

## Look online for new ways to sell

By Ray Allegrezza, Editor in chief, -- Furniture Today, January 19, 2009

*Without a doubt, one of the best-received panels at our recent Furniture/Today Leadership Conference was the session that examined the opportunities the Internet holds for the home furnishings industry.*

A number of eye-opening statistics were shared during the panel that featured both brick-and-click retailers and pure-play Internet retailers such as Niraj Shah, founder of CSN stores.

For example, we learned that a whopping 75% of Americans use the Internet. Of that majority, 80% use the Web to research products while two-thirds regularly purchase various products online.

Even better, through the third quarter of last year, American consumers spent \$158 billion online. And for those who still refuse to believe that consumers would ever buy a big bulky item like a sofa online, please talk to my good friend, Niraj at CSN stores.

Niraj, who founded CSN stores in 2002, told our group that he realized sales last year in excess of \$200 million, which earns him bragging rites as one of the largest online retailers in the country.

***So, am I here to merely suggest you consider selling furniture online?*** Absolutely not!

Rather, I'm here to challenge you to look at sales possibilities online in an absolutely new way.

Here's an example from a totally non-related sector:

Germany's respected Berlin Philharmonic is now giving fans, regardless of where they live, the chance to access its performances online.

That's right. Thanks to what it is calling a new digital concert hall, music lovers can buy tickets to watch performances online. If you can't make the live performance, for a mere \$14, you can listen at a later date.

So what's the relevance for you? How about forming a partnership with a designer who, for an agreed-upon fee, consults via the Internet with your customers?

It's easy and convenient for your customer and you get to open the door to new sales opportunities.

You will also get credit for doing something edgy, innovative and exciting.

That's music to my ears!