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Falcon

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CFGroup/Falcon focusing on Solutions

By **ROB KIRKBRIDE**

The office furniture industry has been very product focused throughout its history, Falcon is trying to be more solutions-focused.



One size does not fit all, especially when it comes to designing lounge furniture and tables for collaborative spaces. So when Falcon began polling its customers about their needs, the brand found there were definite holes in the marketplace.

So instead of following the pack, Falcon decided to blaze its own path by focusing on segments of the lounge and table markets that competitors were underserving or downright ignoring. The result is a collection of interesting furniture based on Falcon's strengths: a design language that is unique and the manufacturing know-how to do specials for site-specific projects.

Falcon is part of CFGroup and has as its sister brands Shelby Williams, Howe and Thonet. While there is nothing unique about Falcon's focus on community and collaborative areas, its broad selection of furniture for those two niche segments and the time it has spent serving them make it unique.

"We do custom quickly and with low quantities," said

Seamus Bateson, president and chief executive officer, who noted a project for custom booths at Princess Nora bint Abdulrahman University in Saudi Arabia, where the company shipped 20 containers of custom product in a 10 day period.

Instead of creating a wide range of overly simplistic lounge and table furniture for collaborative spaces, Falcon is closely following trends in education and the office and asking customers what they need. That allows the brand to create the specialized products that the market craves. All of it is being driven by technology, said Steve Cohen, corporate vice president of sales and marketing at CFGroup. "Technology is driving changes in the space," he said. "What we doing a lot is trying to adapt traditional furniture for technology and how people are really working today."

There are some interesting trends emerging from the Millennial generation as well. They eat out less than any of the previous generations in the office. Yet they want a









“eating out” feel to the spaces in their offices. Since one of Falcon’s specialties is its custom booths — an increasing number of which are being specified at bar height — the company’s products are in demand.

“They want collaboration, they want a quality of experience, they are health conscious,” Cohen said of the Millennials storming into offices everywhere. “They eat out less, which means they tend to be more productive when they stay in. If we can keep them comfortable and productive, our customers are happy.”

The quality of the environment has become critical to recruitment and retention of employees in offices and students on campus. Virtual learning is changing educational spaces and corporate training needs. Mobile working and learning are the norm. At the same time, people are demanding choice in where they sit. That means there is a need for a lot of different types of seating.

Though incorporating power into products is nothing new, Falcon is working hard to do it in a way that is as convenient and less intrusive. Its Power FLX table is a good example. The industry has always struggled with elegant ways of getting power from the work surface to the floor. That’s especially true for cafe-type settings.

Power FLX is a cost-effective and simple way of doing

it. Power FLX has a power hub under the center of the table top. The electrical runs down the center of a pedestal table and to the floor where it can be connected to an outlet.

While it might seem simple, Falcon also adds a lot of power options to its booths. Instead of placing the receptacle under the table, where it can be socially awkward for someone to tuck their head under the surface to plug in, Falcon adds the power at shoulder height.

Forum is another product that has performed well for Falcon. Launched at NeoCon 2013, Forum is a range of products that creates a community hub with multifunctional zones where workers can connect, encourage innovation and share ideas.

Falcon is also benefiting from a large collection of products that falls under the heading of TLC — training, learning and collaboration. All of its brands contribute to this collection, but the idea is that training, learning and collaboration can happen comfortably. In many cases, the lines between the three activities are blurring as well.

The brand is moving forward with new products in 2015 as well. The first is Fifth Avenue, a booth seating line that has a standard back height of 28 inches, seat height of 19 inches, and five inches of premium foam



over an elasti-web removable seat. It also features a hanging lumbar pillow and is offered in single-booth, double-booth and quarter-circle configurations.

Falcon is also revamping its website, falconproducts.com. It will have four or five new products to show at NeoCon in the new CF Group showroom in Chicago. "There is plenty of runway to do even more," Bateson said. "There is a lot of experience (in these growing segments) in our roots. A lot of companies scramble to meet the need. That wasn't our challenge."

The office furniture industry has been very product focused throughout its history. Falcon is trying to be more solutions-focused — showing the design community how its products fit into the new ways of working and collaborating in community.

"The nice thing for us is that most of our clients and end-users want to know what we have done recently," Bateson said. "When we get to that point, there is not a city in this country where we couldn't point to a project (we have completed). It could be hotel, office or educational facility."

Having its "sister" brands in its arsenal helps too.

Shelby Williams focuses on the hospitality and food-service markets. You can find its products at many hotels, fine dining rooms, country clubs and high-end senior liv-

ing centers. One of its most high profile installations is at the Bellagio Hotel and Casino in Las Vegas. It is known for its wood and metal seating and for its heritage in banquet room seating.

The company's Howe brand, which it acquired in 1998, is slightly more upscale in its offerings. Howe invented the first mass-produced banquet table and created a lightweight, space-saving folding table for use in US Navy submarines. In collaboration with IBM, Howe developed the first training table which has been widely used in corporate offices and colleges. The company makes dynamic products that stack, nest and fold. Its strength is in northern Europe, Scandinavia and the UK.

Thonet is the company's oldest brand -- more than 150 years old. Thonet invented the steam bending process for commercial quality bentwood furniture in the mid-19th century and may very well be the oldest commercial furniture company in the industrialized world. Thonet was also the first company to use an assembly line to make furniture. Thonet is known for providing seating in the education, healthcare and corporate markets.

Other than Shelby Williams, which is sold directly to customers, the CF Group brands are sold through traditional contract furniture channels. 