



# Upholstery Shop & Furniture Repair

## “Restoring the Luster”

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### I. Repair or Replace

Despite a tremendous amount of history, expertise, and enthusiasm, the University of Michigan's Upholstery Shop & Furniture Repair had been suffering from a steadily shrinking client base and increasing periods of downtime over an extended period of time.

Financial cutbacks and chronic downturns due to the usual seasonality of the nature of business and University semester breaks were also creating additional difficulties for the shop.

#### How would it reverse this trend to become more vibrant and useful than ever?

To gain the competitive edge and take the advantage of being on top of the game, the Upholstery shop needed:

- ◆ Quick Customer Response
- ◆ Good Customer Service
- ◆ Quality of Workmanship
- ◆ Quality of Materials
- ◆ Communication with Customers and Other Departments
- ◆ Competitive Prices
- ◆ Full-Line of Upholstery Skills for All Types of Upholstery Needs
- ◆ Offer Replacement Furniture

### II. Refurbishing an Image

As part of the process of developing a specific marketing plan, upholsterer Phil Reed realized during his Customer Service Marketing coursework at the Plant Academy that the Upholstery Shop's methods of communicating with customers were inadequate. Changes needed to be made in order to keep old businesses, generate new businesses, market its services, relate with customers and share information more effectively. He also responded to a series of key questions about how to improve these communications, and clearly identified the department's need for additional marketing resources. As the challenges mounted during this difficult time, the shop soon began to learn that with change comes opportunity.



Detroit Observatory Couch



Radiation Oncology Waiting Room Seats



Mott's Children Hospital Sleep Spot

### III. Hammering Out Solutions

A threshold issue for the Upholstery Shop was whether the department could afford to implement a proposed **Plan of Action**. The Construction Services Department promptly agreed to fund the project's initial expenses. Further, it was also agreed that its ongoing operational costs – including a line item for advertising – would be added to the Upholstery Shop's annual budget.

The general goals and major objectives established for the Upholstery Shop included:

- ◆ Creation of a long-term (2-3 year) marketing plan
- ◆ Generation of new business and establishment of a balanced workload throughout the year
- ◆ Improvement in customer education, communication and overall relations
- ◆ Creation of a comprehensive customer target list.

Once the problems were identified and goals established, J.A. Bardouille, Director of Plant Academy, and Leslie Smith, Staff Associate of Plant Academy, assisted in the creation of innovative change strategies and the establishment of realistic time frames within the context of the development of a step-by-step plan. Tom Rumble, Foreman of Architectural Trades, and Paul Guttman, Associate Director of Construction Services, provided management experience and financial support.

### IV. Weaving a New Fabric

A new culture of increased information and enhanced communication was essential for the mission's objectives to be readily and effectively achieved – and this was not a result likely to be arrived at overnight. It took approximately 13 months to develop an overall plan of action, a portion of which was piloted for the last few months of 2000 before implementation of the full plan commenced in January 2001. The **seven key steps** used to better understand the strengths and weaknesses of the Upholstery Shop, as well as the true character and needs of its customers, included:

1. Identification of Best Customer Service Practice
2. Creation of Unit Mission, Business Objectives and Success Indicators
3. Creation of a list of External Customers
4. Identification of a “Target Group” of Customers
5. Realization of the Upholstery Shop's Competitive Edge
6. Development of a Strategic Approach to Customer Communications
7. Identification and Development of the Critical Skills Necessary to Implement the Newly Devised Customer Services Marketing Strategy

### V. Stitching It All Together

In-depth customer analysis not only identified specific new targets within the university but it also matched customers' particular business needs with specific types of services. This extensive exercise also resulted in a name change for the shop, a rewriting of its mission statement and a change in image with the development of its new logo.

A detailed plan for more effective communications with customers was ultimately – and painstakingly – devised and implemented. Once client and target group listings were compiled, strategies were designed to reach each segment, as follows:

- ◆ University Record Advertisement
- ◆ Direct mailings and e-mailings
- ◆ Postcard Reminders: “We have a new look and so can you!”
- ◆ Personal Contacts: Correspondences, telephone, meetings
- ◆ Website:  
<http://www.plantops.umich.edu/construction/shops/Upholstery/home.html>

The advertisement in the Record and website proved to be important pieces of the marketing puzzle. The website provided flexibility and convenience it had lacked in prior dealings with customers.

## VI. A New Look and Feel

The success of the marketing program has resulted in a great number of tangible benefits, such as Phil Reed's Best Presentation Award at the MAPPA conference in Ann Arbor, Michigan, Fall 2000, which led to an invitation to APPA conference in Montreal, Canada, in Summer 2001.

Other key value-added results of enhanced communications with customers and the complete implementation of the marketing plan include:

- ◆ Greater awareness of and appreciation for the Upholstery Shop & Furniture Repair
- ◆ Ability to contact customers and have them contact the Upholstery Shop "24-7"
- ◆ Better relations between customers and Upholstery Shop employees
- ◆ Increased and more consistent workload
- ◆ Change in thinking – and in budgeting – regarding marketing and advertising

## Financial Summary 1999-2002

The Upholstery Shop Financial Summary 1999-2002 is associated with the operations of Construction Services that include the details of the operation of the Upholstery Shop:

- ◆ Enterprise account for fiscal year 1999--\$33,398
- ◆ Enterprise account for fiscal year 2000--\$10,787
- ◆ Enterprise account for fiscal year 2001-- (\$16,864 )
- ◆ Enterprise account for fiscal year 2002--\$7,543

All of the enterprise accounts are designed so that the revenue generated by each of the shops meets the cost of the operation. Fiscal year 2001 reflects a correction to the books from fiscal year 1999. In that year income from work performed by our Grounds and Waste Management department was improperly credited to the Upholstery shop. The overall performance of the Upholstery enterprise indicates a net revenue of \$34,864 on total revenue of \$712,836 a margin of just over 4.8%. In addition the average revenue in the past two fiscal years has increased by approximately 15%.

**Upholstery Shop Financial Summary 1999-2002**

Year	Total Revenue	Margin	Total Maintenance General Fund
1999	167,764	33,398	24,083
Fall 2000	163,467	10,787	-378
Summer 2001	192,442	-16,864	14,372
2002	189,163	7,543	25,917

\*\*Note: Costs to Participate reflect to next budget year\*\*

The other account that we are required to maintain is the Maintenance General Fund account. This account is an allocation of funds for the maintenance and corrective repairs in our general fund facilities. The Upholstery Shop has been budgeted \$45,500 (approximately 25% of it's total budget) to perform these services on an as required basis. Due to the efforts of the Upholstery shop, all of the maintenance needs have been met each of the past four years without utilizing the budget allocated to this effort.

## VII. Recycling Results

Those working in Upholstery Shop & Furniture Repair appreciate the importance of evaluating the ongoing efficacy of its marketing plan and of developing methods to adapt it, as necessary, to ensure continued success. The primary value of documenting best practices includes taking advantage of opportunities to examine internal processes and to implement quality improvements. Secondary advantages include fostering the greater achievements of others by applying those practices to other systems and processes. Rich Robben, Director of Plant Operations, notes that front-running businesses conduct continual self-examinations not only to verify that its processes are still the best but also to demonstrate that the organization remains an industry expert, and that it can be trusted to both establish and maintain the highest standards of quality.



Stockwell Dining Room, Stickley Windsor chairs



Pierpont Commons Piano Lounge



*The University of Michigan Upholstery Shop and furniture Repair is committed to provide the highest level of customer service, by understanding the needs of each individual customer. We will strive to offer competitive pricing, on-time scheduling and to develop solutions to difficult problems with expert craftsmanship. Our goal is to build trust and long lasting relationships with our customers.*

## Feedback from the Clients

"Replacing our original Stickley windsor chairs in the Stockwell dining room with new replicas from Stickley was cost prohibitive. But thanks to the skill of Phil and Chris in the U of M Upholstery Shop, the chairs have been beautifully repaired and refurbished, at a price that fit the project budget. The newly refurbished chairs not only look great, but thanks to your efforts these historic and special chairs will serve us for years to come. It's great to have you as a resource for repairing / refurbishing all wood furniture, as well as upholstered pieces! Kudos for a job well done!"

- Mary Waite, Interior Designer, Housing Design Service

Michael and I just wanted to thank you for your prompt and valuable service. We enjoy working with the U of M Upholstery Shop not only because you do excellent work, but also because of your commitment to service. Your response to our inquiry for an estimate has always been within 2 to 3 days, your fabric samples are great and have some flexibility in pricing and you are great about giving us a timeline for completion of the job. As you know, we have completely changed the atmosphere of our Piano Lounge from formal into a "fun" gathering place for students to study and hang out. You listened to our ideas about the change and provided us with appropriate fabric samples based upon our needs. Once again, thank you. We look forward to working with you in the future.

- Merry Meyer, Facilities, The Pierpont Commons  
Michael Swanigan, Director, The Pierpont Commons

## From the Editor

Plant Academy documents and disseminates best work practices in Facilities and Operations

### The Goals

- ◆ Share workplace solutions to problems from lessons learned
- ◆ Serve as a benchmark for assessing trends and conditions
- ◆ Identify who is doing what to implement commitment to business objectives
- ◆ Provide insight to policy options and capacity-building opportunities to improve service to customers
- ◆ Promote interdepartmental communication and collaboration

## What are Best Practices?

Best Practices describe the optimum ways to perform a business process; they are a component or combination of component practices determined to be the most effective, practicable action steps in performing work; they make lasting contributions to improving quality of work life and services to customers. They are the means by which leading organizations have achieved top performance. They also serve as goals for other organizations striving for excellence.

Source: Anderson Consulting; Best Practices and Local Leadership Program, UNCHS (Habitat); Cooperative Extension, Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources, U of Nebraska, Lincoln/2-5-99).

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*The Plant Academy Publisher*

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