hiring people who have no possibility of performing as required or honouring the business culture. It is going to cost a fortune and create great disruption to get rid of them, including wrongful dismissal lawsuits, when these folks become intolerable.

In spite of how challenging it is to attract, engage and retain top performers, we must keep trying. It's still true the best people have to work for someone, it's just that we have to deserve them. The reality is what we must do to deserve them has changed drastically in the last few years. What they want, demand from an employment experience has changed – and so must you.

To help you, I have created a checklist of 20 key areas you can work on to

make your business the preferred supplier of meaningful employment.

**NOTE:** Some of the key points below raise tough questions and require real soul-searching, self-awareness and guts to answer honestly. Denying reality doesn't change reality, so give it your best shot.

In which of the following key areas must we improve to attract, engage and retain top performers?

**1 We've not clearly defined who we're looking for.** How do we improve our clarity? Do we have updated 'outcomes-based' job descriptions?

**2 We're not looking in the right places.** Where should we be looking? Where are the people we need working, living or being educated right now? Are we using online employment sites like Indeed, Monster and Zip Recruiter?

**3 Our industry is perceived negatively by our target employees.** What can we do to honestly change that perception?

**4 The word is out that we're a toxic or dead-end employer.** What makes us toxic and what will we do to change that negative perception?

**5 Our employment interview process makes us look unprofessional, or poor screening or our desperation to 'find bodies' during the interview stage lets the wrong people in.** What are the 'interview process' best practices of world-class companies from which we can learn?

**6 We're not effectively 'selling' top candidates on the culture, benefits and opportunities we offer. How can we do a better 'sales job'?** Do we have a classy company brochure or, even better, a video, that tells our company story, states our values, explains why what we do matters, talks about market leadership, customer and environmental commitments, pay and benefits, employee health and safety, how we help our community and includes quotes from delighted employees about what a great career choice we are? ►



**7** During the recruitment process, we describe the job, our business culture or the career opportunities in terms that are not realistic or true, so many of our new hires leave in a few months in frustration.

What will we do to become more truthful during the interview process and to fix the employment experience so that we can attract top performers without deceiving and then disappointing them?

**8** Our 'pay – benefit – work-life balance – vacation package' is not competitive. How do we make our package competitive and still make a profit? What improvements in operational efficiency are required to make that happen, and in which parts of the business?

**9** Our hours or rules of work don't fit with most people's lifestyle. How can we improve these or compensate for them?

**10** Our location works against us. How can we overcome that? What bold, innovative thinking might be required?

**11** Lack of effective on-boarding and ongoing training. How can we create world-class onboarding and ongoing training and development?

**12** Negative (toxic) culture and environment. Which aspects of our culture need improving and how will we do that?

**13** Lack of respect, diversity and inclusion. How do we become more respectful and welcoming of a variety of people, backgrounds, experience and ideas?

**14** Incompetent, ineffective or abusive supervision and/or management. Do we have the quality and competence of supervisors and managers that top performers want to work for? If not, who and what needs 'fixing' or replacing?

**15** Poor ongoing communication. Little or no feedback, mostly negative. How do we improve the quality and quantity of our communication?

**16** Supervisors or managers who don't listen. Our front-line people know stuff and they hate it when we don't listen! How do we score on listening and how do we improve that score?

**17** Lack of praise, acknowledgement, celebrations, joy or hugs. How will we create a culture of joy, appreciation and celebration?

**18** Lack of 'meaningful work' or they don't know why their job is important. How will we help each team member understand the importance of their job to the customer, the team and to our bottom line.

**19** Lack of opportunity to grow. We rarely discuss career wishes and opportunities with our team members, so the best ones leave for career opportunities elsewhere. How and when will we start those conversations with each of our team members?

**20** Dishonesty – broken promises. Do we ever mislead, make promises we don't keep, or outright lie to any of our team members? What do we commit to do to stop that immediately?

For every decision you make to improve performance in any of these 20 key areas, get specific about what will be done, by whom, by when, at what cost, with what outcomes, measured how and rewarded how. This is how stuff gets done!

Next, create a career path for your best people – those with the ability and drive to grow. Surveys show the number one thing most top performers want is a challenging job with an opportunity to contribute and grow. Sit down with each of them individually and ask these three questions:

**1** Where would you like to be in three to five years in your career and your life? What job or position would you like to have? What other things would you like to have accomplished or experienced? How can we help you get there?

**2** Whatever job or position they express interest in, ask them what they think that job or position will be like. If they say they would like to be the sales manager because they can play golf and enjoy expense account dining every day, write them off as lightweights.

**3** Next, ask them what knowledge, skills, training, education and experience they think they'll need to perform that new job or position excellently.

Don't expect them to have immediate answers to these three questions. Most people won't, and that's okay. Invite them to take a few days to think about and research the possibilities and book a specific time when they'll get back to you with their thoughts. If they don't keep the appointment, you know everything you need to know about their commitment to move ahead.

Once you've agreed on a career path for each person, create a specific 'growth plan' for them, including the training and experience they'll get and when, where and from whom they'll get it. This doesn't mean everyone will become a senior manager but everyone who wants to grow should be growing in some way, even if it just means being better at what they're doing right now.

I know this sounds like more work than just solving day-to-day problems and complaining you can't find good staff anymore but this is what real management and leadership is all about.

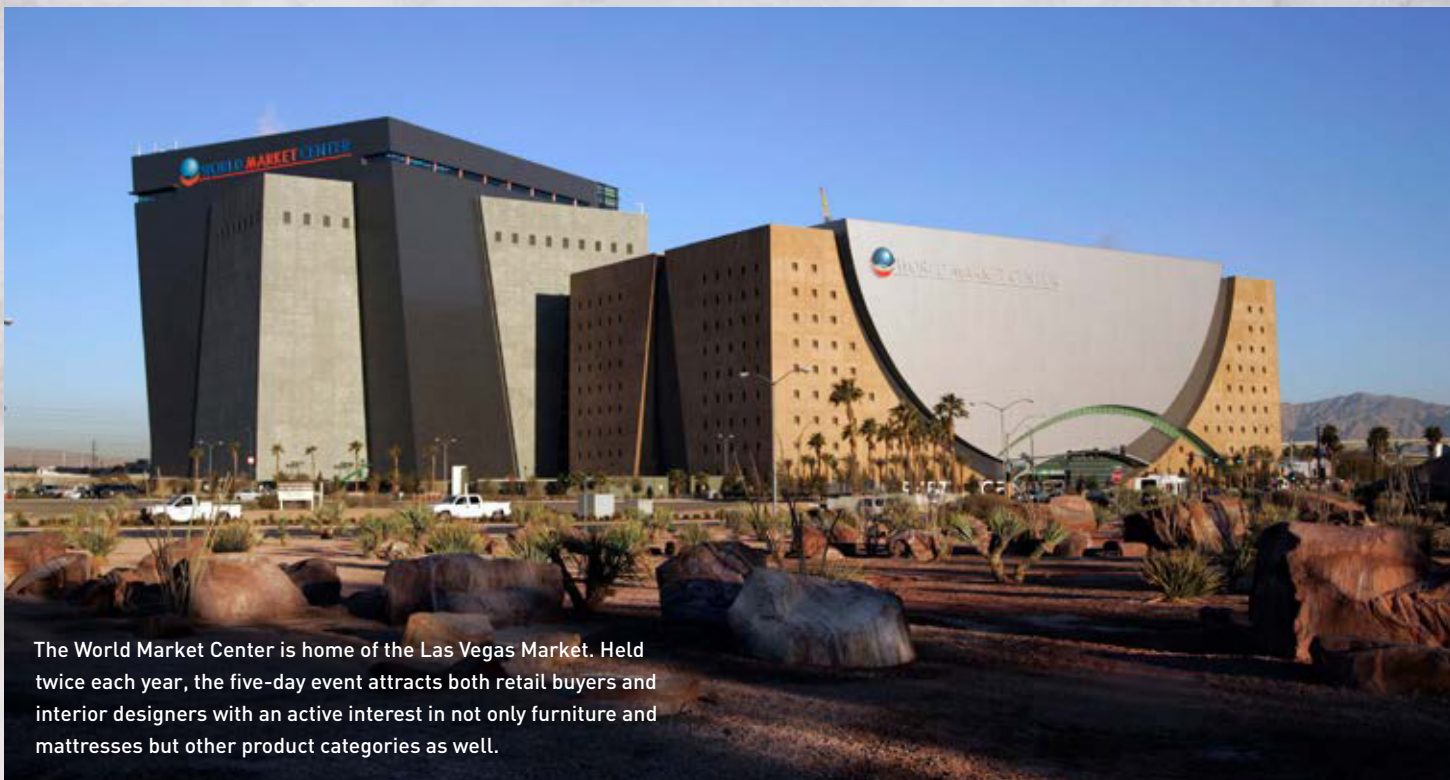
By the way, include yourself in this process. What do you want to be doing in three to five years in your career and your life? What does the business need you to become? Are you capable and committed to become what you must become to grow the business, lead your team and create your extraordinary life?

And, if you simply don't want to become what you must become, what alternate plans are you making for the business, for your career and for your life? You can't grow your business without growing your people – and without growing yourself. **HGO**

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*A regular contributor to Home Goods Online, DONALD COOPER has been both a world-class manufacturer and an award-winning retailer. Now a Toronto-based business speaker and coach, he helps business owners and managers rethink, refocus and re-energise their business to create compelling customer value, clarity of purpose and long-term profitability. For more information, or to subscribe to his free, monthly management e-newsletter, go to [www.donaldcooper.com](http://www.donaldcooper.com)*

# INDUSTRY CALENDAR



The World Market Center is home of the Las Vegas Market. Held twice each year, the five-day event attracts both retail buyers and interior designers with an active interest in not only furniture and mattresses but other product categories as well.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** The following is a list of published dates for trade events of interest to Canadian furniture, mattress and major appliance retailers. Because of volatility surrounding the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, those interested in attending are urged to visit the organiser's web site before making any travel arrangements. The dates are subject to change and were accurate when this issue of the Merchandiser went to press.

*January 3 to 8, 2023*  
**CES**  
 Consumer Technology Association  
 Las Vegas Convention Center  
 Las Vegas, NV  
[ces.tech](http://ces.tech)

*January 19 to 22, 2023*  
**INTERIOR DESIGN SHOW**  
 Metro Toronto Convention Centre South  
 Toronto  
[interiordesignshow.com](http://interiordesignshow.com)

*January 29 to February 2, 2023*  
**TORONTO GIFT & HOME FAIR**  
 Canadian Gift Assn.  
 Toronto Congress Centre  
 Mississauga, ON  
[cangift.org](http://cangift.org)

*January 29 to February 2, 2023*  
**LAS VEGAS MARKET**  
 World Market Center  
 Las Vegas, NV  
[lasvegasmarket.com](http://lasvegasmarket.com)

*January 31 to February 2, 2023*  
**THE INTERNATIONAL SURFACE EVENT (TISE)**  
 Mandalay Bay Convention Center  
 Las Vegas  
[intlsurfaceevent.com](http://intlsurfaceevent.com)

*January 31 to February 2, 2023*  
**KITCHEN & BATH INDUSTRY SHOW (KBIS)**  
 National Kitchen & Bath Assn.  
 Las Vegas Convention Center  
 Las Vegas  
[kbis.com](http://kbis.com)

*February 26 to 28, 2023*  
**ALBERTA GIFT & HOME MARKET**  
 Canadian Gift Assn.  
 Edmonton Expo Centre  
 Edmonton, AB  
[cangift.org](http://cangift.org)

*March 1 to 4, 2023*  
**MALAYSIAN INTERNATIONAL FURNITURE FAIR**  
 Putra World Trade Centre  
 Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia  
[miff.com.my](http://miff.com.my)

*March 18 to 20, 2020*  
**ISPA INDUSTRY CONFERENCE**  
 International Sleep Products Assn.  
 Vinoy Renaissance Resort  
 St. Petersburg, FL  
[ispaindustryconference.com](http://ispaindustryconference.com)

*April 22 to 26, 2023*  
**HIGH POINT MARKET**  
 High Point, NC  
[highpointmarket.org](http://highpointmarket.org)

*May 21 to 24, 2023*  
**INTERWOVEN**  
 (Formerly Showtime)  
 International Textile Marketing Assn.  
 Market Square  
 High Point, NC  
[internationaltextilealliance.org](http://internationaltextilealliance.org)

*May 30 to 31, 2023*  
**STORE 2023**  
 Retail Council of Canada  
 Toronto Congress Centre  
 Toronto  
[storeconference.ca](http://storeconference.ca)

*June 4 to 7, 2023*  
**IMM COLOGNE**  
 The International Interiors Show  
 Koelnmesse GmbH  
 Cologne, Germany  
[imm-cologne.com](http://imm-cologne.com)



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## HGO THIS WEEK

**THE ONLY** *Market intelligence for Canada's home goods retailers and their partners*



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