



FRÍANT

2020 Customer Success Story

Key to Success: Excellent Customer Service

It has never been easy to stand out from the crowd and create loyal customers. Today, with so many viable product options, the job is tougher than ever. Looking at successful companies, what is often clear is their ability to provide solutions that address a real need and to go above and beyond expectations in order to drive customer loyalty. One such company is Friant & Associates, an office furniture manufacturer, based in Oakland, California. By working hand-in-hand with its dealers and creating a design and order process that is easy and efficient through technology deployments and training, Friant has been steadily building its loyal customer base for more than two decades.

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What started as a one-man operation more than 25 years ago has grown into a successful company with nearly 500 employees and four manufacturing, warehouse, and showroom locations. In a competitive market, this is no easy feat. What can be learned from Friant's success?

Philosophy

Friant's business strategy is fairly simple—create quality, affordable workspaces while ensuring customer satisfaction. The concept might seem straight forward, but as anyone in business can attest, keeping a consumer satisfied is sometimes easier said than done—especially with a middleman involved. Despite not having direct contact with the end customer, Friant proactively ensures both the dealer and the customer are satisfied.

"Friant sells great looking furniture but what we're really offering is value and that translates to dealer profits and end-user savings," commented Paul Friant, CEO. In order to deliver excellent customer service, Friant ensures several steps throughout the customer experience are addressed, including:

- The dealer must be well educated about Friant's products and order processes.
- The design process needs to be easy to use and Friant products must be easy to specify in order for the dealers to show their clients which products fit into their spaces and budgets and exactly how they will look.
- The dealer needs to place the order accurately. The order must be processed quickly and efficiently. This means they must know how to use the software.
- The installers must have all of the product and parts—everything required—for proper and timely assembly.

All of these steps are interdependent and critical to ensuring a smooth customer experience from start to finish. Friant has deployed industry-leading software tools and established a method to streamline the process.



"Creating value means delivering a seamless customer experience—from sale to delivery. We work closely to build relationships with our dealers in order to help them deliver a great experience to their clients."

—Paul Friant, CEO, Friant

Product Flexibility

All customer experiences start with a product. Office furniture products have evolved in many ways over the past few decades, from private offices and cubicles, to shorter walls, benching and now open floor plans. The reality is most customers want a hybrid solution to meet all requirements but one where all the systems work together. For this reason, Friant designs its products to be interoperable—producing pieces that work together and have universal hardware to offer greater flexibility and options. By designing products this way, they are able to meet consumer demands and adapt to changing trends more easily as well as offer the convenience of one-stop shopping.

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Because it has several product lines, with many features and finish options, Friant puts a lot of forethought into each of its product's design phase and catalogue creation to make it inherently easier to specify. Every catalog and part number is structured to eliminate confusion during specification. For example, there are separate part numbers for each option instead of building too many options into one part number. Because of this provision, communication is clearer and it's easier to order Friant, resulting in a more accurate order.

Many of Friant's dealers use 2020 Cap or 2020 Giza professional space-planning solutions to design innovative spaces for their clients. These solutions put entire product catalogs at the dealers' fingertips and enable them to create instant, beautiful, and accurate renderings featuring Friant products, which helps clients envision exactly how their spaces will look furnished with Friant's systems.

"Offering catalogs in the 2020 software is essential to getting our products in front of dealers and helps them clearly share the vision of what a Friant solution looks like with their end users. It's a great sales tool—even people with no design training can use 2020 Visual Impression to create 3D visuals showing our product and how great it will look with actual fabrics and finishes."

—Catherine Rendon, Product Design, Friant

Further building out the customer experience, Friant creates electronic content catalogs for 2020 Cap and 2020 Giza with automation functionality built in. This enables efficient and more accurate furniture specifications during the ordering process and the ability to provide instant quotes and submit an order in real time, while still in the design software. Creating a drawing with Friant's products will save designers time and this level of automation results in higher ordering accuracy as well.



Building Relationships

Relationships take time, and Friant has worked hard to develop good working relationships with its dealers. Company representatives educate dealers on how to position Friant products and train them to specify Friant products within 2020 Cap or 2020 Giza. This ensures dealers can provide their clients with quality designs and utilize the electronic catalogs for more accurate online orders. Submitting orders electronically to Friant through 2020 software reduces manual entry and the risk of human error in the translation of the order. Furthermore, Friant is diligent about monitoring orders and addressing changes immediately, if and when any issues arise.

Because the return on investment is so clear, Friant knows it's effective to invest training time with new dealers on the front end, walking them through the process, which makes ordering with Friant as easy as and as efficient as possible. This investment results in higher levels of client satisfaction and reaps dividends for everyone down the line.

Across the board, from sales to customer service, Friant's team prides itself on knowledge, accessibility, and speed. This combination leads to a smooth order and time-to-production process and allows for Friant to meet the customers' deadlines and expectations—a happy customer means the dealer is satisfied and reinforces the positive relationship.

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Streamlining the Process

With success comes growth and, recently, Friant needed to expand not only its production facilities but also implement a system that could better track orders and manage production on a larger scale. This would drive further efficiencies and avoid growing pains typical among manufacturers in growth mode. Friant's executive team decided to partner with 2020 to integrate the manufacturing operations management (MoM) solution, 2020 Insight, into its daily operating process. Developed specifically for furniture manufacturers, 2020 Insight goes beyond traditional enterprise resource planning (ERP) to deliver a comprehensive platform that connects the entire manufacturing process to create a seamless flow of information from sales order to installation.

"2020 Insight provides us start-to-end visibility into the ordering process and enables us to manage and scale up for large volumes of manufacturing," said John Woodworth, Purchasing Manager, Friant. "We're also able to effectively introduce new products and offer the required customization with it—all of which helps us to better serve our customers."

Friant processes more than 500 orders per month, each with incredibly different products and parts. Each order type may have different workflows varying by lead times and purchase requirements. 2020 Insight applies business process logic rules to each stage of product, which Friant established based on its business needs. Friant can make changes as it implements continuous improvements, and can easily make modifications while 2020 Insight updates the manufacturing process automatically.

In order for 2020 Insight to effectively help manage production, Friant places high importance on the quality of the content entering its systems and ensures its content catalogs are always up to date. In addition, Friant encourages dealers to submit their orders electronically via 2020 Worksheet, which pulls all the specifications directly from the design software. If a dealer chooses not to submit it electronically, then a Friant agent will work with the dealer to get the order into the system. All files related to the order are attached to it within the system and bill of materials (BoMs) are automatically created along with production orders. With 2020 Insight, Friant is able to manage the entire life cycle of the order. If there is an error, it can be traced and corrected easily. For further insight, a status history of each order is conveniently available, and notifications are sent when key points throughout the process are achieved.

"In this industry there is a lot of urgency with many same-day shipments or fast turnaround times in emergency scenarios," said Clair Moreland-Girma, Vice President of Customer Service, Friant. "2020 Insight allows us to address needs quickly in these circumstances and keep customers satisfied."

With all the information Friant has readily available as a result of 2020 Insight, team leaders can manage customer interactions by easily pulling reports at any time. The system can be queried for useful information such as "any open orders" and help move orders along or resolve issues faster without the need of IT intervention or support. The software is also helpful as a sales tool. For example, if a sales leader wants to know the number of orders a specific dealer has submitted for a certain product during the past



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twelve months, the answer is a only a few clicks away. If management has an inquiry, team leaders can answer instantly and confidently. This allows Friant to be able to make quick and informed decisions and provide top-level customer service.

Going deeper, Friant can even pull historic records. One such example of this use case occurred when a dealer called to ask about a drawing for an order he had submitted to Friant two years prior. An agent at Friant was able to pull up the order with the attachments, helping the dealer in a matter of seconds, and making him look like a hero in front of his customer.

With all this success, however, Friant never stops looking for ways to innovate and deliver even higher standards. Another example of Friant's drive to leverage technology shows in its efforts to customize 2020 with a stock checking function allowing order entry and customer support agents to check inventory in real time—a task that used to be manual and time consuming. This has reduced the number of back orders and has freed up time for customer support to be more proactive.

Managing Growth for a Bright Future

Friant has grown by more than 20% annually over the past few years. With a streamlined manufacturing process in place, the company managed this growth while minimizing overhead. Since implementing 2020 Insight, Friant has opened two additional factories and is able to manage orders and inventory across all four of its facilities to maximize efficiencies and better serve dealers with rapid turnaround times.

With a strong foundation for managing the manufacturing process, Friant plans to leverage data collected to make highly informed decisions about how to further grow its business and, of course, continue to delight dealers and customers, alike. With dedication and unrelenting drive, this is how Friant differentiates itself and where, as its tagline states, “design sense meets business sense.”



AT A GLANCE

Challenge:

Friant needed a system that could keep pace with its growing business and deliver the best customer experience for its dealer base.

Solution:

- 2020 catalogs allowed Friant to create built-in automation so designers can easily create drawings featuring Friant products and order directly within the design software.
- Friant uses 2020 Insight to automate its manufacturing operations management and better ensure orders are received, processed and delivered efficiently.

Benefits:

- 20% growth without significant overhead
- Opened 2 new factories during this time