

# Makers: Game Changer

By ROB KIRBRIDE

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One of the toughest things you can do as a company is to give up business you already have in your back pocket to focus exclusively on what you do best. But that's exactly what AMQ did when the company decided to focus on quality products, customer service and quick shipping.

AMQ decided to rebrand itself recently to emphasize that it can ship open plan offices in five days. It was more than a messaging shift. The company dropped all product lines that didn't fit the "5 Day Open Plan" model, which included two systems lines, a storage collection and all of its seating.

Instead of competing with the mid-market masses as a generalist, which had worked well for the company for five years, AMQ decided to focus strictly on open plan environments and products that can ship in five days. The market response proves AMQ made the right choice.

Sales last year grew 320 percent and this year, sales are up 200 percent, according to Chief Executive Officer Bruce A. Mallett.

Mallett is betting that open plan furniture buyers want quick and easy transactions at a good price. So that's what the company is focusing on — and nothing more. Though it might sound like a simple philosophy, AMQ is thriving because of it. AMQ is in the process of opening a showroom in the New York Design Center, others in San Francisco and Irvine, Calif. and a distribution center and showroom in Atlanta.

Not bad for a company that was founded in 2009 in Santa Clara, Calif. by a group of industry veterans, led by Mallett. In a sea of sameness, AMQ is staking its claim in a small but growing section of the industry. The company's promise to deliver open plan products in five days sets it apart. When designers ask: "Who



Bruce Mallett



is AMQ?" the company hopes the answer is, "The folks who will deliver an entire open plan office in five days."

"It is a clear, concise message," Mallatt said. "It really just made it simple. It gives (customers) confidence and it gives us credibility. The time frame in which furniture is delivered is almost more important than the price."

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On the surface, AMQ looks like a distribution company. But it works closely with its manufacturing partners in Asia. The company is designing its own products, not simply slapping together Asian parts into a finished component. The fact that AMQ is bringing unique products to the market helps open doors with large, aligned dealers that might not give a mid-market company a second glance. AMQ is not shopping a simple, cobbled together product to every dealer that will have a look. Instead, the company is offering a cost-effective solution that is unique.

The company also has an open book management philosophy. Each of its employees has a full understanding of the company's cash flow and have a stake in the outcome. Many other companies are adopting a similar philosophy, including Southwest Airlines and Harley-Davidson.

It is not easy to grow a new brand, regardless of the simplicity of the message or the engagement of employees. For years, AMQ has been a West Coast company and has counted some of the largest tech companies as its customers. Google has 25,000 electric bases supplied by AMQ through its dealer.

Other customers include Auto Anything, Aviat Networks, Acient, Caesar's entertainment, California State University, Encidia, Federated Media, LinkedIn, Marvell, Microsoft, Netlogic, Siemens, Solution Set, Sugar Publishing, TRS Rental Telco, Venadavo and Wave Systems, to name a few.

Look for more new customers as the company continues to expand on the East Coast and moves into the Midwest. AMQ has only been on the East Coast for about the past four to six months. "Our New York showroom is a tremendous opportunity for us," Mallett said. "And we are going to NeoCon for the first time this year."

The company will show off its latest product, the ILINE power/data beam. AMQ has never shown any





products at any event. Its space on the 7th floor of the Merchandise Mart will mark the first time. In short, ILINE is a power/data beam that runs between height adjustable tables to power up everything an office dweller might need. Power and data cables are kept organized in ILINE's built in wire channel. ILINE is available in 3 circuit/5 wire and 4 circuit/8wire electrical to provide plenty of power. It is also available in 48 inch, 60 inch and 72 inch widths.

In some ways, ILINE is influenced by how young people are working. In fact, Starbucks has greatly influenced open plan work. It is a very fluid environment. Sit-stand desks mean movement and that's where ILINE flourishes. It is the individual power and data source for individual sit-stand products. "You can literally pick up the desk and move it because the beam is stand alone," Mallett said, who added that the product is driven by technology companies in Northern California. ILINE is different too in that the post connects on four compressed springs. That allows the installer to level the beam on two different axes.

Mallett has the experience to take AMQ national (and global). He started in the industry in 1995 at Wilkhahn in South Africa and Germany. In 1998, he came to the

U.S. to work for a Herman Miller dealership under the SQA brand. "I was influenced a lot at that stage," he said. "SQA was closed and I linked up with partners in Northern California to create EQA (an Internet furniture seller). In 2009, we started AMQ. We have great partners here and overseas. All of us are trying to make a good company great and have some fun along the way."

Making a bench or height adjustable table is not rocket science. Mallett likened it to a ping pong table and gave the example of Google employees using a door and a few legs to create a desk. Instead of trying to make the product more than it really is, AMQ is working to execute and add to the details that make a difference — to be a little more progressive than the competition.

In addition to the work AMQ is doing for its own brand, the company is also starting some OEM relationships with a few larger office furniture makers. "As a company, we still see a tremendous amount of growth in coming years," Mallett said. "We are moving to the East Coast and the center of the country. Open plan benching applications, outside of the East and West coasts, have just been around a short time. But it is the fastest growing category. There is a tremendous amount of growth and opportunity coming that we haven't even touched." 

