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## **Furniture dealers learning to navigate within the healthcare industry**

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How does the contract furniture dealer navigate the healthcare market effectively? The first step is to understand the concepts and business issues of the healthcare facility and its providers. Secondly, you must possess the ability to avoid assumptions or misconceptions that can cloud one's vision of the business, as it currently exists. Thirdly, you must maintain the ability to sense any trends or change of direction within the industry.

For the furniture dealer, as well as many other businesses, the healthcare market represents tremendous opportunity. Like with many opportunities the temptation to "do it all, right away" is great. Planning has always been a critical element of any successful strategy and it's no different in this market. It makes sense to identify the trends in healthcare marketing/advertising, a true view of how hospitals present themselves to perspective patients, thus providing a valuable insight into the areas of need. This insight allows the dealer to select two or three sectors in which to specialize with tailored solutions. By becoming the expert in these areas, you will differentiate your effort and this will often lead to opportunities in other areas where the healthcare provider has needs.

Obtaining knowledge of healthcare business issues, those that influence or determine the needs of these customers, is extremely important. Learning for example the basics of how the hospital generates revenue and reimbursement policies used by Medicare to compensate the healthcare provider at fixed amounts for all similar patients, regardless of actual costs incurred, will enable the furniture dealer to best position the appropriate products and services.

Occasionally there is a need to pause and take a fresh look at things that are working within the healthcare industry and those that are not. By engaging the healthcare provider to validate the trends you have identified you can adjust your direction based upon the feedback received. At the same time it may be helpful to seek help from vendors who know the healthcare industry and can help the dealership avoid costly mistakes.

Collaborating with healthcare providers and hospitals, in your endeavor is beneficial; however it does not complete your agenda. You are well advised to participate in organizations that support and provide products and/or services to this segment. This will provide you with the opportunity to network and exchange ideas that have previously resulted in proven solutions to customers within the healthcare organizations. This participation will enable you to address the needs of the individual providers while approaching the group as a single point of contact. To also further your dealerships' development of relationships and value, identification should be made of healthcare organizations which may through ownership or formal agreements be aligned and possibly managed by a single entity.

Even when the furniture dealer has created a niche market within the healthcare facility many other companies remain involved with which the material manager must contend to provide for all the

needs of the healthcare facility. This coordination of multiple vendors, fewer resources to share the workload, less time to get things done, can create great demands on the material managers and their ability to perform well. This situation can be a significant opportunity for the furniture dealer to be of more value to the material manager.

By broadening product lines, offering other items such as certain types of medical equipment and focusing on providing services to act as a "consolidator", the furniture dealer can make the entire process for the materials manager more effective and efficient. This is not something that is easily done, but with consistent effort, good execution of products/services and the appropriate adjustments, this type of business relationship will prove to be most desirable by all involved.

This will enable you to establish an effective sales strategy, provide value to the customer through products and services while differentiating your business. By approaching the healthcare market differently than other market segments and maintaining a firm grasp the dynamic needs of healthcare providers, you can begin to expand your unique solution for the healthcare market.

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