November/December 2021

Sleep Savvy

the magazine for sleep products professionals

L&W Bedding Caters to Every Customer Need

"If you can sleep on it, we can build it."

— John Wheatley, founder of the factory-direct in the Quad Cities area

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A Bittersweet Goodbye

As much as I love being the editor of Sleep Savvy, it's time for me to move on. Here's why

Like many of us, I have never been good with goodbyes. When I was 4, I cried for a week when my parents sent my bunny rabbit pajamas (handed down from two cousins and my sister) to a "special farm" because my precious pj's were barely more than tatters. But the top and bottom set, married by snaps around my waist, offered me a sense of security at night and helped me fall asleep. To this day, it's painful for me to bid farewell to things and people I love.

I remember my bunny rabbit pajamas because that was my first experience with saying goodbye. Over a handful of decades, it hasn't become less painful as I announce that this is my last issue as editorial director for the International Sleep Products Association, which publishes Sleep Savvy and its sister publication BedTimes. The past 10 years have afforded me the opportunity to grow professionally and personally. And for that, I will be eternally thankful.

Tendering my resignation has been difficult, leading to much soul searching on my place in the publishing world in the twilight of my career. To make a long story short — I have accepted a position as editor of a North Carolina-based lifestyle magazine in my hometown of Greensboro. Having led several similar magazines about the Southeast, I think this publication is a good fit for me.

I know I am leaving the magazines in extremely qualified hands. Beth English, who, until a couple weeks ago served as our managing editor, has been named editorial director for both magazines. A seasoned communications professional and editor, Beth has worked for ISPA for seven years and has mastered the complex bedding industry. Surely, the magazines will flourish with her at the helm. I am very proud of my colleague and friend, who has brilliant ideas on advancing Sleep Savvy's content.

Beth has a team working with her that makes the Bill Belichick/Tom Brady Patriots look like a Pop Warner gang. Leading advertising is Kerri Bellias, who is joined by sales representative Gary Socha and ad production/sales coordinator Julie Lewis Dossey. Stephanie Belcher designs attractive pages to complement our editorial, and Mary Rulli keeps our circulation growing. Editor at large Dave Perry provides his extensive industry knowledge (does anyone know more about the bedding industry?!), and former editor in chief Julie Palm provides myriad contributions, from writing to spearheading special projects.

From ISPA headquarters, I could not have asked for a more supportive, encouraging and thoughtful leadership. I know Catherine Lyons, Mary Helen Rogers and Ryan Trainer will extend the same to Beth.

Thank you for 10 memorable, rewarding years. I wish you every success, and I will never forget you.

Mary Best
Editor in chief

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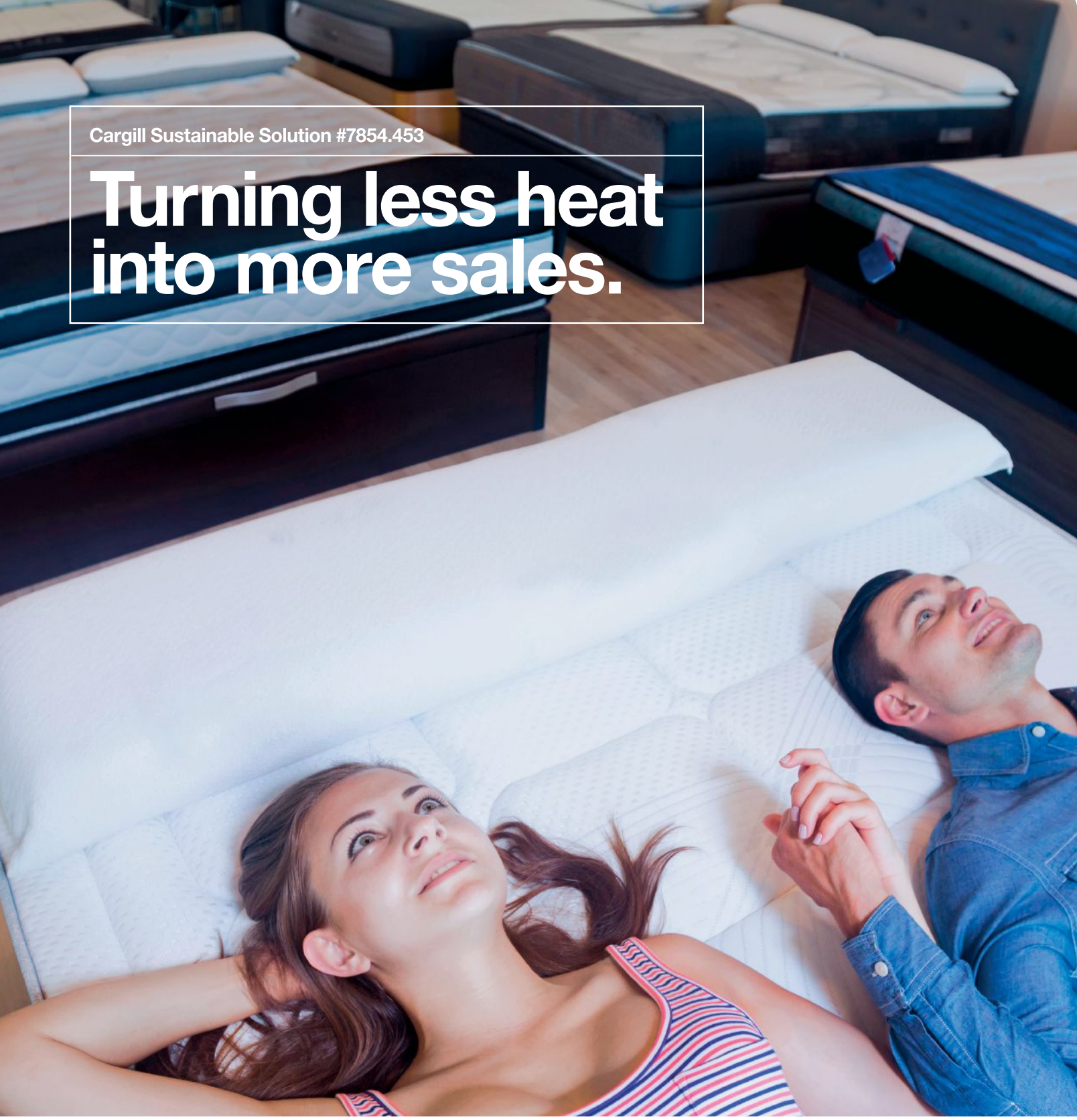

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Something (Not) to Chew On

To avoid turning off customers, here are 5 habits to adopt. First up: Leave the gum at home

CHOMP. CHOMP. CHOMP.

Chewing gum can keep your breath minty fresh, diminish cravings for food and cigarettes, and burn off some nervous energy. It also can annoy the heck out colleagues and shoppers.

You may think your gum chewing is unobtrusive, but people notice, and it's one of those things — like fingernails scraping a chalkboard — that can irritate other people instantly.

"Chewing gum at work is like fidgeting, but instead of using your hands, you are fidgeting with your mouth. Lip smacking, gum cracking, and the sound and sight of someone chewing incessantly can be as distracting as someone clicking and twirling their pens nonstop in a meeting," writes Sally Hayes in a May 2020 article for Tough Nickel.

If you are worried about your breath, pop a few quick-dissolving mints or bring a toothbrush and toothpaste with you to work to freshen up throughout the day. If you must chew, take a gum break outside.

Here are four other workplace behaviors that will endear you to co-workers and customers alike:

O TONING DOWN YOUR TALK: Speaking too loudly can distract your co-workers and come off as aggressive when dealing with shoppers. Maintain a conversational tone. As Hayes notes, "Beyond having to speak over construction noises, sirens or other loud sounds, there really is no reason to raise your voice at work."

O PUNCHING UP YOUR POSTURE: Watch your body language. Slouching in a chair at the sales desk indicates a lack of interest and energy. Crossing your arms while talking to a customer can come off as defensive. Sitting and standing up straight, with arms by your sides, conveys that you're open and engaged, giving "other people the respect and attention they deserve," Hayes says.

O SPIFFING UP — IN PRIVATE: We wish we didn't have to include this one but we've caught retail sales associates brushing their hair and even clipping their nails on the sales floor. It's a mattress store, not a spa. Personal grooming tasks should be done at home or in the bathroom, Hayes says.

O DINING WITH DECORUM: Depending on your hours, you may need to eat a meal at the store. If that's the case, try to eat in a back room or discretely behind the sales desk. And be careful what you bring. Strong smells — microwaved broccoli, reheated curry, fried foods, even popcorn — will linger in mattress fabrics and on your clothes. And no one wants to rest-test a mattress that smells like leftover halibut.

Popping the Question

Follow these best practices for inquiring about a potential employee's Covid-19 vaccination status and avoid paying a fine

THE TRICKY QUESTION MORE and more employers are facing as they require vaccinated employees is this: How do I properly ask about a job candidate's Covid-19 vaccination status without violating human resources laws?

Inc.com contributor and HR consultant Suzanne Lucas put the question to a couple of employment attorneys and wrote about their answers for the website in September.

This is what they recommend:

O PUT THE VACCINE REQUIREMENT ON THE APPLICATION. You don't have to wait until the interview to spring the vaccine requirement on a job candidate. Employment attorney and HR consultant Kate Bischoff recommends something along these lines: "This position requires that you be vaccinated against Covid-19 unless you need a reasonable accommodation for religion or a health-related need."

Then, after making a job offer, verify the person's vaccination status, or begin the process of figuring out how to make accommodations for the person's exemption.

O SCREEN YOUR CANDIDATES. Employment attorney Dan Schwartz says companies may consider asking about vaccination status as a screening question rather than waiting until the job interview because it's not a protected category under most state laws.

Federal law supports (and sometimes requires) vaccine mandates. "The courts have consistently upheld a business's right to mandate vaccines for employees as long as you have the proper exceptions for religion and medical issues," Lucas wrote.

O IT'S OK IF CANDIDATES VOLUNTEER THAT INFORMATION on their resumes, but it shouldn't be a requirement.

MANDATE: YEA OR NAY

IN SEPTEMBER, PRESIDENT Joe Biden mandated that all employers with 100 or more workers must require those workers to either be vaccinated or undergo Covid-19 testing on a weekly basis. Employers can face fines of up to $14,000 for noncompliance.

Not surprisingly, Americans are strongly divided about the mandate. According to a Harris Poll of more than 2,000 U.S. adults who were surveyed about the mandate Sept. 17-19, 55% support the employer-mandated vaccine, and 45% oppose it. Among vaccinated Americans, 68% support the mandate, but only 23% of the unvaccinated support it. On the political spectrum, 76% of Democrats are in favor of the mandate, while only 39% of Republicans support it.

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Dec. 21: First day of winter
Dec. 24: Christmas Eve
Dec. 25: Christmas Day
Dec. 26: First Day of Kwanzaa
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L&W Bedding Follows Time-Tested Recipe for Success

The factory-direct keeps the good old days of mattress making and personalized selling alive in the Quad Cities area

By DAVID PERRY
Photography by TODD MIZENER/ QUAD-CITY TIMES

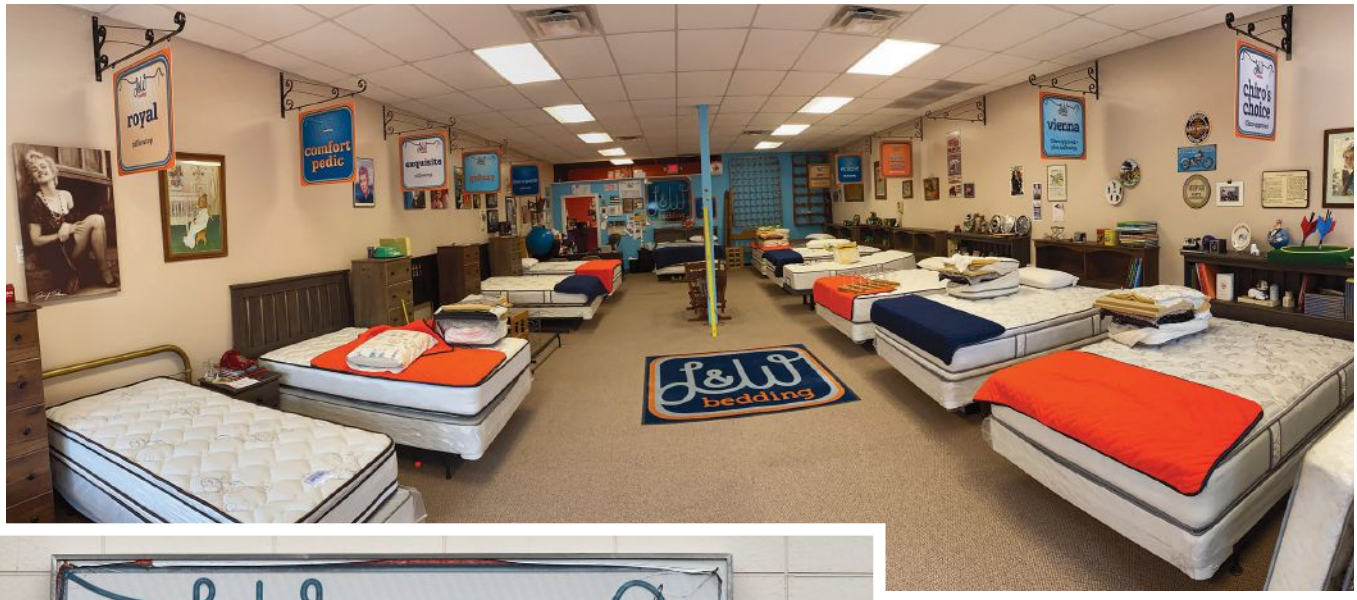
L&W BEDDING, WITH ITS factory that time forgot, could be in the running for the title of the nation's smallest retailer. And it's doing just fine, thank you. Some newer ways of producing and selling mattresses are overrated, according to this factory-direct operation.

A few qualifications are necessary as we relate the story of L&W Bedding, which has a 33-year history of serving customers as a manufacturer-retailer in the Midwest.

John Wheatley, the company's founder, doesn't know for certain but he thinks he just might be the nation's smallest mattress retailer. True, he does have two stores, which puts him ahead of the single-store owners out there, but his stores are open by appointment only Monday through Friday, and for just four hours — from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. — on Saturdays. And Wheatley has a lean operation, with just three full-time employees, includ-

FOUNDATIONAL MATTERS John Wheatley started L&W Bedding in 1988 after learning how to make beds during a stint at another mattress producer in the area.

L&W Bedding



Top: SHOW AND TELL Vintage photographs and accessories lend a sense of history and interest to L&W Bedding's small showroom in Bettendorf, Iowa.

Left: QUAD CITIES CLOUT The store in Bettendorf is across the Mississippi River from the company's factory and showroom in Moline, Illinois.

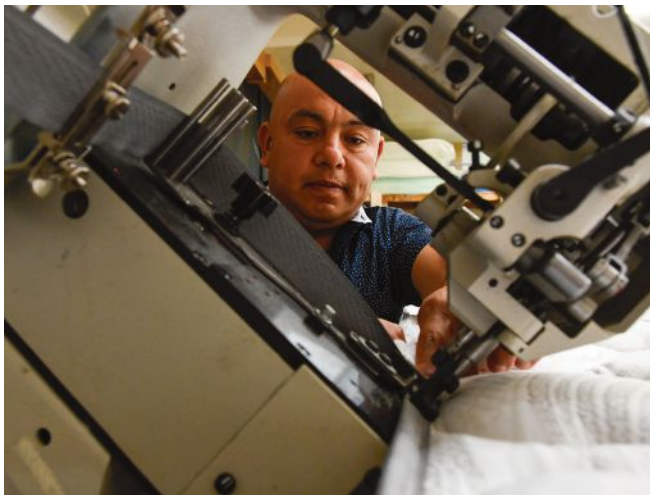
ing himself. The trio makes the beds, and sells them, too.

If L&W Bedding isn't the smallest mattress retailer in the nation, Wheatley allows, it's certainly one of the smallest. He also asserts he's the best mattress retailer in his area — the Quad Cities corner of Iowa and Illinois, where he has a factory and showroom in Moline, Illinois, and a store in Bettendorf, Iowa.

The L&W way

The way L&W Bedding builds mattresses, Wheatley proudly acknowledges, is rooted in the 1970s and 1980s, when most mattresses still were made with two functional sides. Back then, typical box-spring foundations really were full of springs, and they worked with innerspring mattresses as shock absorbers to provide long-lasting comfort and support for sleepers.

L&W Bedding



TALE OF THE TAPE Jose Beltran, co-owner of L&W Bedding, operates the tape-edge machine at the factory in Moline. The company's three full-time employees make and sell all the beds.

QUALITY COUNTS Owen Beltran, quality control manager and son of co-owner Jose Beltran, builds a wood foundation in the L&W factory.

Those were the good old days of the mattress business, Wheatley says, when he learned how to make mattresses, and those are the good modern days at L&W Bedding today.

"We haven't changed the way we've done business in more than 30 years," Wheatley says. "The quality of and education about our product is the same as it was when we started the business. We do things the old-fashioned way and that resonates with our customers."

"Our strategy," he continues, "has been to provide education on the craftsmanship and what's going inside the mattresses."

But don't think that Wheatley disdains other advancements in the industry. Far from it.

"We have adapted a digital marketing strategy to reach a targeted audience in-market for mattresses and we focus our messaging around key benefits for the customer," he says. "Also, I recently had our website (LWBeddingqca.com) redeveloped to be more user friendly and easy to navigate."

The internet plays a key role in educating L&W Bedding's customers about mattresses. "We receive inquiries and many consumers are doing their homework online before calling us for an appointment," Wheatley says. "I think having a strong brand presence and longevity in the market with a good reputation has helped our business be successful. Additionally, I do tap into our existing customer base for testimonials and referrals to their friends and colleagues. I actually designed a Chiro's Choice product, which has been tested by a few chiropractor buddies of mine, and we've leveraged those relationships with messaging."

When it comes to mattress designs, the customer is king at L&W Bedding, which offers customized designs for humans and also their four-legged friends. "We're able to build any mattress to specs or whatever the customer needs," Wheatley says. "We do RV, boat, pet, youth or any custom-size order. Basically, if you can sleep on it, we can build it."

While most of the beds made by L&W Bedding are for the residential consumer market, the company does have a few contract and wholesale accounts, including the Salvation Army, and offers wholesale pricing for those larger orders.

Two-sided mattresses are tops

What's selling at L&W Bedding these days?

"Our two-sided, flippable pillow-top mattresses represent 85% of our mattress sales today," Wheatley says. "The price points range from $699 to $3,000. Also, half of our pillow-tops are sold with foundations and the other half with coiled box springs. The coiled box springs provide extra longevity with the mattress."

Those coiled box springs, a staple of bed designs decades ago when two-sided mattresses were the norm, are a point of particular pride for Wheatley. "I'm probably the only person in the Midwest who still sells box springs," he says. "You could drive from here to Chicago, here to St. Louis, here to Kansas City, and not find a traditional box spring."

Wheatley says his company's traditional box springs are designed to work in tandem with its mattresses to provide comfort and support. A rigid foundation that doesn't offer any give to the mattress will cause the mattress to wear out more quickly, and single-sided mattresses don't have the springiness and resilience of two-sided models, he says. That combination of

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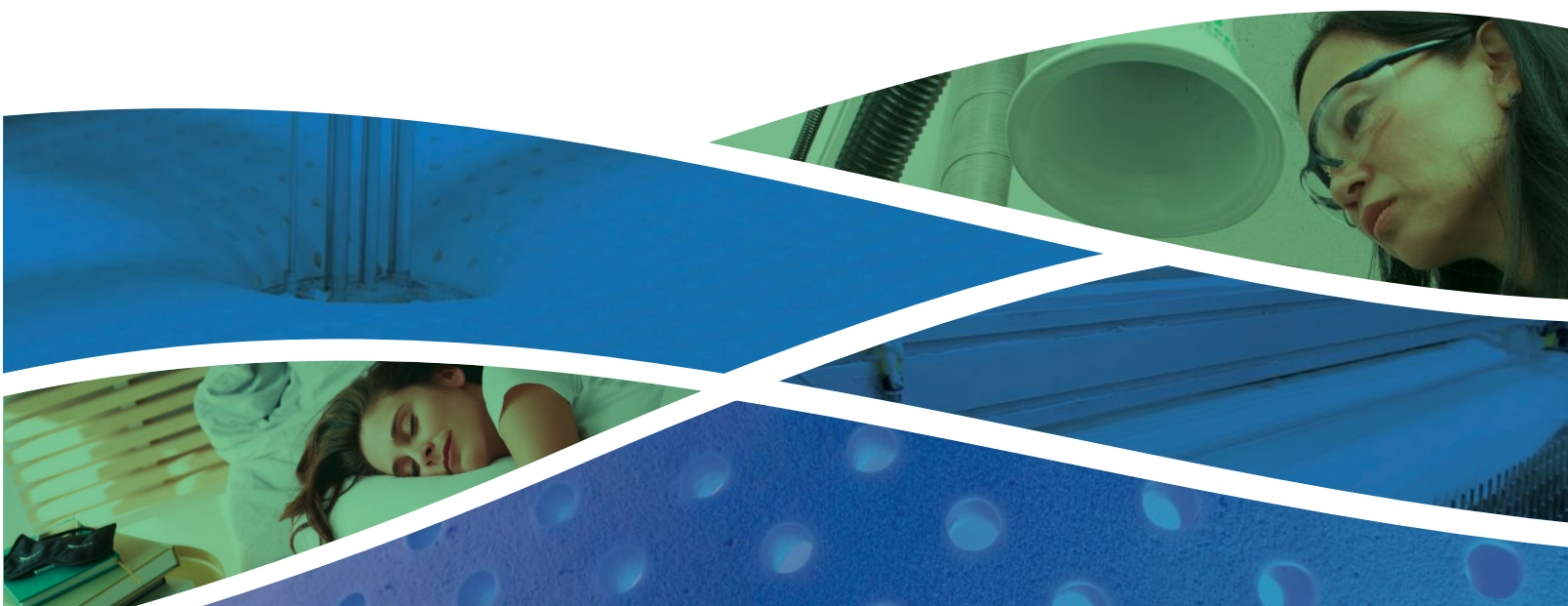

IN THE LAND OF LINCOLN AND DEERE, WHEATLEY BUILDS A MATTRESS LEGACY

JOHN WHEATLEY'S HISTORY AT L&W BEDDING, THE MANUFACTURER-RETAILER HE FOUNDED, IS WRAPPED IN THE QUAD CITIES, TOWNS THAT GREW TO PROMINENCE BECAUSE THEY SHARED A BEND OF THE MISSISSIPPI RIVER, ONE OF AMERICA'S GREAT TRANSPORTATION CORRIDORS.

Two of the Quad cities — Davenport and Bettendorf — are in Iowa, north of the Mississippi, and two — Moline and Rock Island — are in Illinois, south of the river.

The area boasts a rich history. An up-and-coming lawyer named Abraham Lincoln represented the Rock Island Railroad Co. when it was sued by a steamboat owner in 1856 who wasn't happy about a railroad bridge built across the Mississippi. Lincoln's skillful handling of that case, which ended with a deadlocked jury but was considered a win for the railroad, helped propel his career forward. He was in the White House a few years later.

Also making history in the area was entrepreneur and inventor John Deere, who moved to Moline with his steel plow company in 1848. Today, Deere & Co. is the city's largest employer.

Wheatley grew up in Moline, and he's proud of the city's heritage. "Moline is the home of John Deere, the best tractors in the world," he says. Wheatley's career started at a bedding factory in Rock Island, where he learned how to make mattresses, and where his dream of starting his own business was born. In 1988, he and a partner founded L&W Bedding in Wheatley's garage in Moline.

The partner soon departed, leaving the business in Wheatley's hands. A few years later, he moved L&W Bedding into the site of the former Salvation Army thrift shop in Moline, where the factory has been located ever since. The sewing room, equipped with Singer sewing machines built in 1933 and 1951, turns out a full line of mattresses, including the first three beds Wheatley designed — the Spinal Guard, the Chiro's Choice and the Vienna. A showroom is located nearby.

In 1995, Wheatley opened his second mattress showroom, across the Mississippi River in Bettendorf. "You need to have a presence on both sides of the river to optimize your business in the Quad Cities," he says.

Ask Wheatley the key to his success and he gives a straightforward response. "If you're going to be somebody," he says, "you have to do a lot of hard work." And that's exactly what he has done.

factors leads single-sided mattresses to break down faster and that leads to more mattress sales, which, Wheatley contends, is why many mattress producers no longer use those traditional box springs with two-sided mattresses.

In contrast, Wheatley says, he would rather sell fewer but better beds. "Why are we trying to make beds last for a long time?" he asks. "Because we can still do it. If other manufacturers wanted to, they could make a bed that would last for a long time without a problem, but they don't do that because they want to make more money that way, so that instead of buying two or three beds in a lifetime, you're going to buy possibly six or seven more. Our beds are designed to last and keep their shape for a long time. They not only outdistance the competition on quality, but they also beat the competition on price and customer service."

L&W Bedding is able to offer excellent customer service, Wheatley says, because "we are a local mom-and-pop shop so we deal directly with any potential problems. We deal with the customers directly."

He recalls a time when a customer complained about a mattress breaking down. Wheatley made a house call and discovered the customer was regularly walking on the mattress to dust the ceiling fan that hung above it. Mattresses are not designed for that type of abuse, he says.

Wheatley's customer connections pay big dividends for the business. He has long-standing relationships with many of his customers, and even knows the families of others. Repeat customers are part of his business model, a strategy he recommends to other retailers. Consumers will pay for quality beds, he says.

"Start selling two-sided mattresses," he advises. "The consumer wants a bed that lasts longer than four to five years. They want a product that can be flipped, with a real box spring, and is built to last." Wheatley says L&W Bedding's premium two-sided mattresses with box springs can provide comfort and support for about 20 years.

Special attention, not special pricing

The sales process at L&W Bedding is highly interactive and often led by Wheatley.

"We ask lots of questions to understand what customers' needs are and we provide recommendations that align with what they are looking for," he says. "The fact that we're a manufacturer allows us to really customize products for them because there isn't a one-size-fits-all solution for mattresses."

Wheatley says his business has been able to navigate the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic by relying on the trust he's built up over decades with his customers.

"We have been fortunate to earn our

Above: CUSTOMER CONNECTIONS When Wheatley (left) talks to a shopper, he focuses on mattress education and product demonstrations.

Left: MULTIPLYING SPRING BENEFITS L&W Bedding describes its Elite model as "the forever bed" because of its premium materials. It is designed to be paired with an "everlasting" box spring that features more springs than a typical box spring for extra longevity.

customers' trust over the years," he says, "and we've kept their safety in mind during the pandemic by offering private in-store appointments, which has been mutually beneficial. They have trusted us to provide a safe shopping environment and the appointments give us the ability to spend more time in a one-on-one setting getting to know their needs before recommending a product solution."

Promotional sales, a staple at most mattress retailers, are nonexistent at L&W Bedding.

"We often get asked if we have sales coming up or special pricing, and that's never been part of our business model," Wheatley says. "We try and price things right and build everything to order, which has given us a niche in our market."

A legacy

Wheatley is proud of the business that he's built, one bed at a time, over the years.

"I love my customers — the new ones and the ones I've been serving for decades," he says. "I guarantee they're happy with the product we make here because it's my life's work."

Ask him how many beds he's made during his career and he pauses, as if images of thousands upon thousands of mattresses are flashing through his mind. "A lot," he says finally, chuckling. That's his best answer.

At 59, Wheatley still loves what he's doing, especially making some of the higher-end mattresses that he calls "masterpieces." "We claim we make the best beds in the world," he says. They are filled with high-resilience foams, natural cotton batting, latex, and high quality springs and support systems, including extra support for the vital center portion of the bed, he says.

Wheatley still operates the quilt machines, preparing the panels that go on the tops and bottoms of his two-sided beds. Jose Beltran, who is co-owner, and his son, Owen Beltran, who serves as quality control manager, fill out the L&W Bedding staff. The three can make about five beds in a day.

"I enjoy working with my dad and with John, and I learn something new each day," Owen Beltran says.

Perhaps someday, Wheatley says, he could turn the business over to the Beltrans, but he has no immediate plans to step aside. "I don't know if I have a retirement bone in my body," he says. "I do enjoy this job." O

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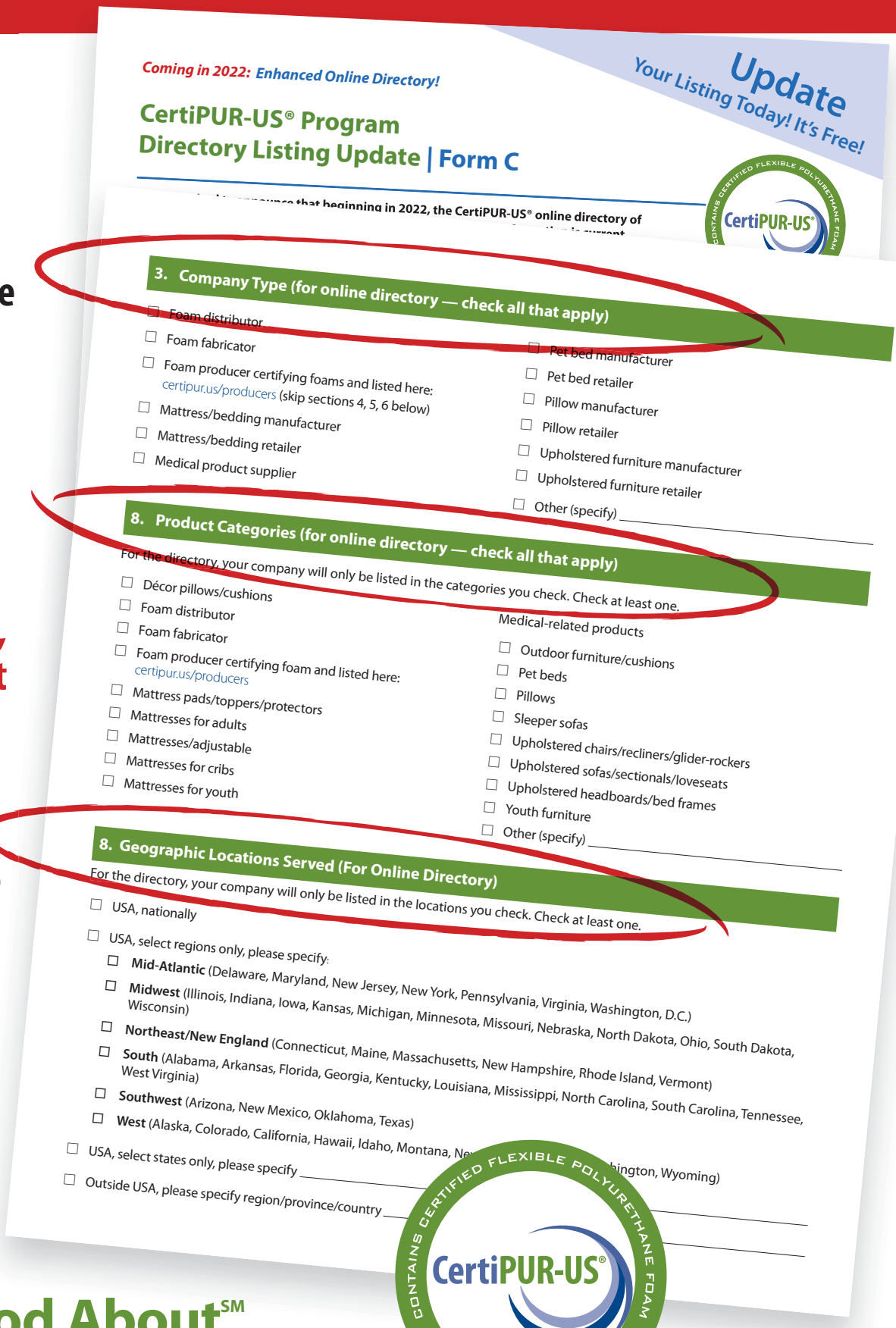

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- ☐ Foam fabricator
- ☐ Foam producer certifying foams and listed here: certipur.us/producers (skip sections 4, 5, 6 below)
- ☐ Mattress/bedding manufacturer
- ☐ Mattress/bedding retailer
- ☐ Medical product supplier
- ☐ Pet bed manufacturer
- ☐ Pet bed retailer
- ☐ Pillow manufacturer
- ☐ Pillow retailer
- ☐ Upholstered furniture manufacturer
- ☐ Upholstered furniture retailer
- ☐ Other (specify) _____

8. Product Categories (for online directory — check all that apply)

For the directory, your company will only be listed in the categories you check. Check at least one.

- ☐ Décor pillows/cushions
- ☐ Foam distributor
- ☐ Foam fabricator
- ☐ Foam producer certifying foam and listed here: certipur.us/producers
- ☐ Mattress pads/toppers/protectors
- ☐ Mattresses for adults
- ☐ Mattresses/adjustable
- ☐ Mattresses for cribs
- ☐ Mattresses for youth

Medical-related products

- ☐ Outdoor furniture/cushions
- ☐ Pet beds
- ☐ Pillows
- ☐ Sleeper sofas
- ☐ Upholstered chairs/recliners/glider-rockers
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- ☐ Upholstered headboards/bed frames
- ☐ Youth furniture
- ☐ Other (specify) _____

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Ring It Up: Triggering a New Mattress Purchase

Better Sleep Council research shows a deteriorating bed prompts replacement; about a third of consumers plan to buy a new mattress within 2 years

BY DAVID PERRY

ABOUT ONE-THIRD OF CONSumers plan to replace their current mattress within the next two years, according to a consumer study from the Better Sleep Council, the consumer education arm of the International Sleep Products Association.

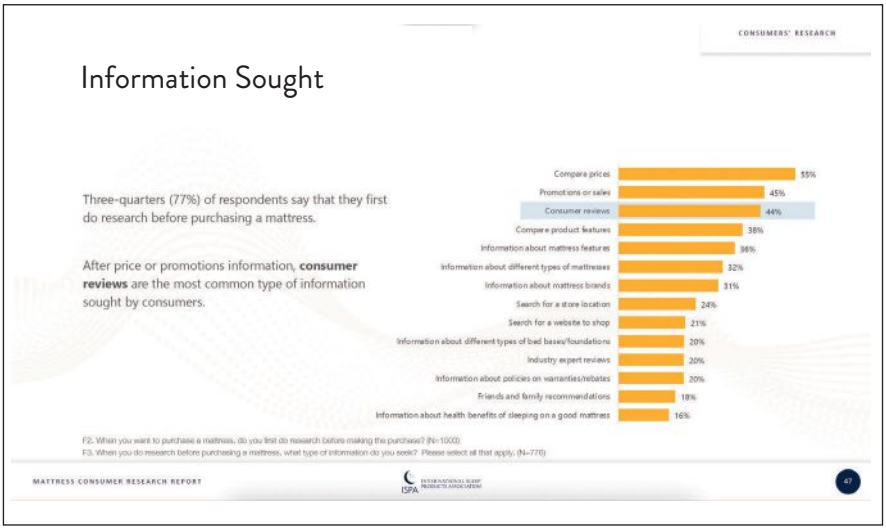
The BSC's comprehensive look at consumer attitudes about mattresses and mattress shopping found that 5% of consumers currently are looking for a new mattress, while another 7% say they will be in the market for a new mattress within the next few months. And 20% of consumers surveyed say they will be looking for a new mattress within the next one to two years.

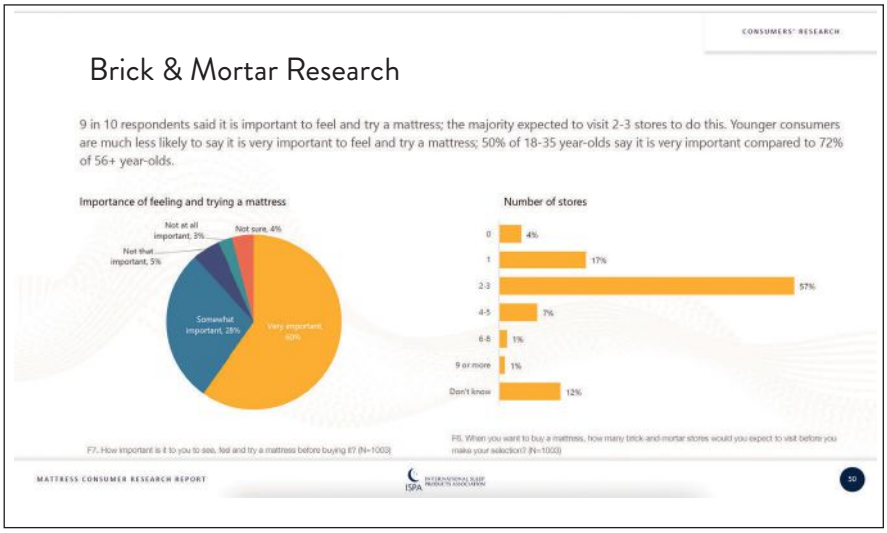
In addition, 30% of consumers say they plan to replace their mattress, but have a longer time frame in mind — either in three to four years (18%) or in five to seven years (12%). That means about six in 10 consumers plan to replace their mattress within seven years.

Overall, about three-quarters of consumers say they plan to replace their mattress, with just 7% planning to keep their mattress and another 19% saying they weren't sure.

The BSC survey found that consumers replaced their previous mattress after a mean of nine years.

"The high levels of interest in mattress replacement in the next several years suggest that the mattress replacement cycle could be getting shorter," says Mary Helen Rogers, ISPA vice president of communications and marketing. "The Covid-19 pandemic sparked more consumers to look for new mattresses, a development that could have an impact on the replacement cycle if those trends continue."





The nationally projectible survey was conducted for the BSC in 2020 as part of the BSC's ongoing commitment to consumer research. Sleep Savvy has been delving into the research results throughout this year. For past articles, check SleepSavvyMagazine.com.

Decisions: Sets and sizes

According to the survey results, when consumers look for a new mattress,

See page 21

What Consumers Want to Know

When researching mattresses, shoppers look at price, promotions and reviews, according to Better Sleep Council survey

BY DAVID PERRY

MOST CONSUMERS DO RE-search before they purchase a mattress — and that research is likely to include price comparisons. They also check promotions or sales, and read consumer reviews.

Those are the three top sources of information consumers seek when they want to buy a mattress, according to broad consumer research conducted in 2020 for the Better Sleep Council, the consumer education arm of the International Sleep Products Association.

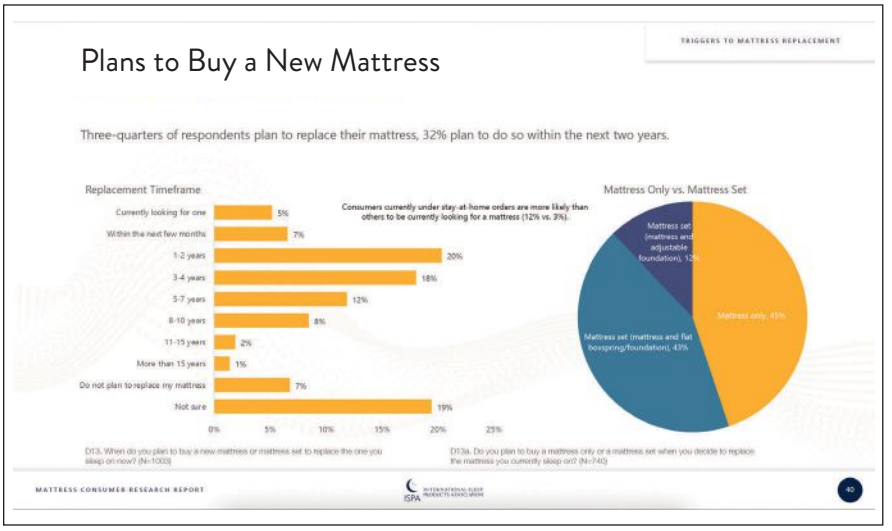
The nationally projectible survey found that most consumers (77%) say they conduct research before purchasing a mattress. A majority of consumers (55%) seek to compare prices, while another 45% look at promotions or sales, and 44% read consumer reviews.

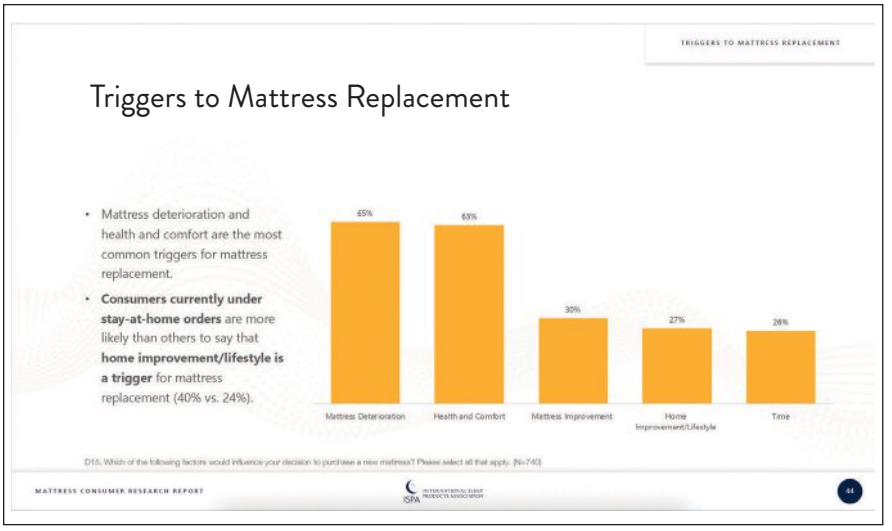
Survey respondents also say they want to compare product features (38%), seek information about mattress features (36%), research different types of mattresses (32%), and want details about mattress brands (31%). They also want to know store locations (24%) and seek a website where they can shop (21%).

Perhaps surprisingly, friend and family recommendations are low on their research list, cited by just 18% of consumers. That is just ahead of information on the health benefits of sleeping on a good mattress, something only 16% of consumers want to research.

Mary Helen Rogers, ISPA vice president of communications and marketing, says the survey illustrates that mattress research is a multifaceted process for many consumers.

"This BSC study reveals that consumers are searching for information from a variety of sources and are seeking information on everything from prices to product features to brands," Rogers says. "It is interesting that consumer reviews are highly valued by a significant number of consumers, while recommendations from friends and family members are used much less frequently. And many consumers want to compare mattress prices, which is not always easy for consumers to do."





Trying before buying is important

Brick-and-mortar research is critical, the survey found, with nine out of 10

respondents saying it is important to feel and try a mattress before making a purchase. That is very important to 60% of consumers and somewhat important to 28% of consumers. Only 8% of consumers say it's not important to feel and try a mattress before buying.

When they are doing brick-and-mortar shopping, a majority of the consumers (57%) expect to visit two or three stores.

But the research found that younger consumers are much less likely than older consumers to say it is very important to feel and try a mattress. While only 50% of consumers ages 18-35 say it is very important, 72% of consumers 56 and older want to feel and try a mattress first.

Consumers of different ages also use different sources to research mattresses. Specifically, the top three information sources for consumers ages 18-35 are internet search engines (31%), YouTube (24%) and going to stores and looking around (24%). For consumers ages 36-55, the top three sources are search engines (33%), visiting stores (33%) and retailers' websites (27%). While almost half of consumers 56 and older like visiting stores (49%) and using search engines (38%) to research mattresses, their No. 3 source of information, cited by 28% of respondents, is Consumer Reports' website or print magazines. (Consumer Reports ranks No. 5 on the list of information sources used by consumers ages 36-55 and is not among the top 10 information sources used by consumers ages 18-35.)

Overall, consumers say they are as likely to use online search engines as they are to visit stores when they research mattresses. And they don't need long to make up their minds. A majority of consumers (63%) say they take less than two weeks to decide which mattress to buy.

From page 19

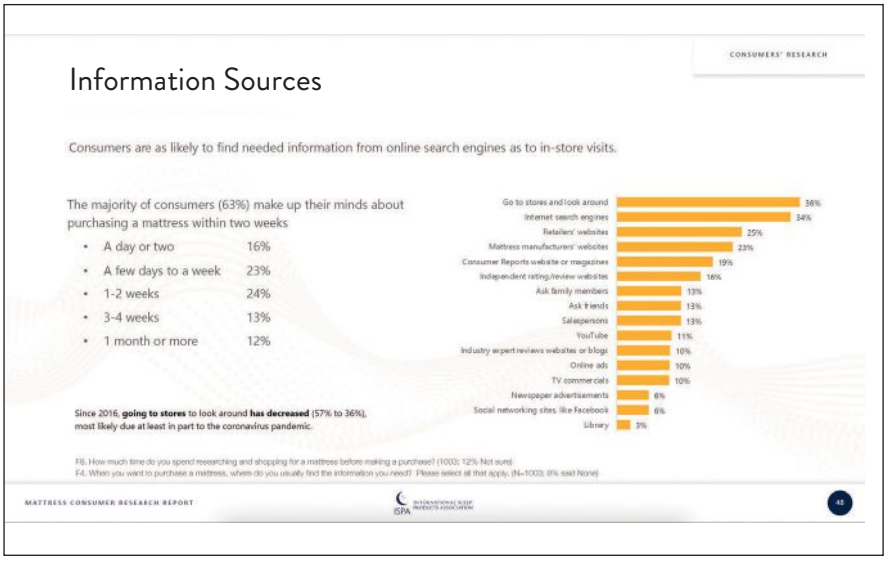
they will be about evenly split in their plans to buy a traditional mattress set or a mattress only, with 45% saying they plan to buy only a mattress, and 43% saying they plan to buy a mattress and a flat box spring/foundation. Another 12% plan to buy a mattress and an adjustable foundation, a sign of the growing popularity of power bases.

When choosing a size, consumers expect to shop for mostly king and queen sizes, with 41% of consumers saying they expect to buy a king or California king, and 46% saying they would buy a queen model.

If consumers do go ahead and buy those sizes, it would represent an increase in the number of consumers sleeping on king-size models because only 35% of consumers say they currently sleep on king (26%) or California king (9%).

"This increased focus on king-size beds may be another result of the pandemic," Rogers says. "With consumers turning their homes into everything from home offices to home gyms, they may be looking to maximize their time in the bedroom, where the bed can play a number of roles for a multitasking family."

The BSC survey also asked consumers the maximum amount they would be willing to pay for a mattress for themselves. The mean was $1,052 for a mattress only, but that amount varies by size, of course. The mean is $1,121 for a king-size mattress and $897 for a queen. The mean for a king-size set is $1,329 and $1,025 for a queen set.



Ugh! We need a new mattress

The survey also looked at the factors that trigger consumers to replace their mattress. Mattress deterioration (65%) and health and comfort (63%) are the most common impetuses, according to the findings. Another 30% of consumers cited a desire to improve their mattress, while 27% pointed to home improvement as a trigger.

An uncomfortable mattress also is a replacement trigger, according to 47% of respondents. Another 36% of consumers say a sagging mattress would push them to start looking for a new mattress, and 39% say they would consider replacing their mattress when it no longer provides a good night's sleep.

TOP OF BED

Wrapped in Comfort

Weighted blankets can help ease your customers' anxieties, stress, health issues and sleep disorders. Consider these benefits and merchandising tips to provide a long winter's nap

BY JULIE A. PALM

BY IMPROVING SLEEP AND REDUCING feelings of stress and anxiety, the wellness benefits of weighted blankets are "worth their weight in gold," says Sarah Bergman, vice president of marketing and product development for PureCare, an accessories producer based in Phoenix.

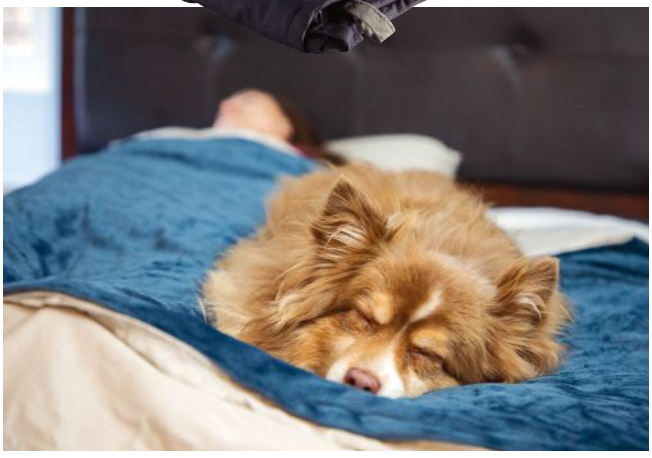
The pressure from the heavy blankets mimics the soothing sensations of being swaddled like an infant or hugged by a loved one. Although there isn't broad scientific support of the claims, some consumers say the blankets also help them recover after exercise and ease conditions like restless legs syndrome.

"One in five Americans has a sleep disorder and nearly one in five has an anxiety disorder — and consumers want natural solutions to these ailments," says Scott Carr, marketing director for Malouf, a manufacturer of bedding and furniture with headquarters in Logan, Utah. "Because of these alarming stats, we wanted to bring a quality weighted blanket to market to help our retail partners provide a solution for consumers seeking help in a natural, nonmedicated way."

For retailers, weighted blankets are a great accessory that can bring new customers to your store or e-commerce site and are a perfect item for gift promotions. They also are a nice add-on to mattress sales. Weighted blankets are an especially good fit for bedding retailers who already focus on wellness.

The specialty blankets have been popular for a few years. Bergman notes when PureCare did its initial market research before introducing Zensory in summer 2019, there were "almost 4 million hits on Amazon for the term 'weighted blanket' over a three-month stretch in spring of 2019."

Because of that popularity, "the weighted category has experienced a deluge of product in recent years," says Susan Mathes, vice president of brand relations for Therapedic International, a bedding licensing group based in Princeton, New Jersey. "The market has been inundated with low-priced product claiming to provide the same benefits as extremely high-priced product that many people find to be out of their price range. Our offerings are a perfect combination of high quality, comforting materials and sweet-spot pricing that consumers can afford."



Top: STAYING PUT PureCare uses minipockets within its Zensory weighted blankets to keep the glass beads inside from shifting.

Bottom: SOFT TOUCH Because weighted blankets are designed to provide soothing comfort, manufacturers like PureCare choose soft, cozy fabrics for the outer layer.

Here's a look at some features you'll want to consider when choosing weighted blankets to carry in your stores and e-commerce operations.

STYLE POINTS Therapedic International offers a wide variety of weighted blankets, most available in gray, taupe or blue to complement home decors.

Variety show

Some sleepers replace their quilt or comforter with a weighted blanket, and many people like to cozy up with one on the sofa or in a comfy chair. Because of how consumers use weighted blankets, the look and feel matter.

"We differentiate our products by offering a variety of textiles for different comfort preferences, such as cooling rayon with bamboo, faux fur with microfiber, and jersey knit," Mathes says.

Therapedic incorporates a mix of glass beads and polyester fill into the internal layer of its weighted blankets. Many Therapedic models are available in three weights (12 pounds, 16 pounds and 20 pounds) and three colors (taupe, gray and blue), and are sized 48 inches by 72 inches.

A microfiber version (spot clean only) is value priced at $49. Step-up blankets include a reversible model with a cooling 100% rayon from bamboo fabric on one side and a cozier fabric on the other, and a faux rabbit fur blanket with faux fur and microfiber in the cover. Both of those are retailed priced at $99.

Keep it clean

As a health and wellness item, a blanket with a removable, washable cover is a key selling point for some consumers. At the top of its line, Therapedic offers a jersey knit version. Ties and loops prevent the blanket from shifting or bunching when placed back inside the removable, washable cover ($79 to $99).

"For Bedgear's weighted blanket, it is important to call out the removable and washable cover. In a time when consumers have a heightened sense of health and cleanliness, being able to wash all their bedding is crucial. With an easily removable cover, it can be washed with routine bedding washes," says Andrea Antinozzi, director of merchandising for Bedgear, a sleep products manufacturer based in Farmingdale, New York.

PureCare's Zensory blankets have two optional duvet covers sold separately, one made of Tencel and one made of velveted fleece. Consumers don't have to "fight" the duvet cover to get it back on after washing, Bergman says, because the company's "signature color-match tie system makes connecting our duvet covers to our products simple and quick."

The Zensory line includes two weighted blankets for adults — 15 pounds and 20 pounds—and also a 7-pound version for children. The blankets are made with minipockets to keep the glass bead fill from shifting.

Malouf's Anchor weighted blankets, which also feature glass bead fill, are available in four weights (5 pounds, 12 pounds, 15 pounds and 20 pounds) and in three sizes (petite, throw and queen). All versions come with removeable, washable microfiber covers.

"This product checks all the boxes: removable cover, washable; baffle-boxed design to ensure even weight distribution; and a 10-tie system to guarantee secure fit," Carr says. The Malouf blankets come in two colors (ash and driftwood) and retail from $99 to $199.

What's inside

Many manufacturers, including PureCare, Therapedic and Malouf, fill their weighted blankets with glass beads, sometimes mixed with polyester, and use baffled fabrics or interior pockets to keep the beads from shifting.

But Bedgear weights its 15-pound Hyper-Cotton blanket

HOW WEIGHTED BLANKETS MEASURE UP

THE NAME GIVES IT AWAY: WEIGHTED BLANKETS are heavy, layered blankets with glass beads, ceramic beads, dense fabrics or other materials at their center. Because they are intended to be used by an individual instead of shared, they generally are sized as throws or petite blankets, although some producers offer them in queen size, too.

When it comes to weighted blankets, one size does not fit all. As a general guideline, consumers should use a weighted blanket that is about 10% of their body weight, so manufacturers typically offer them in a variety of weights, including lighter versions specifically for children.

MAKE WEIGHTED BLANKETS FLY OFF THE SHELVES

A KEY TO SELLING WEIGHTED BLANKETS IN YOUR brick-and-mortar locations is giving consumers, who may not be familiar with them, the opportunity to feel and try the blankets.

"Weighted blankets are a complete sensory experience, so dedicating a space within your retail environment for a see/touch/feel moment is crucial," says Sarah Bergman, vice president of marketing and product development for PureCare, a sleep accessories producer based in Phoenix.

"The best way to sell a weighted blanket is to allow the customer to experience it for themselves. When doing a mattress and pillow fitting, incorporate the blanket into the mix to allow them to feel that soothing, comforting feeling for themselves," says Andrea Antinozzi, director of merchandising for Bedgear, a sleep products manufacturer based in Farmingdale, New York. "Have a sample open on the bed for them to try."

Other tips for selling in-store and online:

O TOUT THEM FOR THE HOLIDAYS. Weighted blankets make a great gift for Christmas and Hanukkah. Valentine's Day isn't far off either. Promote them online using search engine optimization strategies and social media ads, and by featuring them on your homepage.

O SPREAD THEM AROUND. "Furniture and bedding stores that offer weighted blankets in multiple locations throughout the store will see better success than when allocating the offering to one section," says Scott Carr, marketing director for Malouf, a manufacturer of bedding and furniture with headquarters in Logan, Utah. Drape them over a few beds throughout the store, display them near the entrance and also at the sales desk. Carr also recommends placing them in store seating areas "since so many people use weighted blankets while unwinding at the end of the day on the couch."

O EXPLAIN THEM WELL. Product videos, photos of product details and lifestyle images work together to convey the features and benefits of weighted blankets online. Customer reviews and ratings can give confidence to shoppers less familiar with the product. "This allows customers who cannot touch and feel the product in person the opportunity to see all of the details of the product virtually. Having all of the right copy descriptions will also be key so you can speak to the need the customer has and how a weighted blanket can satisfy that need," Carr says.

Top: WASH DAY Bedgear's Hyper-Cotton weighted blanket comes with a removable, washable cover for a clean night's sleep.

Left: A LOOK INSIDE The Hyper-Cotton blanket from Bedgear uses layers of heavy fabric instead of beads to provide the weight.

with layers of breathable performance fabrics and wraps them in a quick-drying Hyper-Cotton cover that gives the blanket its name. The blanket is available in throw-size only (48 inches by 72 inches) for $199.

"We created this unique weighted blanket because we saw that there were so many pain points with consumers overheating, dealing with uneven weight distribution and much more from other blankets on the market," Antinozzi says.

"Bedgear is always looking to innovate within the industry and that is what we did with our one-of-a-kind weighted blanket."

Antinozzi notes that the blanket's fill also prevents noisy movements and eliminates worries about beads or similar fills spilling out if the blanket is ever torn.

Staying put

Although they may have reached the peak of their popularity, producers expect weighted blankets to have staying power.

"Their popularity has increased in the last several years and with all that is going on with the pandemic, politics and around the world, many consumers we speak to express loving their weighted blankets for their ability to assist with

reducing the feelings of anxiety," Mathes says. "I do think the market will adjust itself and not every product will survive the long-term. ... But I believe quality products will survive and continue to be valued."

Julie A. Palm has been covering the mattress and home furnishings industries for more than 25 years and is a past editor in chief of both BedTimes and Sleep Savvy magazines. As chief wordsmith at Palm Ink LLC, she specializes in writing, editing, publications management and communications consulting for a variety of clients. She can be reached at japalm623@gmail.com.

Left: SIZING IT UP Malouf makes its weighted blankets in petite, throw and queen sizes, so they can be used for sleeping in bed or for cuddling up on the furniture.

Inset: ON DISPLAY Malouf's simple packaging gives customers the information they need: blanket size, weight and color.

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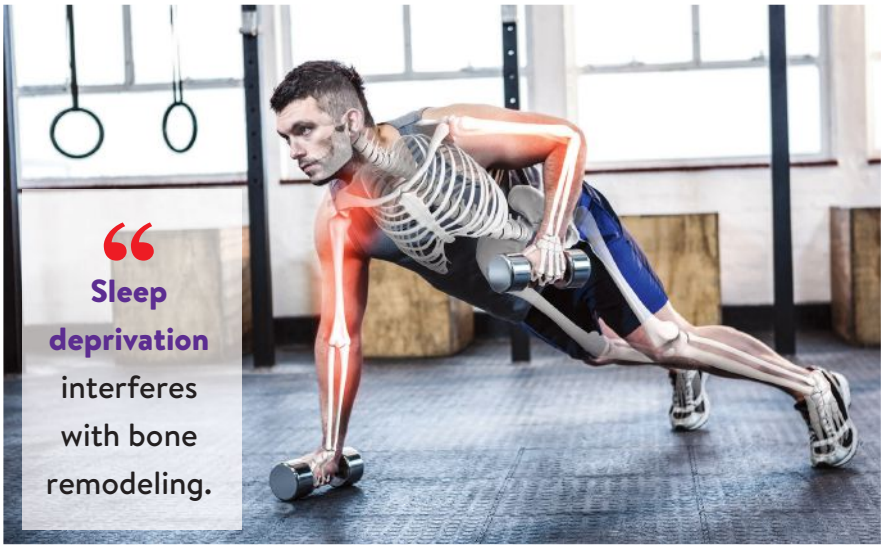
Sleep: It's Good for Your Bones

To keep your skeletal structure strong and supple, try these 7 steps, including exercising daily and buying a quality mattress

BY LISSA COFFEY

Editor's note: Savvy mattress retailers want to do everything they can to help their customers sleep better, including offering them sound advice and tips. Feel free to share this great guidance from Better Sleep Council spokeswoman Lissa Coffey with your shoppers (with credit given, of course). The BSC is the consumer education arm of the International Sleep Products Association.



PEOPLE SOMETIMES SAY "I need to rest my weary bones" when they feel tired. Studies show that we should take this phrase literally.

Researchers from the Medical College of Wisconsin in Wauwatosa, Wisconsin, found that sleep helps to strengthen bones. Their study of lab rats showed that a lack of sleep interrupted new bone formation, while existing bone density decreased. When it came to the rats' bone marrow, scientists found a decrease in the fat component and an increase in the cells that generate platelets. What does all this mean? The rats in the study experienced greatly diminished flexibility and more fragile bones.

Another study from China looked at the association between less sleep and lower bone density in middle-age and older women, and discovered a correlation. And a study in Norway found that those suffering from insomnia experienced a 52% increased risk of osteoporosis, a condition that causes bones to become weak and brittle.

To maintain healthy bones, our bodies must be able to go through a bone remodeling cycle. The process also is vital to keep the body flexible so we can avoid fractures. With our usual activities, we recover from normal bone wear quickly. However, when sleep deprivation interferes with bone remodeling, bone density may decrease and we can become less flexible, more prone to fractures and more susceptible to osteoporosis. There's no doubt that sleep is essential for bone health.

But here's the problem: Osteoporosis is associated with aging. And as we get older, it can be more difficult to get the good night's sleep we need. One reason is that as we age, the production of melatonin, also known as the "sleep hormone" because it impacts sleep, decreases. The body produces melatonin based on the amount of light we are exposed to. Getting some sunlight during the day helps the body to produce melatonin at night. The combination of lower melatonin levels that come with age and inadequate sleep can put us in a downward spiral that accelerates bone loss.

We can't avoid aging, and we can't control some of the other risk factors for osteoporosis either. They include:

- **GENDER:** Women are more likely to get osteoporosis, particularly after menopause.
- **ETHNICITY:** White and Asian people have a higher risk for osteoporosis than other ethnic groups.
- **HEIGHT:** People 5 feet, 7 inches or taller and those who weigh less than 125 pounds have an increased risk of osteoporosis.

- **HEREDITY:** People with a family history of osteoporosis or a diagnosis of a hip fracture are more at risk of developing the disease.

- **PREVIOUS HISTORY:** Those over the age of 50 who have had previous fractures from low-level injuries are more likely to be diagnosed with osteoporosis.

Fortunately, there are many things we can control to fend off osteoporosis, including staying active and mobile. And there are steps we can take to make sure we get the good sleep our bones require to remain healthy. Here are seven:

1. INCREASE MELATONIN. Besides helping with sleep, melatonin functions as an antioxidant, reducing damage caused to bones from activity and free radicals in the environment. It also can help us to heal from fractures and surgeries. While we can become dependent on melatonin supplements, there are many other natural options to help amp up our melatonin production. To start, get some sunlight every day, and sleep in a dark or dimly lit room. You also can add melatonin-rich foods to your diet. Sunflower seeds, alfalfa sprouts, almonds, eggs, goji berries and tart cherries are a few examples.

2. EXERCISE EVERY DAY. Just 10 minutes of aerobic exercise can help you to sleep better at night. Be sure to exercise during daylight hours and not too close to bedtime because you need time to recover and relax afterward. Weight-bearing exercise has been shown to be beneficial for bone health. Weighted vests for walking are a safe way to exercise without overdoing it. Yoga helps to increase flexibility and balance, reducing the risk of falls and fractures.

3. GET SUFFICIENT MINERALS AND VITAMIN D. Magnesium has been hailed as a sleep aid and is great for building strong bones. Calcium, iron and zinc also help to protect against osteoporosis. Vitamin D aids the absorption of calcium, so it plays a key role in fighting osteoporosis. You can get vitamin D from exposure to sunlight and also from saltwater fish, liver or fortified foods.

4. AVOID ALCOHOL AND TOBACCO. We know that drinking alcohol at night interferes with sleep, but did you know that alcohol also is linked to lower bone density? Tobacco is a culprit, too. Avoid these substances as much as possible.

5. MAINTAIN A HEALTHY BODY WEIGHT. Obesity is associated with sleep apnea, which disturbs sleep.

6. GET SCREENED. Talk with your doctor about getting an osteoporosis screening. Osteoporosis comes on slowly and you might not be aware you have it until you break a bone. When identified early, osteoporosis can be treated effectively before it causes fractures.

7. PURCHASE A GOOD MATTRESS. And lastly, make sure you sleep on a comfortable, supportive mattress. No two bodies are alike; we all have unique bones. When shopping for a mattress, rest-test each one by stretching out as you normally would while sleeping. Your mattress is an important ally in helping you to get the sleep you need to protect your bones. ○

Lissa Coffey is a spokeswoman for the Better Sleep Council and the founder of CoffeyTalk.com. A lifestyle and wellness expert, she's written several books and has been a frequent guest on national and local television shows.

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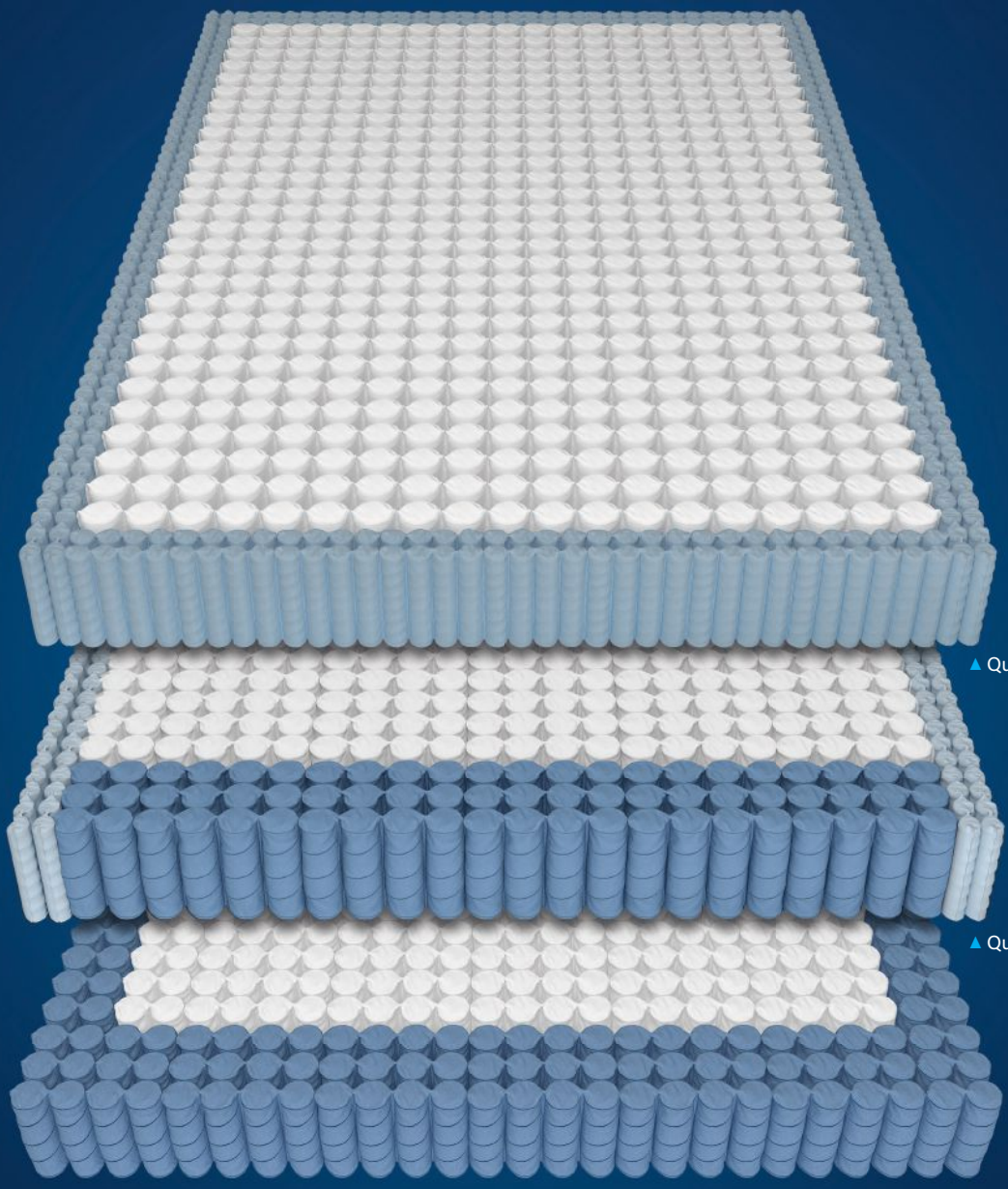

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Research Brings King-Size Good News

Consumer shift to larger mattresses would bring more comfort to consumers and more dollars to retailers

THERE COULD BE A KING-SIZE INSTALLMENT of good news in a big round of consumer research conducted for the Better Sleep Council, the consumer education arm of the International Sleep Products Association. The summary: More consumers are planning to buy king-size mattresses. That means more sales dollars for bedding retailers. Oh, and it means more comfort for consumers, too. That's the classic win-win.

The BSC research we have written about in Sleep Savvy this year provides a wealth of actionable insights for retailers. A consumer shift to more king-size beds is another insight retailers should capitalize on.

First, some basic math

The BSC survey found that 35% of consumers sleep on either a king-size mattress (26%) or a California king (9%). But, spurred by the Covid-19 pandemic, consumers now are more likely to plan to buy a king or California king for their next mattress, with 41% expressing that view. Growth of six percentage points in the king market would be a significant boost to the industry.

The percentage of consumers currently sleeping on a queen mattress (46%) is the same as the percentage of consumers who plan to buy a queen, so there would be no changes in that key market.

Now, let's add some retail math

The consumers surveyed said they would be willing to pay a mean of $1,329 for a king-size set — $304 more than the mean of $1,025 they would be willing to pay for a queen-size set. And I don't need to tell any retailer how nice it would be to add $304 to a great many sales tickets.

How do you seize this king-size opportunity? Make kings the star on your retail floors. Talk about the additional comfort king-size mattresses offer. Ask consumers if they sleep with pets, and explain that king-size beds are more accommodating for people and dogs and cats. Promote king-size prices in your ads. Yes, queen prices are the norm, but there is a well-known saying in retail: You sell what you show.

How consumers want to shop

As we wrap up our reporting and analysis on this major round of BSC consumer research, we want to leave you with two key thoughts: Interest in online mattress buying is on

the upswing, but consumers continue to say it is important to try a mattress before buying.

Those are not necessarily contradictory points. Smart retailers now carry some of the leading online mattress brands in their stores. Consumers can start the shopping process online, looking at the sophisticated websites many brands offer, and they can narrow their choices. Then they can visit their local mattress retailer and rest-test those mattresses.

The BSC research notes, significantly, that consumers' views on trying mattresses vary by age. Only half of consumers ages 18-35 say it is very important to try a mattress, compared with 72% of consumers 56 and older. Getting those younger consumers into stores will be a challenge — just 24% of those consumers say they go to stores to look around, compared with 49% of consumers 56 and older.

Those younger consumers rely on internet search engines and YouTube as much or more as they browse stores, so retailers should lean into search engines and YouTube to catch their attention.

Here's to a good holiday season

Finally, in this last issue of the year for Sleep Savvy, I want to end with a note of thanks to the BSC for its commitment to consumer research. As many of you know, I'm a student of the industry and its numbers, and the BSC studies have given me a rich harvest of data to analyze.

Best wishes to you and your team this holiday season. May you continue to find insights in Sleep Savvy that boost your business. ○

Dave

Dave Perry
Editor at large

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A Big Thank-You

In an impersonal world, a personal note of gratitude can turn your customers into fans

BY JULIE A. PALM

I OCCASIONALLY ORDER ITEMS FROM A SMALL business in Canada — mostly fun little treats, like calendars, T-shirts and books, for myself and others. I'm always delighted when the packages hit my porch, not just because of the coffee mug that might be inside, but because this company knows how to thank its customers.

Tucked into every bag are extra goodies like postcards and stickers, plus a handwritten thank-you note. That note is my favorite part of every package, "signed" as it is by the namesake of the enterprise, Esther the Wonder Pig. She's a remarkable pig who became a social media star and the subject of several books for adults and children. Seeing her cloven hoof print always makes me smile.

As retailing gets more competitive, more challenging — and because of online shopping — more impersonal, heartfelt gratitude for your customers becomes more important than ever.

It costs little, in terms of time or money, to thank your customers after the sale. A follow-up email is one option. But a note accompanying the bed set upon delivery or sent by mail to the customer may have the biggest impact.

To keep the process manageable and repeatable, you'll want to decide who receives thank-you notes. Ideally, every customer would be thanked following a purchase, but your volume may not allow that. In that case, consider sending notes to repeat customers or high-value customers, suggests Michael Keenan in a June article for Shopify, the Ottawa, Canada-based retail platform.

Here are more tips to make thank-you notes most effective:

- PERSONALIZE THE MESSAGE. Use customers' names in the salutation and reference their specific purchase in the body of the message. Notes should be signed by a specific person: retail sales associate, store manager, sales manager, bedding buyer or company owner.

- ENCOURAGE FOLLOW-UP. Include an email address or phone number for customers to call if they have any questions or concerns about their new purchase, or tuck a business card in with the note.

- ADD A PERK. Include a coupon or coupon code for a future purchase, but don't push customers for a social media testimonial or referral to friends and family, Keenan says. If you want to make such a request, do it separately and at a later time.

Esther the Wonder Pig shares another message with her fans. "Kindness Is Magic," she says. Thank-you notes are a kindness that can work magic with your customers.

Julie A. Palm has been covering the mattress and home furnishings industries for more than 25 years, and is a past editor in chief of both BedTimes and Sleep Savvy magazines. As chief wordsmith at Palm Ink LLC, she specializes in writing, editing, publications management and communications consulting for a variety of clients. She can be reached at japalm623@gmail.com.

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