



The Industry Publication for Amish & American-Made Furniture 2023 Issue 2

Expressions

IN WOODCRAFT

Page 8:
**AI Technology
introduced to Amish-
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Page 14:
**Educating the Next Gen-
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FEATURED



ON THE COVER:

The Delta Double Pedestal Table from **Hermie's Table Shop** uses opposing half circles and circles to create an attractive, eye-catching design that supports a beautiful solid top. Pair it with benches, chairs or a combination of both for a look that's sure to be a hit! —See page 7

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From The Publisher...

Every once in a while something happens that you just can't ignore – even if you want to!

Late last year a company called OpenAI introduced an Artificial Intelligence or "AI" product called ChatGPT. A 50,000-foot explanation of this technology would be, it's an app that takes text-based inputs from a user and then creates content based on that "prompt."

Prompts can be very simple, or quite complex. We could talk a *lot* about the impact ChatGPT and other AI technologies already are having, or are predicted to have. For now, suffice it to say that prompt-based AI apps can create...almost anything, whether it's text-based or images.

Already, ChatGPT has created some amazing things, as well as some things that might be cause for concern. The technology is not without controversy. The situation is very reminiscent of the early days of the Internet – but

on a much, much larger scale. In just a few months, AI tech is being found almost everywhere, from marketing, to science and virtually everything related to computing.

It's even made its way into the Amish-built furniture world. Yes, you read that right!

Our lead article in this issue is about how one software/marketing agency located in the heart of Ohio's Amish Country is using this "disruptive" technology to disrupt (in a very positive way) the hardwood furniture industry.

Turn to page 8 for the details, and to learn how AI technology even promises to make your job as a furniture store owner easier and more productive.

As always, thanks for reading
Expressions In Woodcraft

Ryan Kralik



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IDS launches website and ecommerce software with ChatGPT integrations that could change how furniture retailers sell their products

Infinite Digital Solutions Disrupts with New AI platform for retailers

By Jerry Klingerman

When the ChatGPT Artificial Intelligence (AI) app launched last fall it took the world by storm. It also caught the Big Tech companies like Google completely off guard. We have it on good authority that when OpenAI launched ChatGPT — after keeping the ENTIRE project under wraps — Google fired a lot of staff, basically for being unaware of what was happening.

AI is “disruptive” technology, which *Investopedia.com* defines it as, “an innovation that significantly alters the way that consumers, industries, or businesses operate.” Examples in the last 40 years include: Personal computers, Netscape (the first widely available Internet web browser), the Google search engine and, of course, smart phones.

Depending upon where/what you read, AI technology has the potential to be exponentially more impactful than all of those previous technologies. It’s been widely available to the masses for mere months, but already people are using it to develop innumerable solutions across the world, including entire marketing plans, scientific research — and even things as mundane as creating recipes and diet plans. To explain how it’s being used, consider that current AI apps (programs) are tools that work on “prompts.” You write a string of instructions for whatever you’re seeking, and the app responds accordingly.

For our purposes, we set out to discover if — as ironic as it might sound — any businesses in Ohio’s Amish Country are embracing AI tech.

Enter Infinite Digital Solutions of Millersburg, OH.

Expressions In Woodcraft was made aware that the company was working on an AI product, so we reached out to Bob Berryhill, VP at Infinite Digital Solutions (IDS), in Millersburg, OH to ask him about the agency’s work in AI as it relates to furniture. For readers who may not be aware of what they do, Berryhill explained that, “Infinite



IDS’s new AI technology enables it to build unique custom websites for every client — drawing on a database of 80,000 items

Digital Solutions is a full-service digital marketing company that also includes ‘Infinite Furniture.’ We’re located in downtown Millersburg, Ohio, the heart of Ohio’s Amish Country. Working with Amish furniture makes up approximately 75% of our business model, which includes marketing materials and managing a comprehensive digital presence that helps our retail partners access builder photos, files and price lists.

Berryhill and IDS are keenly aware that the entire world is talking about AI, and that businesses everywhere are working to see how they can adapt AI technology into their products, services and businesses. When asked whether he agreed or disagreed with the statement that the launch of ChatGPT is every bit as important — if not much more important — than the introduction of three other disruptive technologies, namely the personal computer, the first “graphical user interface” web browser and then, of course, the Google search engine, Berryhill replied, “I would agree wholeheartedly.”

“I grew up as a fan of a television show called Star Trek. I was always intrigued by the idea of asking the computer to do something or provide assistance. Now, after almost 60 years it appears that is the way life with

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Swing Into
Summer Sales



IDS launches AI platform

Continued from page 8

computers is headed. He continued, “Now, this is both concerning and exciting. It will make work life and even personal life a whole lot easier, but, will AI take away from the creative aspect of the human mind as we become more and more reliant on the computer?”

Answering his own question, Berryhill said, “I believe it is a balancing act. Meaning, we all have a brain to think for ourselves and deal with life’s challenges. I just hope that we do not become too reliant on machines.”

Berryhill further explained that IDS has been looking at AI tech from the perspective of implementing next-level solutions for manufacturers and retailers. He said IDS opted not to build a dealer portal — which would have seemed like a logical step — with current solutions because they were looking forward. “We purposefully held back on creating a dealer portal, to focus on a cutting-edge AI database that will provide much-needed services to help stores become more efficient.”

But with AI being so new, “There is no off-the-shelf system, so we’ve had to hand code, each and every line of data.” The result is, “It has taken longer than originally anticipated, but after two-and-a-half years, we have finally launched the initial stages of our AI database.”

IDS encountered numerous challenges along the way — as early adopters of technology often do — but the company did not give up on its mission to create a comprehensive AI database. Instead, after three separate occasions of working with outside vendors didn’t work out, Berryhill said IDS took a long look at their options and decided that the best path forward was to take the massive project on as an in-house task. “We created and launched our own AI-based database — hand-coded, as I mentioned previously — and are using it as a building block to expand our program to stores.”

Berryhill said the database “Will not only attract retail customers, and bring them into stores, but will ultimately help reduce back office work,” which is an attractive option, because as everyone knows, there’s much more to a retail operation than simply working the sales floor!

Berryhill said the project definitely has been daunting, “Because we are a pioneer in this field, which always presents challenges.. We’re creating the best system possible, with our ultimate goal of becoming a full-service software and digital marketing company.”

A project as large as this begins with the baseline requirement of a lot of existing data, most notably a data-

base of furniture manufacturers. Berryhill said IDS’s efforts began with “Over 400 builders in eight states, with 90% of the builders being Amish craftsmen. All of our 80,000-plus images in our database come from the stores whose websites we’re developing.”

He emphasized that IDS has a working relationship with every single builder in its database, a distinction he said separates IDS from other marketing companies. “We will not show a builder on a retailer’s website unless the store is an authorized dealer for that builder. It’s not fair to anyone in the process — the customer, the retailer and of course, the builders who’ve forged the relationships with the store,” Berryhill said protecting the integrity of the database that constitutes the lead building block of their AI platform is something they take very seriously. In addition, “We keep these files updated, and we work daily to incorporate new and updated images into the database.”

Thankfully, Berryhill said, that maintenance is not as difficult as it once was. “The nice thing about the AI functionality is, all we have to do is upload the raw data into the database and the Artificial Intelligence takes over, and organizes each piece and the corresponding wood type, options, size variables and pricing for each piece,” which is an enormous time-saver.

Berryhill also said the images IDS uses will be He added that this component of the AI platform “will be far more functional and exciting than just looking at a website that features images that change colors, but that are not a true reflection of the furniture’s actual color.” This represents a passion point for Berryhill, because other images, including computer-generated images (CGI) “do not reflect the true colors on a computer screen or smart phone, because each and every monitor shows slightly different colors.” He added that, “We performed a survey of website users and while most like the overall experience, they were very disappointed in the fact CGI graphics did not show true colors.”

IDS is focused on this in no small part because, one of the top reasons for returns in the hardwood furniture industry is because a customer doesn’t like the color or finish — often claiming that it doesn’t look like it did on the dealer’s floor or website. Of course, at that point, the retailer is left in a difficult position: They want to please the customer, and the builder did their job, completing the piece as ordered. “So, in a lot of those cases the store is left with no choice but to take the piece back, and hope that they can sell it off the floor — usually at a loss.”

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IDS launches AI platform

Continued from page 10

Berryhill said that with the AI tech IDS has developed customers can get a much more accurate representation of the furniture. Continuing this thought Berryhill said, "We recommend to stores that customers choose two or three stain or paint colors and that actual selections be given to them so they can see how the color really works in their home. We all know how much stain color can vary, and this narrows the potential for disappointment." Doing this won't interrupt lead times because, "with the exception of Quickship items, stain or paint choices can be finalized 2 weeks after the sale is completed."

It's clear that this project has been a massive project for Berryhill and the entire team at IDS, but the good news is, "We've launched our beta version of the AI-enabled websites and are in the process of resolving any challenges as they arise in a real-world scenario. He said this is only possible through the cooperation of IDS's retail partners, and "We have some pretty awesome stores that have been incredibly patient and wonderful as we work through this process. The Beta-tester stores are locked in for each and every improvement we launch, and at no cost to them," which he says is "a thank you for working with us, explaining that, "we have not collected a payment from the stores since September 2021 when we began this project."

Even with all of this in mind, Berryhill indicated that IDS is only showcasing the tip of the iceberg at this point, and there is much more to come. "Our Infinite Furniture AI database contains over 80,000 pieces of furniture, with full details and pricing for each piece. Using AI tech allows us to explore, analyze and visualize fast-moving, complex data within milliseconds." In the coming months, "Our AI will include a chatbot that interacts with the customer and responds with furniture ideas, searches and recommendations based on the customer's thoughts and ideas."

Customers most likely will not realize it's an AI-based conversation, and "Eventually the AI chatbot will function as a design consultant, expressing ideas about room colors, stains, furniture types and styles. Within the upcoming year, our AI will allow for completion of a sale, order processing and tracking update reminders."

The entire system "will be integrated into each of our unique individualized websites, creating a dynamic experience for the customer and conversion into store sales."

He added that IDS also is working with a couple retailers on a Beta project "to remove the labor-intensive updating and maintenance these sites require. This is just a start of things to come, with future improvements that will benefit each store using our service."

While all of this might seem complex or even intimidating to some people, Berryhill is quick to dispel those reservations, saying, "The beauty of our system is, we make the process as simple as possible to use by even the least tech-savvy customer. Our retail store clients will have individualized websites that do not look like competitors' sites. We want to make the experience as informative as we can, while making the website easy to navigate. The upcoming in-store tool functions will also be easy to use, with the process being automated once a sale occurs. AI gives us the ability to do all of this."

Bob Berryhill is VP of Sales at Infinite Digital Solutions/Infinite Furniture. You can reach him at: 137 W. Jackson Street, Millersburg, Ohio 44654 bob@infinitedigitalsolutions.com www.infinitedigitalsolutions.com

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They're young, tech savvy...and on your sales floor!

Educating the next generation of high-quality furniture buyers

By Jerry Klingerman

It happens somewhere around age 35.

That's the age when young people look around their homes and say to themselves and/or their partner, "Why do we keep buying this cheap bolt-together stuff? Let's buy some good furniture."

I refer to it as "aging in" to higher-quality product choices.

And that, my friends, is where you come in.

When those potential customers walk into your store, it's your opportunity to help them begin a lifetime of enjoying the quality and beauty of fine, handcrafted, solid wood furniture manufactured by Amish artisans.

Before we dive in, here's something I want to share right up front: People's buying objections are rarely solely about price. That's an excuse people default to when they don't really understand the value of what you offer and, as the saying goes, "A confused mind always says "no."

So, the purpose of this article is to "unconfuse" and educate your potential buyers.

With that in mind, let's talk about how those folks came to enter your store. Understand that before today's age-35 consumers ever step foot in your store, they've checked you out.

They've looked at your website, read the reviews on various other websites, and they've reviewed your Social Media channels.

That's a good thing.

If, after doing all that homework, they come into your store, a big part of the modern-day sales process has already taken place. <<<< You might want to read that sentence again.

Gone are the days when consumers randomly happen upon your store. With respect to Amish-built furniture, that only happens in Amish Country when people are enjoying tourist-related activities. In the rest of the country, this demographic (yes; we're talking about Millennials, most of whom are all grown up now) does not do random in-person shopping for big-ticket items. It Does. Not. Happen.

So, again, if they make it into your store, you're miles down the road. But there's still work to be done.

As I used to tell my own retail furniture clients, "My job is to get them through the door, after that it's up to you." That sentiment rings true today — but however it happened, here they are, and now it's your job to sell them!

So, what's next? *Education.*

I'm not going to deep-dive into retail psychology. It's manifestly up to you to provide all of your customers



with a positive buying experience. That should be a given.

Rather, Let's talk about the product itself. There really isn't anything exactly like high-quality solid wood Amish-built furniture. It's produced with an eye toward quality that, frankly, doesn't exist in many other product arenas. Another huge selling point is, quite simply, that it's made in America.

Pivoting off that, Amish-built furniture also presses a couple other buttons for this buying group: Amish-built furniture is produced by small, independently-owned shops that normally include the owner and, on average, fewer than five employees. These are the ultimate locally owned small businesses that this demographic loves!

It's likely that you, the store owner, know a number of your suppliers by first name. Not to sound crass, but use that. Tell customers about your own experiences of visiting these folks in their small shops adjacent to

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Next Generation

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their homes in picturesque Amish Country. If applicable, tell them not only about the business relationships you've developed, but the friendships as well.

You might also mention that virtually all of the suppliers along the whole Amish-built furniture supply chain are local to that area, and there are literally thousands of spin-off jobs related to the furniture industry.

In addition, you should be able to convincingly share the fact that hardwood furniture is environmentally friendly: Wood is a highly renewable product, and for decades now, woodlots in the states where the logs are sourced have been managed with an eye toward the future. It only makes sense: A well-managed woodlot can be harvested roughly every 20-25 years, so a woods that bore fruit once will do so again and again. Read: These products are not sourced from woods that have been clear-cut. Private landowners do not do that!

So...The people in front of you have done their homework and entered your store. You've engaged them in conversation and share a few very key points with them. Now, it's time to get specific: Talking about style, wood and stain choices.

Chances are your customers will have pictures of what they're looking for on their phone. Frankly, I'd be surprised if they didn't. So, that should give you a pretty good idea about what style they like and want to see.

But, here's a big revelation: Don't be surprised— as I was when I used to work home and garden shows in large cities — that a lot of people don't really understand what "hardwoods" are, or anything about various wood species.

Example: When I produced a furniture exhibit furniture in Pittsburgh, PA, on behalf of about 12 furniture builders from Ohio's Amish Country, one of the items we featured was a neat canoe-shaped bookshelf. It was a perfect "rustic cabin" piece and got a lot of attention.

But as I would explain to people that this item was made of pine, I almost always received a "deer in headlights" look in response. Meaning, the average person who is not involved in the furniture industry probably doesn't understand what a hardwood species is. What that also means is, they might not understand the various cost factors where different hardwoods are concerned.

So, this is your opportunity to briefly educate them on the most popular wood species: Oak, Quarter-sawn White Oak, Cherry, Rustic Cherry, "Hard" Maple, Brown Maple, Walnut, Elm and hickory. Of course, today we also have furniture that's built with reclaimed woods (note: repurposing also is wildly popular with this customer group).

Briefly, this is how I explain those species:

Oak (Red Oak): The gold standard of hardwood furniture. Very solid, and features an "open" attractive grain that you can actually feel. You can choose designs and stains that make an oak ensemble look great in any room, any décor.

Quartersawn White Oak: A premium Oak option that showcases a magnificent grain based on how the logs are cut. It's more expensive because not as much of the log gets used in QSWO, but the look is truly second to none. When finished in the always-popular OCS 113 "Michaels Cherry" it truly is a beautiful look. QSWO costs approx. 40 percent

more than Red Oak.

Cherry: The smooth, almost glass-like feel of Cherry has made it a popular choice for more-formal options for generations. Example: A classic Queen Anne dining table with matching chairs. Historically, Cherry's almost always been finished in darker stains, but it's quite attractive in "natural" finishes as well. Like QSWO, Cherry is considered a premium choice and the price will reflect that. But...

Some customers wo like the look of Cherry — but not the price tag — will love the option that "Brown Maple" or "Soft Maple" offers: It looks almost identical to Cherry, but carries a price tag similar to Red Oak. Most consumers will be hard-pressed to tell the difference, but you can point out that, where Cherry reflects more reddish tones, Brown Maple has subtle chocolate tones. Again, the only thing that most customers will take away is that Brown Maple looks like Cherry, but costs like Oak.

Other options you can throw into the mix are "Rustic" Cherry and Rustic QSWO. If you've been in the furniture business for a long time, you know that these options were virtually unheard of 15 years ago. Made from, #2 grade woods that show knots, sap pockets and other "imperfections," these species can be very popular with people not only don't mind, but actually want to see the natural character of the wood. A natural finish on "Sap" Cherry can create a truly beautiful look.

Walnut. Ah, what can we say about Walnut? It's a true classic. Walnut fell out of favor in the early 2000s, but it's back in a big way. Based on where it is in the popularity mix, it can be a little more difficult to

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(Below) The Madearis Chair **Horseshoe Bend Chair** showcases two large horizontal slats that provide excellent support, and clean lines that allow it to blend well with any table choice. Paired with the matching arm chair, it's sure to fit with almost any look. — *See ad on page 26*



^^^The Small Lennox Collection from **Hillside Chair** is a great solution for smaller spaces where you still want an attractive set. The chair has a Special Comfort Profile, and features the same two-tone finish as the table – OCS 119 and Mindful gray, on Brown Maple. — *See ad on page 27*



^^^ The Broadway Sofa Table is the newest offering from **Deer Valley Woodworking**. This sleek, modern style features large “stacked” X-shaped legs, and a live edge Walnut top. At home in the living room or entry way, it’s sure to be a conversation starter! — *See ad on page 11*

<<< New from **Ebony Woodworking** is this exciting solid-top table with Rough Sawn Character Walnut and bread-board ends! Sitting on a metal base, this eye-catching piece measures 40x84 and is sure to grab customers’ attention on your floor. — *See ad on page 25*



<<< **Hidden Hollow Wood and Upholstery** offers a full line of wood and upholstered furniture in a number of designs, including its latest offering, the Jasper Arm Chair. Gently curved arms provide an inviting look to this classically-inspired design that is easily at home in living, dining or office applications. — *See ad on page 15*



<<< The Reno chair is an exciting new entry from **Country Comfort Woodworking**. It shows a rounded top that’s straight on the bottom and metal supports that are available in Sungold or Black. The legs are flared wide, with a scooped seat for great comfort. — *See ad on page 29*



New from **Barkman Furniture** is the Franklin Sofa Counter Table! Shown with coordinating side chairs, this exciting new piece adds function and character to any modern living space. Featuring a built-in power station and attractive rub-through finish, this set is sure to be a wonderful gathering place in any home. Shown in Red Oak top, Brown Maple base in OCS-122 Cocoa 10 Sheen (top) and OCS-342 Country White w/OCS-122 Cocoa Rub Thru 10 Sheen (base) — *See ad on page 4*



Offering a unique, stylish approach to the swivel glider is the #LSG46 from **Buckeye Rocker**. The high back and contoured solid wood arms are designed for maximum comfort, and when combined with Oak and the ever-popular OCS 113 Michael's finish, and L110 soft gray leather, you get a piece that combines modern style with comfort. — *See ad on page 11*



Made of 100% treated yellow pine, this pergola and swingbed from **A&L Furniture** are naturally weather and insect resistant making them beautiful and durable. Available in nine stain options, white, or unfinished. The swingbed accommodates a standard twin mattress or you can order a custom 4" thick outdoor cushion. Made in the USA. — *See ad on page 9*

(Below)The Arco chair from **Wengerd Wood** features a curved top, two large inverted-style slats in the back that curve for support. Combined with a scooped seat and slightly curved legs, it's a great look! — *See ad on page 3*





^^^The Ventura Writing Desk from **Ashery Oak** features inset drawers and, at 64"W x 26"D x 31"H it has a large surface for your laptop, monitor or whatever office/home office accessories you need. Shown here in Rustic Cherry with OCS-119 Cappuccino Stain to create a classic look. — **See ad on page 12**

^^^ **Troyer Woodcraft** present an exciting new option for those who want a hide-a-bed, but also want something stylish as well. The Reclaimed Hide-A-Bed is made of reclaimed wood, and folds up into a small space, making it perfect for apartments, condos or perhaps a guest room that doubles as a home office. Contact them for details on finish options. — **See ad on page 30**



^^^The Glen Canyon Collection from **Meadow Wood Furniture** features an eye-catching combination of Barn Floor/Brown Maple. The traditional styling includes a high headboard, with the set also showcasing a roomy nine-drawer dresser and mirror combo. An excellent choice for a cabin, vacation home or anywhere you want a rustic-style look. — **See ad on page 15**



<<<The Umbrella/Coat Stand from **Superior Furniture** is an excellent all-purpose piece for your foyer, mud-room or anywhere you need a handy place to throw your keys, charge your phone and hang your coat, purse or backpack. The Mission-Style slats provide an excellent storage place for umbrellas or anything you don't want on the floor! — **See ad on page 29**



The Belmont side and arm chair from **Hickory Lane Woodworking** features two wide slats that extend from the curved top. The back legs and slats all have an eye-pleasing gentle curve. It's an excellent pairing with almost any table, and available in a variety of wood and stain choices. — **See ad on page 26**

(Below) **Gliders By Miller** invites you to experience the #296 Swivel glider. The back fans out wide and it has a thick padded seat for excellent comfort. Available in Oak, Cherry, QSWO Brown Maple Hickory and now Elm. — **See ad on page 7**



<<<The Delta table from **Hermies Table Shop** has a lot going on! Opposing half circles and a smaller circle in the base create a truly eye-catching design. All of that sits on thick supports, and draws your eye naturally to a beautiful solid top. — **See ad on page 7**



>>>The Sierra Quick Ship Set from **Finishing Designs** features Sierra chairs and a Bunker Leg Table that measures 42" x 48" with two Leaves. It is available in Sap Cherry with OCS 112 Provincial stain. — **See ad on page 17**



>>>The Glendale Bedroom Suite is new from **Troy Lane Woodcraft** This unique collection features beautiful wooden inlays that add a dramatic flair to an otherwise simple design. This one is sure to grab attention in any setting. Inset panels, dovetailed drawers and full extension drawer slides make this a remarkable collection. — **See ad on page 31**



>>>>**Dining Solutions by Farmstead Acres** introduces the exciting new Medina set. The base of the two-tone round table and the chair backs feature a shape that almost looks like a tulip. It's an excellent selection where you need a smaller footprint with lots of style. — **See ad on page 2**



Next Generation

Continued from page 14

source. Walnut commands a premium price all the way along the supply chain, from the woodlot owner, right to the retail floor, but there's just something about walnut that gives it a timeless, classic — classy — look that makes it a wonderful choice for more discerning customers. Walnut is almost always finished in a clear/natural stain that showcases the incredible beauty and attractive color variances, which include various shades of browns/chocolate to even shades of red, gray and even purple.

Elm. As opposed to Walnut, which has been popular virtually forever, a relative newcomer to the modern hardwood furniture arena is Elm. The first time I ever saw a piece constructed in Elm, I asked the craftsman about it. I asked because the grain was incredible. (I often jokingly refer to Elm as “Quartersawn on steroids.”) Elm does have a truly fascinating grain, but also is a truly “hard” wood. Wood Magazine says, “Its twisted, interlocking grain makes elm difficult to work with anything but power tools.” The craftsman I was visiting confirmed that Elm was notoriously difficult to work with. But in just a few years after that first glimpse of Elm, it became a popular choice. It also commands a higher price than standard species. Still, it might be a good option for those customers who are looking for “something different.”

Along those “something different” lines, are the various reclaimed furniture options available to today's shoppers. Mostly crafted from reclaimed barn wood, I call this “furniture with a story.” The bad news is, we're losing more and more of America's pioneer-era barns. That's sad, because they

are absolute works of art. The good news is, these days many of those barns are being dismantled, instead of simply torn down, with the wood being used to make everything from dining sets to bedrooms and occasionals and entertainment pieces. The reclaimed pieces are unique, rustic — and expensive. The premium look comes with a premium price because of supply challenges and the fact that reclaimed species have to be run through a process that removes nails and other hardware. It also needs to be dried, to kill off any unwelcome tiny visitors — who might have contributed to the character of the piece, but are not welcome in consumers' homes! Reclaimed furniture skyrocketed in popularity virtually the moment they entered the Amish-built furniture marketplace, and they look to be popular for a very long time.

Last but not least is “Hard Maple.” And in particular right now, wormy Maple. When compared with some of the other wood species, Maple has a rather, plain, unremarkable look. That's not to say that it doesn't have a nice grain; it does. But if grain is a determining factor, maple is probably not going to be a customer's first choice. However, wormy Maple is a different story. This variation shows actual worm holes and, perhaps more importantly, the variations in color that the presence of the worms caused over the tree's life. Wormy Maple has a very different look than regular Hard maple, and has gained a strong following, especially when accented with the aforementioned Walnut. While it might not be every customer's taste, the classic, traditional look of Walnut combined with wormy Maple definitely has a distinctive look. Only time will tell if it has an enduring appeal to consumers,

but since its introduction approx. 10 years ago, the Walnut/Wormy Maple combination has gained a solid foothold in both dining and bedroom collections.

Now, as sure as I'm writing this, I don't expect you to explain all of these choices to consumers. But as I said at the outset, people will buy high-quality items if they understand why it costs more. If you can share some of your knowledge with potential clients, you have a better chance to not only make a one-time sale, but also to gain a long-term customer.

The current generation that's “aging in” to buying higher-quality items will spend money. They just need to understand more about how/why it comes at a higher price than the throwaway furniture with which they've now grown tired.

As we wrap this up, I should add that the digital properties mentioned at the outset are a key to getting people through your door. But you can't just put up a website, Facebook or Instagram page and let it languish. Constant attention to your digital presence is required. It's not an option, it's required and should be part of your budgeted items.

Whereas in the past, a marketing budget would include radio and local daily newspapers, I would (with some sadness) suggest discontinuing those. I've used local radio and daily newspapers many times over the course of my career, but the simple truth is, your current target market isn't in those places! They don't listen to the radio, they are streaming their music (including in their cars), and they don't read newspapers. Their entire lives, including their exposure to advertisements is online. You need to embrace that, accept it and build on it.

—EXP—



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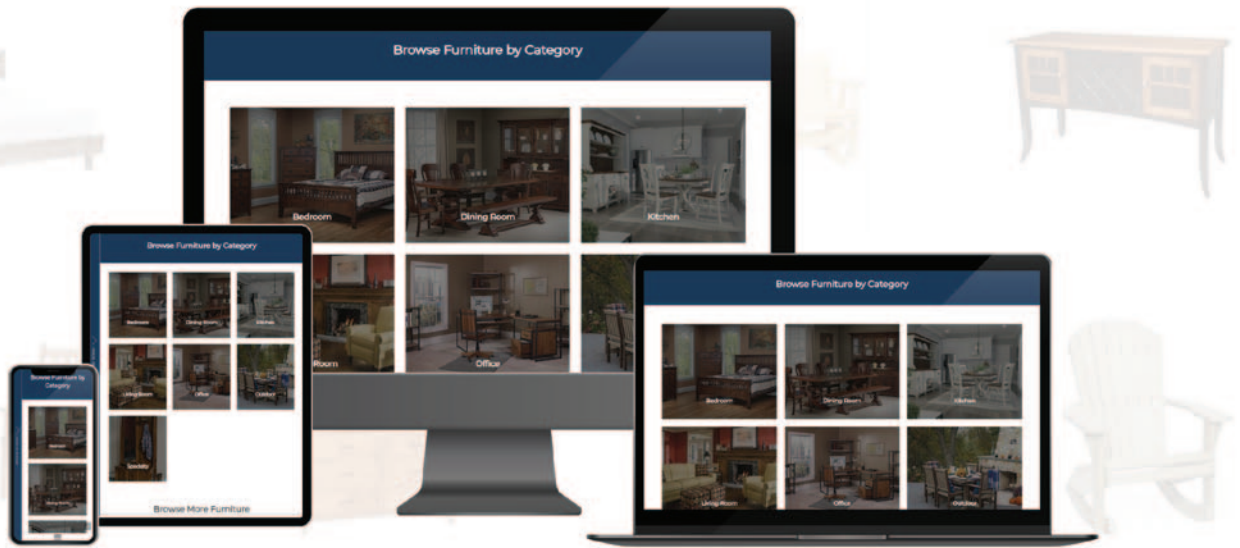
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