

# Topping things off



A well done display can help relieve a consumer's stress and confusion when making a purchase

## Getting the lowdown on the latest in bed-branding from the president of market specialists, Colonial.

You never get a second chance at a first impression, as the time-honoured phrase goes, and nobody is more aware of that than Mark Hobson, president of display and branding company, Colonial LLC.

Working out of its US headquarters in High Point, North Carolina, Colonial has over 30 years of experience working with manufacturing and retail clients in the bedding industry to improve in-store marketing. And it might just be time the UK sat up and took notice.

We've all seen it, the dressing on beds in store salerooms, be it fabric or plastic, but what you might not realise is just how much of an impact, especially when executed correctly, these tools can have on potential buyers.

"Many manufacturers and retailers already recognise that

consumers are typically confused and stressed about the mattress buying process," Mark tells us.

"To them, all mattresses may look the same because they simply don't get engaged in the process very often.

"Well done displays can help to relieve that stress, and when you relieve stress in any sales environment the chances of closing the sale go up dramatically, as do the chances of that consumers spending more money on their purchase." And the inverse is also true, Mark believes, since consumer stress levels can be driven up if confronted with a poorly done display. That's a mistake that could cost both the manufacturer and retailer dearly. In fact, when it comes to consumers, Colonial is keen to impress the importance of what it terms 'The First Moment of

Truth', the first three to seven seconds after a consumer first sees the product.

As Mark explains: "You only get three to seven seconds to make a positive first impression, so how you display that product can dramatically impact your business or, maybe just as

importantly, your competitor's business.

"The most common mistake mattress manufacturers and retailers make is not understanding that in-store marketing is so critical. Very few have the resources to market directly to consumers on TV, so



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'The First Moment of Truth' is the first three to seven seconds after a consumer first sees a product

how well you do your in-store marketing can determine the success or failure of your bedding slots."

That said, the in-store bed-marketing sector has itself seen a dramatic rate of change and development, especially in the past ten years.

But what should be particularly interesting to our readers is Mark's surprise, having visited The Bed Show earlier in the year, that so many of the top of bed display's being used in the UK are something close to a decade behind what the USA is now able to offer.

people trying to make foot protectors that matched the fabric of the bed. That worked to keep the bed clean but was expensive and added little value, since, beyond keeping the bed clean, it didn't look like there was even anything there.

"Soon people started to add pillows and then somebody thought 'why aren't we using this space to communicate our brands? This is a branded business after all!' And so the brand logos started to be embroidered onto the pillows and foot protectors."

Unwilling to offer empty

promises, Colonial works hard to back its product claims with consumer research. This includes investigating which styles and designs add the most perceived value and quality to a given mattress, as well as which are the best colours and fabric types. Not only that, but the top of bed displays produced by Mark and his team can be used to convey a world of information, from key product features and benefits to promotional events.

"In the US today, 30- 35% of a mattress surface area may be covered with the pillows and foot protectors in-store, so you'd better make sure that, collectively, it all adds appeal and value," Mark advises.

"Nobody else has done this type of consumer research and we reserve the guts of the information for the clients that we work with, because that's a competitive advantage for them." With the gap between the latest kinds of displays in America vs here on our own shores ever

## How you display a product can dramatically impact your business

"The category originally started by people realising that mattress samples are expensive, and wanting to prevent them getting dirty. So somebody came up with the bright idea of putting clear plastic pads over the ends of mattresses," Mark explains.

"Ironically, as I saw when I came to the UK, there's a whole bunch of people who are still using that first attempt at foot protectors, from over 15 years ago.

"In America, certainly, the category then evolved into



In-store bed marketing has seen a dramatic rate of change stateside

widening, it's easy to understand why Colonial is well on its way to trading in the UK.

Its part of a deliberate scheme of expansion for the business, which has seen it go global in recent years, shipping products to Australia, New Zealand, Singapore, Hong Kong and Denmark, to name but a few. And now, the company has the UK firmly in its sights, an area Mark sees as a huge opportunity for UK bedding manufacturers.

Speaking about his recent visit to The Bed Show, Mark observed: "Just in looking at the way people are dressing their products in the UK today very few have tapped into top of bed displays to elevate their brand presence and sales, as is now common in the US market.

"We've probably got ten years of extra learning and expertise that we can use to help those clients who feel like they need it in the UK, and we're just in the early days of doing that.

"Not everyone's going to be a good fit for us, we know, because we're looking for long term relationships and consultative type arrangements where we can help our clients become more effective in store and sell more mattresses over the long haul." Talking to Mark, his enthusiasm for what Colonial can do and achieve is infectious. From his description of the ongoing interactions the company maintains with its clients, to his aspirations for the future of the business, one can't help but feel UK suppliers would only be doing themselves a favour by getting in quick.

As Mark concluded: "If you're happy with your sales, your share and your margins, you shouldn't do anything at all!

"But if you are not happy, are aggressive and are looking for an edge, you might want to consider evaluating your in-store display and marketing strategy to see whether or not it is as competitive as it could be.

And if the answer is 'no' then find somebody who can help, because the in store marketing piece of mattresses is a huge factor today." ■