

Catching Zzzz's creates growth for Mattress Giant

By David Perry

ADDISON, Texas — The Zzzz's are on the march for Mattress Giant.

They first sprang to life four years ago, helping the nation's No. 6 bedding retailer stand out from the tough retail competition that always has characterized the bedding industry. They cleverly gave form to a concept that is timeless in the world of sleep: catching some Zzzz's.

The Zzzz's unleashed by the creative team at Mattress Giant immediately took to the airwaves, starring in TV commercials. "The Zzzz's existence is known, but few are ever caught," an announcer says as the camera panned a night-time landscape. "Just seeing one is considered an accomplishment. As quickly as they appear, they vanish into the night. Unless you have the right mattress."

The commercial turns the Zzzz's into elusive white creatures who flee into the forest. But the commercial ends with the perfect way to catch the Zzzz's: a beautiful new mattress.

That message has resonated with Mattress Giant's customers as the chain has continued to expand its reach across the country. The retailer operates more than 255 stores in 13 states and bills itself as "America's fastest-growing specialty bedding retailer."

Selling better sleep

Bedding sales were an estimated \$199 million in 2005, the last year for which Furniture/Today has ranked the bedding specialists. That was an 8.2% increase over the previous year.

The 2005 figures included sales in Chicago, a market the company later exited by selling its stores there to a Chicago-based retailer. Total bedding sales for Mattress Giant last year exceeded \$220 million, the company said.

The Zzzz's continue to do their part. They attract attention to the retailer in its advertising materials, and they prance proudly through the company's Web site at www.mattressgiant.com.

And now they are even for sale. "Catch your own lovable, soft, fluffy 'Z' for grown-ups or kids," the Web site says. "A great pillow or toy." A standard-size Z is \$14.99.

The Zzzz's are part of an effort by the retailer to put the focus on the importance of a good night's sleep, the key benefit delivered by new bedding. They complement Mattress Giant's tag line, "Shop Smart. Sleep Better."

That tag line "embodies our philosophy to provide great value, customer service and our commitment to help customers sleep better," said CEO and President Barrie Brown.

Offering a destination for smart shoppers is an obvious goal, and it's one the retailer has embraced with its upgraded customer service and sales training programs. Mattress Giant is known for its strong sales training programs, headed by Sharon Smart, director of training.

Brown, known for his operational strengths, has been focusing on improving sales, customer service, operations and human resources since joining Mattress Giant in October 2002. Before that, he was president and chief operating officer of Sleep Country USA, which operated 50 stores in the Pacific Northwest under the Sleep Country and Mattress Gallery names.

The other element of the company's tag line, "Shop Smart. Sleep Better" — reflects Brown's awareness that consumers are more interested in getting a good night's sleep than in just buying a new bed. He said Mattress Giant prides itself on offering "an exceptional blend of value, friendly customer service and a superior quality of products for our customers."

The product roster includes Tempur-Pedic, Simmons, Sealy, Spring Air, Airsprung, Kingsdown, IB, Fashion Bed Group and Leggett & Platt.

Web provides information

Consumers can learn all about those products on the company's Web site, but they aren't for sale online. "Because we believe you should try before you buy," the company says, "we don't sell mattresses online. Visit our stores for a test dream today."

Brown and his team are dreaming of more growth for Mattress Giant. One step in that process was the sale of the company last year to a private equity firm, Los Angeles-based Freeman Spogli & Co. Brown said the sale hasn't affected day-to-day operations, but will provide the resources to help Mattress Giant continue to grow. This February, the company entered its first new market since 1999, in Jacksonville, Fla.

Mattress Giant has a strong social conscience and donates bedding and related items to a variety of worthy causes, including the Ronald McDonald House Charities



Distinctive architecture sets off this Mattress Giant store.

and the YouthBridge Family Community in St. Louis, a market served by the company.

"Mattress Giant is a true giant in our hearts," said Kathy Sidel, executive director of YouthBridge, which serves the families of children receiving medical care in St. Louis. In addition, Mattress Giant donated \$250,000 worth of products to assist Hurricane Katrina victims.

Brown also is known for occasionally taking provocative positions on industry issues. In a talk at Furniture/Today's Bedding Conference last year, he showed pictures of optical illusions and challenged attendees to think differently. He chastised bedding manufacturers for not having the courage to shorten bedding warranties, add recycling programs, and improve service before imports change the industry.

"The customer loses and the retailer loses in our current system," Brown said.

Mattress Giant is trying something different in warranties, selling extended warranties on floor samples, exchanges and other products not covered by the manufacturer. The effort has become a significant source of revenue at Mattress Giant, Brown said. Sometimes, he observed, it helps to see things from a different perspective.

RETAIL GIANTS OF BEDDING

Why they stand out

- Stresses importance of a good bed to a good night's sleep.
- Combines commitment to customer service with emphasis on value.
- Clever marketing catches attention of consumers and spotlights bedding.



The company's Zzzz's campaign gets its due inside the Mattress Giant stores.