

Two executives team up for private label resource

Thomas Russell -- Furniture Today, September 17, 2012



This chair's frame was made by one of Ultimo's source factories in the Manzano/ Udine chair manufacturing region of northern Italy. It is made with northern European beech and is shown in a dark walnut finish.

JEFFERSON CITY, Tenn. - Two longtime industry executives are using their expertise to provide a one-stop resource for private label manufacturing, warehousing distribution and customer service.

Leonard Backer and Doug Blackford, former executives with contract and hospitality furniture resource Loewenstein Inc., are offering the service through their respective companies.

Blackford is president of Consolidated Wood Products, which has about 50,000 square feet of manufacturing and distribution facilities in Jefferson City.

Backer is president of Ultimo Furniture, which develops and designs furniture made with parts and components sourced out of Europe and Asia.

The two worked together at Loewenstein for a number of years. Backer was vice president of marketing and Blackford worked on the manufacturing side.

Before that, Backer was senior vice president and cofounder of EPIC Furniture Group and vice president of marketing at Brown Jordan International. Blackford managed two Haworth contract furniture factories and was director of operations and quality at Sea-Ray Yachts.

Backer left Loewenstein in October 2008 and formed Ultimo in November of that same year. Blackford left Loewenstein a few years earlier and formed CWP in 2009.

Before forming their alliance in May 2010, Backer said that he and Blackford each were getting inquiries from industry contacts about private label manufacturing and product design, development and sourcing opportunities.

They also were hearing complaints in the industry about cost increases, large minimum quantities for orders, long lead times and product quality issues, particularly out of China. That, combined with the interest among retailers and consumers for U.S.-made goods, led them to pursue a sourcing and manufacturing partnership that would address the needs of clients seeking private label case goods and upholstery.



Consolidated Wood Products' 50,000-square-foot plant in Jefferson City, Tenn., can produce both upholstery and wood furniture.

"By combining all of the successful experience and expertise of these two companies, we can offer an extensive range of services targeted for almost any area and any size company in the furniture industry, while still maintaining a low overhead," Backer said.

He said he has relationships with some 35 suppliers both overseas and domestically that offer items tailored to the needs of private label clients. Many are in European countries such as Spain, Italy, Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia, although he also works with factories in China and Vietnam. He also has Scandinavian sources that produce bent plywood components.

Components supplied by these manufacturers typically are shipped to CWP's Jefferson City plant, which has a sanding, assembly, finishing and packaging facilities as well as a receiving and shipping department.

"If it needs to be assembled, finished and shipped out, we can do it from that one facility," Backer said.

The same facility also has a dedicated area for upholstery production. Both areas can produce samples as well as larger orders.

"Between the two, we have a complete manufacturing facility," Backer said, adding that Ultimo also helps develop product based on a client's drawings and designs. "They (clients) can choose what they need from us and know what their costs will be each month."

"We combine the best of American technology with these pre-milled parts and can service small orders," he said, noting that the concept also allows retailers to order in small or large quantities and have the finished goods stored in a secure area in the warehouse.

In addition, the CWP facility has staff trained to handle customer service, invoicing, collections and purchasing functions.

Backer didn't name any clients, but indicated that the operation has a steady flow of orders and activity. He welcomed those interested in learning more about the business model to contact him at leonardbacker@yahoo.com or (305) 409-9092.