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Person to Watch  
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Coming Back Around

How Seth DeForest has taken the smear from pre-owned.

Seth DeForest doesn't want you to think of "pre-owned" as a dirty word. No, the president and CEO of Boomerang hopes that you'll see value in something that has been used before. After all, it's his business. Boomerang sells pre-owned office furniture, but in a different way – and in a different setting – than has ever done before.

"A lot of used office furniture dealers act solely as brokers," says DeForest, 28, of Haddon Heights, "where they make the deal and ship it out the next day to the next customer." Instead, Boomerang is clearing house of sorts, where used office furniture from all over the country is cleaned, refurbished, stored, and repackaged until the new owner is ready.

DeForest isn't dealing in kitschy file cabinets and gun metal gray desks either. Boomerang only turns around the "Mercedes" of office furniture, names like Knoll, Steelcase, Haworth, Herman Miller, and Teknion, whose names take spots next to the fine works of art at museums around the country, like the Museum of Modern Art.

"We deal with high end because it's more durable," says DeForest whose commitment and interest in architecture shows in the detailed blueprints for his planned new warehouse entryway that are scattered among books on design and architecture in his spacious and airy office.

But how did this Princeton native get involved in making classy office furniture more affordable? Not the way you'd think.

DeForest started his professional career in the New York City restaurant industry by way of Cornell University, where he earned an undergraduate degree in business. After doing time with Myriad Restaurant Group, managing restaurants like Robert Deniro's Tribeca Grille and helping to launch the Flagship W Hotel, DeForest found himself disenchanted with the industry. That's when Boomerang crossed his path.

"The opportunity presented itself to me," says DeForest of when the bankrupt company came to his attention. "It was purely a business decision."

So he packed up his life from New York City and moved to Philadelphia, where he ran Boomerang out of rented space. He always wanted to own his own space, though, which is what brought him to the Hurffville location, a 75,000 square foot former manufacturing facility squared on 16 acres of land, two years ago.

“The whole place was brown with grease,” says DeForest of what now is an open admittedly unusual showcase facility that is unlike what you might expect in any kind of “pre-owned” business. Yes the Boomerang showroom does have its office mock-ups that show customers what Boomerang has available. But the vast warehouse space is also home to a Porsche, a plane, a kiddie horse, a tricycle, swings and a Segway, on which potential customers and reporters are encouraged to ride for a tour of the Boomerang facility.

“I feel that when someone buys from Boomerang, they’re buying our whole experience, our whole meaning,” says DeForest of his unique idea of office decorating which, in the near future, will include a putting green. Besides giving clients a relaxing atmosphere in which to browse, DeForest says that it promotes “creating spaces that engage people.”

And how does the pre-owned office industry suit DeForest? Very Well. His clients include both upstarts and fortune 500 companies, from Cannon to Glaxo SmithKline to Goddard to Lenox to the Starr Restaurant Group to the University of Pennsylvania, “It’s the upstarts that I like the most though,” says DeForest of his client base. “They usually don’t realize how much it costs to outfit an office with new furniture in a style that will impress their clients.” When buying from Boomerang, businesses save from 50 to 75 percent off of a new price, which can make a major difference to a company low on cash and client base.

Admittedly, the furniture that Boomerang sells isn’t perfect, but the company goes by what DeForest calls the ten foot rule. “It’s not perfect furniture. It looks perfect from ten feet away,” he says. “But up close, you can see small markings,” he says, pointing to small examples of wear and tear. “It’s a small sacrifice that a lot of businesses will make for such high quality materials.”

He also speaks to how pre-owned office furniture is environment friendly. “If it wasn’t bought by someone else, it would end up in a landfill,” he says.

The sources for his stock come from all over, says DeForest. Don’t think he’s a vulture, though, looking to scavenge when a business bites the dust. By networking with both facilities managers and new furniture dealers, he’s on the up and up when it comes to what businesses are buying new furniture and looking to sell the fantastic and high-end stock that already have.

DeForest is a hit with his staff, too. “I have no problem coming to work everyday,” says office manager Lisa Long. “And I come a long way.” Indeed, this

dynamic do-it-all commutes everyday from Glenside, PA to work at Boomerang. “I’ve never worked in a place like this before,” says receptionist Nikki Hawkes, who only started working for Boomerang a few weeks ago. “It’s like being in a family.”

DeForest says that he doesn’t want to grow into a mega-company and that he likes his space in the Southern New Jersey warehouse. But he does talk of maybe going back into the restaurant industry, this time opening up his own restaurant. “South Jersey’s Italian food is parallel to none, including New York City,” he says. What kind of restaurant will he open? His only answer is a sly smile. We’ll just have to wait and see what’s next from Seth DeForest.