

Meet The Furniture

Furniture Factor, Cabinet Maker's search for the individuals who really make a difference to interiors, drew to a close with a flood of entries. The task for our panel of trade gurus was not an easy one. Eventually, however, one industry mover and shaker stood out above the rest as winner of both the Team Player category and the overall Furniture Factor title.



Team player and overall winner

Jim O'Donnell, Lebus Upholstery md



Jim O'Donnell, Lebus Upholstery, md had a strong chance of winning any of the three categories. The boss of the Scunthorpe company had shown enough personal sacrifice to qualify for Going the Extra Mile and enough ingenuity and invention to qualify for On the Ball award, according to the judges. But in the end, it was his ability to work within a team that impressed them most.

It was O'Donnell's rallying of staff when Lebus was placed into administration in the summer that separated him from other entrants. His impressive efforts brought Lebus away from those dark days and returned the company to a good level of business going into 2006.

O'Donnell, nominated by Rachel Jackson, his PA, had built up the business for a number of years only to see it be threatened with closure in the summer. His team faced a bleak future. That is, says Jackson, until O'Donnell's positive thinking and astute

decisions brought Lebus back from the brink.

To bring himself closer to his staff, O'Donnell gave up the luxurious high climes of his office to join everyone in the sales, service and accounts office. He helped to instil a philosophy at all levels of Lebus of one team with one aim – customer satisfaction.

Jackson says of O'Donnell: 'He is always on top of the latest trends and constantly comes up with great innovative designs. These are then developed with all our customers in mind to ensure everyone receives the best product for their relevant marketplace. He will always go the extra mile to ensure complete satisfaction for our customers.'

O'Donnell's career in furniture began in 1975 and this is not his first brush with awards glory. In 1980, he won Apprentice of the Year while at G Plan Upholstery. In 1982, he was awarded a scholarship by the Worshipful Company of Furniture Makers.

Finalist

Steve Wilson, CFC Interiors
Steve Wilson, CFC Interiors marketing manager triumphed in the Going the Extra Mile category.

The family-owned department store, with outlets in Londonderry and Cookstown, Northern Ireland, has benefited from a loyalty card introduced by Wilson – whose father started the business.

Loyalty cards are usually associated with large corporate entities, so this was considered by the judges as a particularly brave step for a relatively small business.

Similar to the large chain stores, CFC organises special loyalty card evenings for its customers. The main event of the year is a Christmas party, where cardholders are treated to mulled wine, sweets and shortbread. The local primary school sings carols and Father Christmas hands out presents. Wilson applauds the loyalty and effort shown by the store's staff, who work above and beyond the call of duty to make the evening a success.

In addition to the various events, loyalty card holders receive a 5% discount off all purchases.

CFC was established in 1975 as a furniture retailer and has gradually expanded over the course of 30 years. The two outlets now stock a full range of furniture, flooring, giftware and fabric to provide a complete service for home owners.

In addition to its loyalty card, the business has also launched two online facilities; one covering its entire list of products and a bridal service.



THE PRIZE

As the winner of Furniture Factor, Jim O'Donnell will be treated to a day of whitewater rafting, courtesy of Cottrills. He will have to pull together with other rafters to navigate choppy conditions in this extreme sport – a prize perfectly suited for such a team player.

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Factor

Finalist

Richard Moyles, Funtech

For the On the Ball category, the judges were looking for someone who has used innovation to improve things for a business or team. In our winner, they found someone who has initiated and developed an idea to make a difference for the furniture retail industry across Ireland, and who is now looking to do the same in the UK.

At a time when the Internet looms as a threat to non-online retailers, Richard Moyles, founder of FunTech, has harnessed the ease-of-use qualities of Internet buying to win custom back for furniture retailers, by setting up the website www.furniture.ie.

Through the website companies in Ireland can promote their company and products online, at the same time giving customers a one-off location to search for the furniture they are looking for.

The Product Directory and Special Offers Directory makes it easy for customers to find their nearest and most suited companies, as well as getting assistance and tips on purchases.

The website also runs a number of online forums which allow people to discuss furniture and DIY topics, and gather objective opinions and feedback on particular companies and services.

In November 2005 the website clocked up 35,000 visitors, and was generating 600 sales leads monthly for member companies. On the back of this success www.findfurniture.co.uk is now under development to see if Moyles can drum up the same potential for UK companies.



East goes East: Efforts to raise the profile of UK cabinet making never go amiss and one organisation in the East Midlands is leading the way in increasing awareness of the high-quality work being done by designers and manufacturers.

Design Factory is a not-for-profit organisation that supports creative industries from the Derbyshire, Leicestershire and Nottinghamshire area through initiatives such as exhibitions, grants and training. In March, it is taking representatives from some of its 50 member companies on a seven-day trip to Japan to meet



retail buyers and speak to like-minded businesses.

Design Factory has built on ConnectUK's foundation and created a collective voice for quality and innovation within the industry. Members range from students and new start-ups to fully established companies. Membership as a manufacturer is free but designers must pay a £50 annual fee and applications must pass through a selection panel to ensure eligibility.

Many services are available to non-members but membership benefits include larger grants: non-members can receive up to £500 but this rises to 1,500 for members.

Bosnia catches up on trends

The industry will have a chance at The Furniture Show to meet exporters from Bosnia and Herzegovina, a country steeped in wood processing and manufacture that has enjoyed a significant resurgence in recent years. After the devastation of the Balkan conflict, former Yugoslavia is re-emerging as a major source for UK companies of wood components or ready-made pieces.

Representatives from 13 companies, including major names Dallas, Konjuh and Krivaja, will be attending the show at Birmingham's NEC on 22 and 23 January to familiarise themselves with trends in furniture design and market opportunities. The following day, the Bosnian party will visit furniture testing facility SATRA Technology Centre in Northamptonshire, where they will discuss technology issues.

Peter Raynor, consultant and UK/EU advisor for the visit, said: 'Yugoslavia is getting back to its feet now. It has excellent woods and trees and kilning systems, and is cheaper than Slovenia and other similar countries, so it is a very good source for manufacturers who want components or even full products.'

The country produces kitchens and bedrooms, wood products, doors, upholstery, top-end tables and chairs.

Urging delegates at The Furniture Show to meet the Bosnian party, Avdo Rapa, president of the Bosnia and Herzegovina Chamber of Commerce, said: 'Bosnia and Herzegovina boasts a wide range of solid wood furniture, as well as a variety of styles and designs using board materials, veneers and painted finishes, plus upholstered furniture.'

Yarwood fills out its leather role

Yarwood Leather is expanding operations in its South Wales factory with Yarwood Cutting and Sewing (YCS), to offer a manufacturing service.

Yarwood supplies a range of cut and cut and sewn leather covers to manufacturers, and they now plan to use its upholstery manufacturing experience to develop models for customers who lack a dedicated development department.

As well as prototype production, the new department

can take on short production runs to meet the needs of companies that need urgent distribution.

Andrew Young, Yarwood Leather md, stressed that the new department was designed to work with manufacturers, rather than as a direct competitor to them.

Paul Newton, YCS md, added: 'It seemed such an obvious thing to do. We regularly advise our customers on how best to develop their new models and



make them "leather friendly". So we thought why not put our expertise to work and help our customers develop a new model to the point where it is ready for sale?'

