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Helping Clients Look Great on a Budget

Boomerang builds profits out of used chairs, desks and tables

[Victoria Hurley-Schubert](#)

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SPOTLIGHT - Corporate Office Design

Does anybody think used desks, chairs and tables can have the cachet of a well-maintained Lamborghini? Seth DeForest, president of Sewell-based Boomerang, does.

His company specializes in pre-owned high-end office furniture, and DeForest compares his modus operandi with those salesmen who transformed sleazy dealings in barely running rust buckets into high-toned offerings of “pre-owned vehicles.”

“When we started, the industry had a whole bunch of shady “used-car dealers,” he says, so he took his education and his background in the restaurant business where “it was all about presentation and cutting edge,” and came up with a smoother approach.

DeForest says he told himself, “If I’m going to get into this industry, I’m not going to be the typical used-car dealership. We can make it sexy; we can turn it around and make it the certified pre-owned car of this industry.” Now, he says, “We don’t deal with the Toyotas of the world; we only deal with the Mercedes, BMWs, Audis and Aston Martins.” In furniture speak, that’s brands like Knoll, Steel Case and Herman Miller.

And pre-owned is profitable, he says. This year DeForest says he anticipates 51% revenue growth to \$6.2 million, up from \$4 million in 2005, which was up 60% from \$2.5 million in revenue in 2004.

Boomerang does business on three tracks: It buys and refurbishes existing office furniture; sells used and new furniture; and offers clients financing solutions, including using the value



DeForest says if furniture were cars, he’d be selling pre-owned Audis, BMWs and Aston Martins.

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of a company's old furniture toward a new purchase. DeForest says, "Big picture—we analyze a company's furniture needs and come up with a solution that ultimately saves them money as opposed to your traditional furniture dealer that is driven by their lead manufacturer."

He says the choice to buy used and refurbished brand-name pieces can save a business about half the cost of buying new.

When Boomerang buys a company's used furniture, the pieces come back to the warehouse for evaluation. Some items are labeled for sale "as is;" other units are repaired or refurbished to client standards. The store's sales team also looks to manufacturers for new pieces when Boomerang doesn't have in stock what it needs to complete a job.

For regular clients, DeForest may develop a standardized price list that allows the buyer to know how much items will cost in the future as they spread out and need more furniture. "So that way they can forecast their growth and budget that growth," he says. Boomerang also helps clients develop floor plans for a new office and figure out how much furniture they will need.

DeForest got started with this in April 2001 when he bought a Philadelphia-based used furniture company that was going out of business. He financed the deal with \$60,000 from savings, friends and family. Three employees and five temps helped him sell the inventory he had purchased from the previous owner.

"[The facility] was so disorganized they didn't know what they had," he says. "There were skids of furniture piled up; it was insane. We peeled it away like an onion."

He had to sort through the items, choosing what to sell, repair, refurbish or throw away. Even now, DeForest says, about 10% of what Boomerang buys is discarded as beyond repair.

He bought his current 75,000-sq.-ft. warehouse and the surrounding 27 acres in 2002, making the move to the Garden State. "We wanted this position around Exit 3 [of the Turnpike]" he says, because it was on the way not only to Philadelphia, but to "Boston, New York and D.C. You're right along that channel."

As a student at Cornell University, DeForest briefly studied food science. At the end of the first semester he recalls looking around the classroom and thinking, "I'd never really connected with anybody in the room. I could care less about connecting with anybody in the room, and these people would be my colleagues in the future. I can't do this."

He switched to hospitality, took business classes and got a job in Robert DeNiros' New York-based restaurant group, Myriad, after graduating in 2000.

Despite his business education, after five years with Boomerang, DeForest has yet to write a business plan. "This company is weird for me because I'm classic business school ... and I didn't do it," DeForest says. "[In school] I won a business-plan competition, but I didn't do

one when I started the company. I had the idea, I knew the vision, but one thing I realized ... is that things change so fast I had no time to write things down. As soon as I had one idea, something would happen and I'd move to a different direction."

In the next year, he hopes to open offices in the New York City area and in northern Virginia, to be ready for the presidential election in 2008, when offices will be shifting and people will be changing jobs.

"Now we're at the point where we can write a business plan because we have some history behind us," he says.

And even if DeForest doesn't, it won't be because his mind is wandering. "Business is my hobby, I think about it all the time," he says. "Boomerang is not about selling cubicles, it's about selling a product at a price and presentation that is acceptable to your clients. I could sell anything from Boomerang and the presentation would be the same."

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