



BoF

The Business of Furniture

May 13, 2020

HIGHLIGHTS

08 Industry Bulletin Board

Information during the Coronavirus outbreak is at a premium. Business of Furniture is dedicated to getting you the latest industry information.

10 Office Design Post-COVID: Have We Gone Through a Weird Time Warp Back to the '80s?

12 UPFRONT: Could Copper Help Reopen Offices?

32 Three Predictions on How Remote Work Will Shift the Product Specification Process

ThinkLab research suggests that specification takes between 20–39% of a designer's time.

<“From a transportation standpoint, you have to ensure driver safety coming in and out of facilities, that you're not spreading any diseases.” p36



LOGISTICS

Be Certain, Things Will Change, but One Group Will be Loyal Through and Through

“FROM A TRANSPORTATION STANDPOINT, YOU HAVE TO ENSURE DRIVER SAFETY COMING IN AND OUT OF FACILITIES, THAT YOU’RE NOT SPREADING ANY DISEASES.”

by Emily Clingman

As the COVID-19 global pandemic continues to impact the commercial furniture industry, there is one sector that has gone largely unnoticed — the delivery companies. Just as manufacturers and dealers have adjusted operations to serve the immediate healthcare crisis, so have trucking outfits — and there are significant risks for these workers.

“From a transportation standpoint, you have to ensure driver safety coming in and out of facilities, that you’re not spreading any diseases,” said Ryan Goor, president of Commercial Furniture Transport (CFT) in Secaucus, New Jersey. “And from here, things will likely be drastically different.”

CFT delivery drivers are provided masks they are required to wear, and other safety precautions are in place. The third-party furniture delivery and installation company typically serves the New York City metro area plus Connecticut, Philadelphia and New Jersey. Once the pandemic took root in New York and spread throughout the region, CFT was inundated with orders for shipping and installing healthcare furniture to hospitals, temporary pop-up medical facilities and conventions centers turned COVID clinics, “as far as deep Pennsylvania,” Goor said.

Speed has been extremely important, he added.

“The customer is so anxious for it, so we’re turning stuff around basically as it comes to us,” he said. “We’re then turning it right around to the hospitals.”

As the need for emergency medical equipment flattens out with the curve, and business restrictions are lifted a bit, the company is starting to shift back to office furniture delivery and installation. This area has already seen changes as a result of the pandemic, like reconfigurations of office setups to include social distancing protocols. One financial institution removed all of its chairs so people physically can’t sit next to each other.

Another issue springing up in the delivery industry is how to handle showroom pieces.

“With demo office chairs, for instance, you have no idea who sat in it,” Goor said. “How are they going to be kept clean? How do we ensure that our people are safe as well as their customers?”

In the post-pandemic era, picking up demo furniture might involve bagging the chair as tight as possible then bringing it back to the warehouse to be kept in a separate area until it’s sanitized — “kind of a huge pain,” Goor said. “But this is what we’re going to have to do in every scenario you can think of.”

Transportation also faces another significant post-pandemic problem.

“We used to send three people in a truck to a job site,” Goor said. “We can’t do that anymore.”

Transportation, delivery and installation will be taxed by stretched crews. Dealers and construction managers will need to get used to longer schedules due to lighter crews.

“You might say, ‘We need to have this by this date so can you just add more men?’ No, we can’t because it’s not safe,” Goor said.

While some in the industry have started to waiver, CFT has taken the opposite approach. Financially, the company is strong, according to Goor, and its foundational services are “extremely diverse,” he said.

“We’re using this time to look at our processes and at our people, look at the things that we do on a daily basis and ask how we become more efficient, and improve on those,” Goor said. “How does this make us a better, stronger company coming out of this?”

Goor said having experienced a situation like this, CFT employees are much more open to thinking outside the box — which will help move forward because a lot of people are resistant and say, “This is the way we do it.”

“Well, we can’t do it that way now so how do we change?” he said. “That’s really going to be a huge thing for us because our world will never be the same.”



The pandemic has really challenged the delivery workers. The dilemma between wanting to avoid exposure to illness and feeling compelled to help their companies serve the community is significant.

“As we were watching the news, it was clear that hospitals were going to become overloaded, that there was going to be a need for other things,” Goor said. “For us, it was really our employees. They stepped up, never wavered, never asked any questions, except, ‘How can we help? What can we do?’ That was huge. We’ve been all over the northeast in the past month, just delivering products. We’ve been to hospitals, Navy bases, Army bases, VA hospitals and Walter Reed National Military Medical Center.

“We need to acknowledge the role of the service providers, not just the healthcare people. They instantly put themselves in danger installing equipment or hospital beds, going to places that quite honestly, I don’t want to go to, but I think that’s our responsibility. Appreciation of the guys out in the field I think really should be noted.”

Goor reports the demand for medical equipment has slowed dramatically and a lot of manufacturers have canceled orders. CFT is moving into storing these products for the manufacturers until they decide what they are able to do.

“So, our workload is starting to dwindle,” Goor said. “Fortunately, some of the other essential businesses are starting to kick up again in the anticipation of bringing employees back.” **BoF**