

FurnitureToday

Q: What is your market strategy for 2021?



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Chuck Reilly, executive vice president, AICO

AICO remains committed to the market and our showrooms. However, the uncertainty of whether our customers are willing to attend all markets is the challenge.

High Point Premarket has only recently been attended by our team, driven by dealers deciding they will go to a Premarket but not the main High Point show. Our current strategy is a concerted effort to reach out to our top customers and determine what shows they are going to. We will be open in Vegas and High Point.

However, our marketing spend will be driven by attendance approaching some form of normalcy. From a product standpoint, we feel it appropriate to focus on products we are flowing as our customers need product now. We will continue to develop new goods from our factories that can provide realistic delivery dates.

Doug Rozenboom, president, A.R.T. Furniture

I feel that market cycles are more heavily influenced on current product shipment status than ever before. Customers that are successful in expanding sales while maintaining back-order service levels are finding ways to increase open-to-buy and are definitely looking for something new for their stores.

There is a clear message from our customers: They want to safely get back to an exuberant and inspiring shopping experience in our showroom. ... We will have customers in our High Point showroom in March, April, May and June. We expect April Premarket and June market to be more heavily attended vs. September and October of 2020.

We at A.R.T. have not slowed down new product development, and we expect to have a strong summer market season.

Hank Little, president, Atlanta Attachment Co.

Let's face it, trade shows will continue to be important when the business world returns to normal, but our industry — indeed, the whole business world — is rapidly going virtual, and the pandemic sped up this transformation. Participation in the virtual world has become a necessity for all industries, especially ours.

As a leading supplier of capital equipment for bedding and furniture manufacturers, it is important for our customers to see our products from all angles to better understand the automation processes and the overall footprint the equipment will take up on the production floor.

To aid our customers with this, we developed a dynamic and interactive virtual tour of our product showroom located at our manufacturing facility in Lawrenceville, Ga. Available in both a 3D and in a virtual reality format, the tour allows our clients access to view our equipment at their convenience online, 24/7. The tours can also be scheduled with our sales representatives, who can virtually guide our customers through the showroom, directing them to the equipment that will best meet their individual needs.

The interactive virtual tour is available on our website and includes 360-degree zoom capabilities, links to product catalogs — which include both English and Spanish versions — product videos and technical manuals.

Rick Coppola, president of U.S. sales, Ashley Furniture Inds.

Even before the pandemic, we were seriously investigating the idea of several product introductions during the year rather than only January, April, October and July.

We did have a mid-market introduction last year and plan on continuing that. Further, we have invested in technology that will 'bring the market to our dealers' using outstanding room settings and CGI.

Mark Owen, executive vice president of sales and business development, Classic Brands

We are providing our retailers with opportunities to visit our showrooms by individual appointment so they can be in a secure and safe environment while reviewing our new product offerings. Our showrooms are located in High Point; Las Vegas; Columbia, Md.; and Long Beach, Calif.

Additionally, we'll be providing a virtual market with our product introductions from our Las Vegas showroom.

Finally, for any of our retail customers who would prefer for us to come to them — if travel and restrictions permit — we're happy to travel and present our products in person at their chosen locations.

Roy Calcagne, president and CEO, Craftmaster Furniture

Craftmaster will be introducing several new upholstery collections along with more than 100 new fabrics at the upcoming High Point Market. The showroom will 100% ready for the April Premarket. The introduction will be lighter than usual but will be very focused on filling in the needs of each product category.

Even with a large backlog and longer lead times, we believe the retailers will be looking to update their floors with fresh products later in the year.

The markets are all about spending time with our customers, discussing strategies to improve business and showing them great new products.

Shaun Pennington, president, Diamond Mattress

We are investing more in high-quality imagery, videography and creating assets to help our customers better understand the features and benefits of the product, whether it be cooling or graphene technology or sustainable materials such as latex and organic cotton. The better job we do presenting and explaining product to our retail partners, the better they can help the consumer understand the materials in the mattress and how they layer to help achieve a better night's sleep.

Higher quality visual assets make sharing via video more effective for our customers and sales team, and this becomes even more important as data shows that more consumers are comfortable with purchasing mattresses online so investing in visual assets helps our retail partners.

Charles Song, marketing coordinator, Diamond Sofa

With the challenges presented in regards to furniture markets and the uncertainties of if or when they take place, we've shifted from utilizing in-person events traditionally serving as major product launching points to premiering products throughout the year, with increased focus on making sure availability is present so our buyers can have new and key products available on their floors. This lessens the pressure to tie our release schedule to the shows and allows for a more spontaneous and agile product cycle.

In addition to when we debut new product, we have made changes to what we offer as well. For example, we're greatly expanding our desk and work-from-home offerings for those who must do so at this time.

We continue to place a prime emphasis on digital marketing. Offering product sneak peeks via social media and daily website updates where all photography works to convey how our offerings work cohesively across categories to complement and enhance one another is our foremost goal. This is especially important to us as most people will obtain their first impressions of our products digitally, now more than ever.

With that said, we still treat the markets — Las Vegas and High Point for Diamond Sofa — very much as premiere product showcase opportunities and have prepared fresh introductions for every show, including the April Las Vegas Market to ensure buyers have a fresh experience upon every visit to our showroom.

Stuart Carlitz, president and CEO, Eclipse International

Business over the past year has been unlike anything we have ever seen. Going into 2021, it looks as if our business and overall consumer demand will remain strong.

We will continue to offer retailers new and innovative products at varying price points with alternative raw materials. With polyurethane foam supply being as erratic as it is, we are forced to make new product with substitute components like cotton, polyester and other natural layers of padding.

Eclipse continues to meet consumer demand domestically through our extensive network of coast-to-coast manufacturing and distribution facilities. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, we have never had to halt production and have instead continued to produce mattresses at full capacity across all of our 22 factories across the U.S and beyond.

Susie Wurster, vice president, marketing, Elements International

Elements has effectively transitioned from four major tradeshows a year to having an “opened year-round” showroom. We plan to use the shift in the schedule to utilize our High Point showroom, not only to participate in the scheduled event (First Tuesday, Premarket and Market), but also to encourage our reps and customers to schedule private showings.

New product samples will be introduced monthly in our High Point showroom, rather than quarterly, to ensure our customers are seeing our new goods as quickly as possible. Our hope is that our “opened year-round” showroom will ultimately get our products to market faster and create more frequent buying opportunities for our customers that are conducive to their schedules.

Johnny Griggs, chief operating officer, Ergomotion

Last year, we launched our first ever virtual event, we learned a lot about this type of approach and received positive industry feedback on our content strategy and this type of event. We provided engaging content that showcased latest consumer trends and featured speakers that included some of Ergomotion’s top leadership team.

For in-person events like market, we will employ a hybrid approach, we will be available at the show but also provide video tours and virtual experiences for customers who cannot attend. We are developing an omni-communication approach for our customers.

David Crimmins, vice president of sales, Flexsteel Inds.

Flexsteel has implemented processes for continuous product development across the year. Through this approach, we can efficiently manage a consistent flow of new product introductions, launching products when they are ready instead of tying launches to episodic High Point or Las Vegas market events.

More than 100 products from upholstery to case goods and across our home furnishings and e-commerce channels were successfully introduced in the past year. Flexsteel’s focus on an aggressive growth strategy, in combination with the effects of the pandemic, have changed not only when, but also how Flexsteel introduces new product to its retailers.

Flexsteel collaboratively engages retailers early in the development process for voice-of-the-customer feedback. In doing so, we have found that by the time a product is introduced, retailers are already eager and ready to place the product. For those who have not seen the product, virtual introductions begin the instant product development is complete.

In 2020, by necessity, Flexsteel had to reinvent how we get new products in front of retailers. Virtual product introductions were driven by that necessity. However, virtual engagement will remain a staple of Flexsteel’s approach going forward.

The sales organization holds virtual product introductions with individual retailers on a weekly basis. They also conduct personalized virtual tours of our 65,000-square-foot High Point showroom. At the same time, Flexsteel has invested heavily in digital capabilities that help support virtual selling and decision-making.

When in-person meetings are appropriate and can be done safely, Flexsteel will get the most from its High Point showroom investment.

First, the showroom stays updated with the latest product, and it is open year-round. Second, we joined other manufacturers and suppliers in the First Tuesday initiative, which has successfully allowed Flexsteel retailers who want the live experience to consolidate their visits with other brands they sell in a single trip to High Point.
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Our retailers tell us they really like having the flexibility of choosing among the First Tuesday events, private showroom visits at other times or virtual tours.

Alan Hirschhorn, executive vice president of sales, GhostBed

No one in our industry could have foreseen what 2020 had in store for us. It was truly a challenging year. Our January market was an overwhelming success, but that (momentum) quickly disappeared as COVID-19 struck.

With stores closing, we adjusted our marketing strategy in two ways. First, we ramped up our online presence to keep our brand in the public eye while reaching out to our retail partners to assist in any way possible. We moved to virtually connect with our customers and, as experts in the DTC channel, worked with our partners to strengthen their digital presences and to offer our in-stock and drop-ship programs through any of our 15 distribution points.

While we did not open our showroom in Las Vegas for the summer market, we are still firm believers in in-person events. Ours is a small industry, and it is important for us to all come together and make personal connections to continue to grow our businesses (and) to also ensure that our industry prospers.

We believe as consumers were forced to change their buying habits to be more online, it is important for us to change with the market and continue to be a valuable supplier to our customers.

Jamie Collins, executive vice president, Homelegance

Our plan is to focus on what we think will be the first safe opportunity to present new products. Premarket will be well attended by the majors, and our hope is by June we will have a well-attended High Point Market. We have been working on developing new items all along, not knowing exactly when we would get to show them, making sure our customers and our staff are safe and making sure we are all putting our efforts where they need to be to show as many products to as many customers as possible.

We really did struggle with our decision not to open in Las Vegas in April. ... Las Vegas is a very important market for Homelegance and the decision to stay closed during the April market was a very difficult one due to its importance to our company”

Johne Albanese, chief marketing officer, Hooker Furnishings Corp.

Digital initiatives have always been an important part of our marketing strategy, and recently they have been significantly amplified. For our partners who cannot experience market in person, it is our top priority to ensure we can equip them with the tools they need to experience market — virtually.

Last year, we launched our first fully digitized portfolio of new product introductions. The comprehensive “Virtual Market Experience” showcases our new collections through an interactive 360-degree virtual showroom tour and a comprehensive library of new product videos. Featuring products from Hooker Case Goods, Hooker Upholstery, Marq, Bradington-Young and Sam Moore, the digital tools were designed to provide our retail and interior design partners with virtual opportunities to experience our High Point Market showroom as well as view new product presentations from the comfort of their homes or offices. The self-guided showroom tours are all available for on demand access, 24/7.

While nothing compares to experiencing our showrooms in person, the pandemic has highlighted that there are more ways to connect with our customers on a year-round basis. The virtual component is here to stay, and we anticipate technology to continually become an invaluable sales tool now and into the future. We will be adding all of our 2021 new product introductions to our digital library.

David Binke, CEO, King Koil

While we all look forward to the day we can get back to in-person events, we must adapt and proceed forward with business, as safely as possible. Our team has developed several creative and safe ways to serve our customers recently. Two examples include our private open-house events at our facility in Arizona and our new SmartLife microsites, developed for retail sales associates and consumers.

During our private open-house events in Arizona, we successfully debuted several new products and gave our retailers the opportunity to tour our 90,000-square-foot factory, many of whom were able to see it for the first time since its 2018 opening.

The private sessions — scheduled by appointment only — followed all health and safety precautions and allowed us to not only tailor the products to each retailer’s needs, but also to spend more quality time with each of our customers without the distractions we would normally experience at a market.

We were also able to create a sense of urgency with our customers through buying incentives such as sales promotions and discounts for those retailers who attended in person or virtually. This initiative was such a success (that) we are planning to hold similar events in the future.

We have also created two very dynamic SmartLife microsites: one for retail sales associates and a consumer-focused site for in-home support after the purchase of a SmartLife mattress.

In the absence of in-store training, the RSA-focused site provides valuable training and troubleshooting content and offers helpful tips for the selling process. The consumer-focused site provides “how-to” guides and customer service information for consumers, allowing them to get the most of their SmartLife mattress from the comfort of their own homes. Both sites include videos, a did-you-know information section and a resource for frequently asked questions.

Terry McNew, CEO, Klaussner Home Furnishings

Outside of the organized markets, our strategy is to make our showroom available to our retail partners year round, and our product development and engineering team is committed to having a continuous flow of new product through-out the year to support our plan.

Neill Robinson, president and CEO, Legacy Classic Furniture

We are focusing on fewer, but better introductions at Legacy Classic. We know our customers are hyper-focused on servicing the products they currently carry, so we are making sure our introductions are designed and priced well enough to get their attention.

Having fewer introductions allows us to make the decision to cut the collection at Premarket, so the goods will be available at retail in our normal six-month cycle. It is important to us that when customers return in October they know the goods have arrived to them or are on the water. If we (wait to) make these decisions in June, we cannot achieve this.

Sam Smith, president, Leggett & Platt Home Furniture Components

Being in the comfort business, it's difficult to express comfort by visual and virtual means only. Touch and feel remain very important, and our customers need to experience new products firsthand.

To do this while protocols are still in place, we are working on a concept similar to the industry's First Tuesday effort. We want to safely bring customers into our regional showrooms — High Point; Tupelo, Miss.; City of Industry, Calif.; Kendallville, Ind.; Rietberg, Germany; and Jiaxing, China — to show them new product rollouts and give them the opportunity to not only see, but also to touch, feel and experience the comfort and convenience we offer.

These small shows would be run by our regional sales staff in place at each location and would follow the strictest safety protocols to protect our customers and our own people as we showcase our technology. We're hopeful that we can get this going soon, so stay tuned.

Billy Curtright, national sales manager, USA, Magniflex USA

We are conducting all kinds of virtual "trade shows" to launch new products, and we have made them as dynamic as possible with plenty of video and engaging lifestyle images. We are also pushing our detailed training videos as well to both current and new dealers. It's an alternative to in-person training but still edited well with plenty of great selling nuggets for RSAs.

That being said, we do plan to go to Las Vegas Market in April. The showroom will be open by appointment only, but we feel we need to go back to the traditional approaches to product launches.

And we have some exciting launches, including a new affordable mattress that we are adding to our Toscana line of organic, high-end mattresses with an organic cotton cover certified by the Global Organic Textile standard (GOTS) and a mattress made with Seaqual, an eco-friendly fabric made of recycled materials collected from the ocean.

Guy Ray, CEO, Manwah USA

Manwah has worked hard to accommodate our retail partners with new product developments and working around travel restrictions. Manwah has committed to the First Tuesday schedule, making sure our showroom is complete with new product introductions.

While we are not trying to change how the retailers buy and develop products, it becomes very important for us to create new options in which we could keep fresh innovative products in front of the consumer. Our First Tuesday events have enabled us to create a workaround to travel restrictions, offering our retail partners the same ability to review and work on new products in High Point vs. Asia.

In today's environment, it is more about safety and personalized attention than being part of a big event without safety precautions. After a few months of opening our showrooms for the First Tuesday, our customers have realized the value of visiting yearround, not just at market times.

Also, with our customers and ourselves unable to travel to Asia, we now have brought all of our product development to our High Point showroom. This solution has enabled us to have something fresh and new to present to our customers yearround without any overseas travel during this pandemic. New products will always be the lifeline of this industry, and now we are using our High Point showroom yearround to work on new products.

When we announced the First Tuesday concept, it was just an opportunity to offer our buyers an alternative to markets. Now after a few months, we have seen several retailers who have embraced the value of our open showroom yearround.

Michael Nanni, president and CEO, Master Motion

We understand that our retail buyers are no different than consumer buyers, so we adapt our marketing and production strategies to meet these similar needs.

People today are buying much more with a click of a mouse, so we designed our company to adapt to this. We did 12 one-hour to hour-and-a-half virtual showroom tours with buyers (at March First Tuesday). I lock the showroom for the appointment, and the customer and I work one-on-one over Zoom. We review leather options and frame options, and we walk from collection to collection answering any questions.

There is no need to take notes because I record the entire presentation and send it to the buyer, with all that we reviewed with a copy of the video presentation for themselves and their staff.

Buyers can be in their own state one hour and virtually in our showroom in High Point the next hour without eating up days of travel and time away from running their business.

We have limited styles that we change the elements and details on to make different looks, and we keep all our quality the same on every piece ... so all of our products sit the same and have at the same quality, making it easier for the retailer to view and purchase virtually. We also make all the leather in our line the same price and all the fabric the same price, making it extremely easy to view and purchase the line.

I believe the retailers that adapt to this new way of viewing and adding new products will be the survivors in the future, and those that take four days of travel away from their business, to do what their competition is doing in hours, will have difficulty keeping up.

Stephen Chen, president, Mlily USA

To address these challenging times for our retailers, we have created a multi-level approach to assist them in the near term.

Mlily still strongly agrees with the value of markets, and we will have a strong presence at the upcoming Las Vegas show. We have an expanded, 20,000-square-foot showroom as the backdrop for 25 different product vignettes to help our retailers see how they can merchandise our product mix.

But we are also sensitive to the effects the pandemic may have on travel plans for some in our industry.

To support our retail partners that may not be planning to attend the Las Vegas Market, we have developed an interactive 360-degree virtual showroom tour as an alternative experience. The tour will launch in tandem with the market's opening day on April 11 and will feature interactive product descriptions, images and videos, giving virtual attendees a realistic tour from the convenience of their own computer.

The tour will be part of our Mlily University, where we are curating a variety of digital content including training videos and virtual catalogs for our retail customers.

We are committed to meeting our customers' needs in terms of safety and product, and our goal with this hybrid approach is to offer our new product information in a variety of ways to provide our retail partners with the support materials that work best for their individual needs.

Scott Hill, president of sales, New Classic Furniture

Last fall, based on customers' reluctance to travel, we decided to set up a private showing for key accounts at our 25,000-square-foot showroom in California. In the second week of March, we showed all the goods we'd planned to bring to Las Vegas Market, Premarket and High Point Market.

We'd had a ton of success after the pandemic hit through getting in a position to ship quickly when stores reopened by ordering a lot of goods without anyone seeing them at a market. That gave us great business in the third and fourth quarters.

Thinking about markets, my opinion is customers might look at product that won't be available till third or fourth quarter this year, but what they really want is goods that are ready now. Coming out of this private show, we made decisions on ordering from the factories immediately. When I see customers at Premarket, these goods already will be on the water. I'll have goods ready to arrive at their stores in May or June, not third quarter.

And, the more we can do digitally, the better. We'll have videos of all this product that we can share with customers that still don't want to travel to markets.

Werner Piel, president, Planum Furniture

This last year was a real challenge trying to adapt to the changing tradeshow schedules. Since we have no showroom that is open year round, we only get to showcase our goods during the High Point Market twice a year. When it was cancelled April 2020, we had all this merchandise to present, and there was no show!

After assessing our options we decided to start to make virtual tours. We figured if our customer can't come to us to see what we have, then we will go to them. We have now made three virtual tours, the first showcased the goods we were planning on showing in April. We then did two more for October, one for our main showroom at 1822 English and a second for our satellite showroom at 200 Steele.

We also revamped our website to make it more informative for our customers and easier to navigate. Our previous website was more pictures than information; our new website gives you finish options, item specs and, if you log in, retail pricing.

Lastly, during the pandemic we started with our email blasts, and we have been having a good amount of inquiries and website clicks because of this. We found that the email blasts gives us a lot of exposure to designers, and we have been having more and more designer business. This was most obvious during the shutdowns: Stores weren't able to write business, but the designers were still working with their clients.

This year we plan to continue pushing forward, we are now also showing at Premarket, which is new for us. So we are hoping that with the added dates for Premarket, we might get customers to come by. We figured it might be better since the crowds aren't as large as they are during market.

We also plan to continue to keep our website up to date; we even have our October market virtual tour on the website so anyone can view.

Lastly, when we are hopefully able to go back to some sense of normalcy, we want to start doing designer tours during the markets. We think this would be a fun way of gathering a group of potential customers that don't know us very well and give them an informative tour of our space, discuss design and sip on some champagne.

Rion Morgenstern, CEO, Pleasant Mattress

Being a super-regional company, our success isn't as dependent on the larger trade shows. Based on this — and following all health and safety precautions, of course — we have been able to host our local retail partners here at our factory showroom in Fresno to share our new product launches.

For us, the advantage of these smaller, more private meetings means we are able to spend more tailored and focused time with each of our partners and limit the distractions that can sometimes occur during a traditional market.

In addition to our Fresno location, we have also organized several private regional events to show some of our new products to our retailers in Arizona and northern and southern California. This has been a successful approach for us, and we intend to continue these private events going forward.

We also realize that some of our partners have a preference for virtual information at this time. In response, we have a new initiative underway to develop product launch and sales presentation videos that our retail partners can access virtually.

Several years ago, we invested heavily to create one of the largest brand and marketing departments in the industry, let alone for an independent manufacturer like us. Our in-house agency is replete with a full suite of design tools and photo studio. During COVID we have expanded our competency to utilize 3D modeling tools. These tools allow us to create realistic virtual room settings rather than traveling on location for photo shoots. This innovative technology has come a long way and is virtually (pun intended) indistinguishable when compared with actual photography.

These videos and 3D models have been a great addition to our marketing initiatives because they have longevity and allow us to curate a variety of digital content for our retail partners to access 24/7.

Scott Tesser, CEO, Precision Textiles

Like many companies, we are conducting much of our product previews and new business initiatives virtually. We recently developed a more dynamic corporate PowerPoint that we are able to present virtually via a live Zoom call or email to our customers.

For the first time, we have a more compelling visual presentation that represents the depth of product and experience we have. This tool has been invaluable as a sales call leave-behind and corporate overview of our products and capabilities, especially considering that our sales reps aren't traveling to meet in-person with our customers as much these days. We also promote our new product introductions and marketing initiatives on social media, especially on B2B-focused platforms such as LinkedIn.

Recognizing that the tactile element of our textile products in particular is incredibly significant, we are also continuing to introduce new products through more traditional methods, including product samples and direct mail campaigns. Our recent direct-mail campaign for our IQFit Natural line of fire-resistant (FR) barriers that included a swatch card with product samples, a mini foam bun with an IQFit Natural FR sock applied to mimic how the product would fit around a mattress, and a product brochure was a tremendous success.

Following a similar approach, we have also developed a “Tool Kit” mailer that includes product samples and brochures for our entire product line because even in this technology-driven business environment, our customers still need something they can see and feel.

Deena Gardner, vice president of marketing, Reverie

Due to the cancellation and postponements of in-person events over the last year, our team at Reverie has made adjustments to our product introductions for both consumers and retailers.

On the consumer side, we have taken this shift as an opportunity to ramp up our virtual content and offerings as an experience. Working with consumers directly has allowed us to take on a more conversational approach — one on one — with more personalized content including how-to videos and 3D renderings. This also helps remove the pressure customers may experience in-person when they step foot on a showroom floor. We are meeting people with where they are at in a safe, responsible way.

For marketing to retailers and other businesses, we offer a virtual experience at the Reverie Partner Network, an online marketplace for buyers to explore our product lineup and other engaging content. If someone is looking for more info beyond that resource, our sales team can set up a virtual meeting.

In the past, we’ve leaned heavily on trade shows like the Las Vegas Market to showcase our new product to buyers, but now we have a more intimate, safe and individualized experience to take our partners through.

We’ve also created a program, called Reverie Base First, to serve as a digital training tool for retail store sales teams with our technology and keep our products top of mind. All partners have complimentary access to this technology.

Dax Allen, vice president of marketing, Sherrill Furniture

Our most important strategic marketing adaptation around new product introduction at in-person events has been to focus 100% of our energy and resources on shipping customers their sold orders instead of making new products to fill our showrooms for in-person events like market. We believe it is irresponsible to divert valuable resources into manufacturing market samples with all that is going on in the industry today.

Shifting our marketing and product introduction strategy to act on this principled belief by not showing at spring 2021 market has generated an amazing emotional response from our customers. The furniture industry is a people industry. Making this decision to put customers first has touched the hearts and minds of people in a way we had hoped for but could not be certain of.

It felt like a big risk to shift strategy like this back in February, but since that announcement we have received hundreds of emails, phone calls, texts, messages on social media, hand-written letters and even personal cards from the CEOs at large furniture retailers to interior designers and small, shop-local furniture store owners thanking us for doing this.

Right now, I’m looking at a letter received from the CEO of one of our Top 10 customers saying, “I just wanted to send a note of thanks for the smart decision to keep customer orders flowing. Market is certainly a necessity, but in this environment, we need to do all we can to reduce lead times. Thank you!”

Sherrill Furniture has made our customers happy and further accelerated the growth of our business. It’s the type of win-win outcome you hope for and never take for granted.

Bill Hammer, president, Shifman Mattresses

In addition to strictly following COVID-19 protocols for those who prefer in-person showroom visits, Shifman provides virtual product tours, factory tours, lifestyle imagery, product imagery and video content, as well as swatches of materials in order to introduce new product lines to those who prefer not to attend in person.

Nick Bates, president, Spring Air International

Our team has done an incredible job of continuing to dialogue with our customers and train RSAs on the benefits of our mattresses through digital means, since the pandemic hit. In fact, our newest product line, Breathe by Spring Air — a collection that provides protection from viruses and bacteria — is being launched 100% digitally via a YouTube video.

These digital elements work just as well as being there in person, and I anticipate that these will be part of every one of our future product launches moving forward.

Last summer, we didn't open our Las Vegas Market showroom because of COVID-19 and our belief — well-founded, as it turned out — that few retailers would attend. There was no negative impact on our business, and we saved on the high cost of operating during a market.

So at the beginning of this year, we announced that we will no longer follow a trade show model for introducing new products. We have decided instead to focus on our most successful existing collections, and we are working hard with our retail partners and licensees to keep up with the tremendous demand for these products. Our partners need to focus on meeting consumer demand for existing lines, not resetting the table with more new collections.

Bryan Smith, president and CEO, Southerland Sleep Inc.

As our industry continues to navigate through various disruptions to the traditional market and product introduction cycles, we are committed to providing our dealers with various options to help them merchandise their floors. One of those initiatives is called Southerland Connects.

Southerland Connects provides our retailers the ability to touch, feel and experience our products either by appointment in one of six strategically located factory showrooms around the country, participation in locally coordinated private regional showings or via sample reviews sent directly to them. We believe it is still important to see the finished models and experience the comfort options that they provide. Through Southerland Connects, our retailers will have time to experience our products in a safe and secure environment, and at their convenience.

While I think we all look forward to the day that things return to “normal,” we view this not as a setback, but as a push forward by creating a “new normal” for the industry while creating a more personal, individualized experience for our customers.

While Southerland Connects offers a safe in-person solution, we also offer a virtual option. Our 360-degree virtual market tour allows our partners to view our Las Vegas Market showroom virtually. This has been an invaluable tool that we plan on continuing to enhance to provide an even better experience for the user as we add new products to our portfolio.

Roland Maddrey, key accounts manager, Sunpan

In an effort to better reach our customers in 2021, Sunpan has put in place several initiatives to make it easier for our clients to access our showroom and be able to shop our products. Our High Point showroom is open to the trade daily, Monday through Friday, and customers can schedule appointments.

We also support First Tuesday, which has brought a growing list of customers into our showroom already this year. We anticipate more attendance to the event as the year goes forward.

We also prioritized the High Point Premarket and market events in multiple ways. For example, we have expanded our showroom to 40,000 square feet, nearly doubling the size of our space in order to better show all of our products categories: bedroom, dining, accents, rugs, lighting, wall art and upholstery.

And we have invested in Premarket as an official sponsor. We are focusing new product introductions for April's Premarket and plan to have a great assortment of new items available for customers to shop. Our sales reps will be here for the event, and we have allotted more time for customers to shop our space.

The June High Point market event will have the same focus as Premarket and will also include new product introductions. We will repeat this prioritization for the High Point fall Premarket and markets, and we will resume our presence in Las Vegas in August to follow up our spring High Point Market.

At Sunpan we are continually working to make it easier for our customers to access our showroom and products, as well as providing more options for customers to buy our products.

Gerry Borreggine, president and CEO, Therapedic International

Since in-person events and markets are not going to happen at full strength, if at all, in the immediate future, we've developed our own virtual events for dealers to peruse new products. We've set-up our showrooms as if we were preparing for a full-scale market and then sent a video crew to professionally film it for the dealers to view privately, on-demand. If dealers see something that strikes them, we will arrange to bring those samples to the dealer or get the dealer to a local factory so they can then view the products in-person.

Neil MacKenzie, director of marketing, Universal Furniture

We are prepared to go into April Premarket in a market-ready mode. The shift to June will also allow for a few additional product experiences to debut then.

One of the positives of what we've all been dealing with is folks visiting High Point year round, and we are open by appointment to meet with them and give them some additional access to our space and products.

The other thing we've executed on is providing a virtual market experience. We were the first company to execute this type of imitative last April, and we've continued to make it a part of the market experience going forward for the time being.

Overall we believe the in-person experience opportunities for all of 2021 will be a sought after and welcomed change. We are looking to build off of this enthusiasm with some more showroom activation opportunities and events around key product introductions while being mindful to adhering to CDC guidelines.



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