

By Doug Kays



## How To Monopolize The Internet

Presentations on the HomeFurnishings.com portal are offered Sunday and Monday of High Point Market in the Retail Resource Center in Plaza Suites. Call NHFA at (800) 888-9590 for more information.

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**There is a lot of legitimate emphasis these days on the added** marketing value of the Internet and the necessity of having a company Web site. But having a Web site is really the easy part of the process. As with every other form of marketing, you have to get your message to the right customer for it to be a benefit.

In reality, publishing your Web site requires an advertising campaign of its own if you hope to have your site seen and impact your business with new customers. Listing your Web site on your business cards and your ads only gets you customers who are already paying attention to you. To get new customers, you have to put your Web site where they will find it. One of the simplest ways is a pay-per-click program, but such a program can be expensive, especially if you're in a competitive area where other Web site managers are bidding up the click charge.

With home furnishings, where products are increasingly the subject of search-before-you-shop buying, you need to get to the top of the search lists as quickly and inexpensively as possible. Even the largest home furnishings retailers can't afford to buy their way to the top of each of the search lists. Whether small, medium or large, the best marketing option is to group with other home furnishings retailers to create a monopolizing Internet presence.

At High Point Market, the National Home Furnishings Association (NHFA) is kicking off a Web portal at HomeFurnishings.com.

The site will host rich consumer content and will include micro-sites of certified HomeFurnishings.com retailers and participating manufacturers. The main site will have all of the bells and whistles the shopper has come to require on a sophisticated Web site, such as hundreds of informative articles, room planners, color guides, style guides, current fashion trends and an exhaustive amount of product. It will also have a drop-down selector to direct the shopper to a certified HomeFurnishings.com retailer in her geographic area, and then will link the shopper directly to the retailer's micro-site and on to that retailer's Web site.

Here's part of the site's magic. In order to determine what the consumer is searching for, the search engines have determined certain keywords drive each individual search. The sites that use a specific keyword or meta tag the most are the sites that come up first on the search list (this is called organic selection). By joining together and duplicating the hundreds of articles and the consumer information found on HomeFurnishings.com, this site will be driven to the top of the furniture search lists. Simply put, if only 1,000 of NHFA's 10,000 member stores join HomeFurnishings.com, no other Web site in the world will have the sheer keyword power in home furnishings searches that HomeFurnishings.com will have.

Here's another part of the magic of HomeFurnishings.com: Because it is owned by NHFA, the net revenue generated by the site will be put back into ad campaigns designed to raise consumer awareness and interest in home furnishings, drive shoppers to HomeFurnishings.com and encourage the purchase of home furnishings from certified HomeFurnishings.com retailers. From the outset, this Web site will give our industry a national "Got Milk"-type ad campaign, all funded from the net proceeds from HomeFurnishings.com.

The final magic: It's affordable. **HFB**

## "Got Furniture?"

HomeFurnishings.com Will Educate Consumers, Drive Them to Local Retailers

By Powell Slaughter



*inspired living begins here.™*

HomeFurnishings.com, the consumer Web portal and associated national marketing campaign the National Home Furnishings Association (NHFA) announced in mid-April, is heavy on driving business to retailers.

"We think the consumer is confused when she goes to the Web and puts in the word 'sofa.' There's so much information out there, and it's all fragmented," said NHFA President Doug Kays. "The consumer does not understand the value of home furnishings and is not confident in her selections."

He describes HomeFurnishings.com as the center of a "spider web" linking inspirational, idea-generating content and vendors, all leading to the furniture retailer.

"The first and foremost goal is to raise the interest and value of home furnishings as part of her home. Second is to educate her and get her the information that makes her confident in her selection," Kays said. "Then we drive that educated, motivated consumer to a retailer in her area."

"In 2010 we want to spend \$2 million on national promotion of HomeFurnishings.com, and we've done a lot of research on how to best use that," said Karin Mayfield, NHFA's senior director for industry promotion and growth.

"The media campaign involves ads in shelter publications. We'll also have high- and low-impact banner ads on Web sites, and Google local Ad Words. Where our participating retailers are is where we'll buy the Ad Words. That will give a direct link to certified HomeFurnishings.com retailers."

Details on the 2010 budget: 50 percent to shelter publications for 20 million impressions; 30 percent to Google Ad Words for 60 million impressions and 600,000 click-throughs; and 20 percent for interactive banner ads for 65 million impressions. Target budget for 2011 is \$5 million; 2012, \$8 million. All of the dollars go toward the Web site and the national media campaign.

"Eventually we'll get to television ads, but before then my goal is to get us on the 'Today Show' (and) 'Good Morning America' as soon as possible," Mayfield said.

The more buy-in from retailers and manufacturers, the more money available to promote the site. Net rev-

enues will go toward advertising the site. Retailers pay \$800 for a single microsite, then a sliding scale based on the number of storefronts, each with its own microsite; and 0.08 percent per million dollars of revenue. It works out to around \$200 a month for a \$2 million, single-store retailer.

Mayfield emphasized that NHFA isn't asking retailers to spend new money.

"We're asking them to re-allocate some of their advertising budget that might not be as effective now," she said. "Look at what's happening to the effectiveness of newspaper advertising, Yellow Pages, local radio getting impacted by iPods."

The site emphasizes consumer-retailer relationships.

"Consumers can log in and opt in for newsletters—that can be a generic newsletter or one customized for her preferred retailer," Mayfield said. "That's a \$30 per month add-on cost to the company for a newsletter you can send out to your hot list and have available for customers in the store. It's based on rich content on the Web site with an optional area for the retailer's own materials or adds."

The retailer locator is at the top of every page except a retailer's microsite.

"My Ideas" lets consumers drag articles and photos to her area on the site, even from other Web sites. Sales staff can pull up her site and see what she wants. Preferred vendors on the site get a link to their microsite in a pop-up window.

"When it closes, the only thing that comes back up is the retailer's microsite. Once a consumer chooses a retailer, they'll always have that retailer until they opt out," Mayfield said. "Consumers can get pre-approved for financing right on the retail microsite. Retailers can post television ads, pictures. All advertising on the microsite is the retailer's own. Retailers can select all the rich content they want to use on their microsite, and tailor that content to their store—if you don't sell bedding, you don't need the bedding information. The retailer can use anything from the room planner to style guides." **HFB**

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