

# FURNITURE Today

## Shoppers increasingly turning to Internet

By Thomas Russell

NAPLES, Fla. — Internet furniture sales are experiencing a wave of growth that reluctant retailers will need to start riding to help sustain their own brick-and-mortar businesses.

That was a key theme from a panel of Internet retailers and experts who spoke at the 2008 Furniture/Today Leadership Conference here.

Despite some false starts in recent years, Internet sales now are not just going strong — they are becoming a mainstay of opportunity, particularly for retailers and suppliers wanting to reach younger consumers, the panelists said.

Penny Schneck, electronic sales manager for Furniture/Today parent Reed Business Information, noted that 75% of Americans use the Internet. Of those, 80% use the Web to research products while two-thirds purchase various products online.

Through the third quarter of this year, Americans spent \$158 billion online, up 10% from the same period in 2007. While the growth has slowed to about 1% in October as the economy hit the brakes, Schneck said that “the fact that Internet continues to grow speaks volumes about the channel.”

She cited a ComScore survey showing that online sales of furniture and home and garden products in this year's third quarter were up 26% from a year earlier.

Schneck said Internet shoppers fall into two main categories: casual shoppers looking for the best price, and more affluent shoppers using the Internet for its convenience. She said online shopping growth in the near future will depend largely on the latter — consumers with incomes of around \$100,000.

The panel also included presentations from three online retail experts, including:

► Niraj Shah, CEO of [CSN Stores](#), which he founded in 2002. With more than \$200 million in revenues, it is one of the largest online furniture retailers in the United States.

► Scott Perry, president and CEO of Everything Furniture Inc., the parent of [Everythingfurniture.com](#), an online furniture resource started in 2001 that will generate between \$15 and \$20 million in revenues this year.

► Andrew Zuppa, a corporate general manager and marketing director of American Furniture Warehouse, the Englewood, Colo.-based Top 100 store. His company's e-commerce site generates 500,000 hits per month



Andrew Zuppa, left, American Furniture Warehouse, Englewood, Colo.; Scott Perry, Everything Furniture Inc.; Niraj Shah, [CSN Stores](#); and Penny Schneck, Reed Business Information Services Retail Group.