



Q&A

An interview with a newsmaker: Bew White, President & CEO, Summer Classics

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Bew White is president and CEO of Summer Classics, which is headquartered in Montevallo and serves more than 275 dealers and 1,500 designers in five countries.

White has led the furniture manufacturer through several periods of significant growth – and the business has ranked as one of the area’s fastest-growing companies in the past.

Summer Classics has manufacturing operations in Alabama and also has plants in China.

BBJ: *Working in a field that depends on consumers, the economy has obviously had an impact on Summer Classics. What did your company do to respond to the recession?*

White: We’ve come out with some lower priced products to address that. That’s the request we’ve had the most.

BBJ: *How did customers respond to it?*

White: They are currently our No. 1, 2 and 3 best sellers.

Three different chairs. That was unprecedented – within a year they became our top three.

BBJ: *There’s been a lot of talk about signs of a recovery. Is that something you’re noticing in your industry?*

White: My business is through the roof. A lot of it has to do with the fact that there is no inventory in the pipeline. When somebody buys something, you’ve got to make it (right then).

BBJ: *How has the industry changed since the company was founded?*

White: It’s nothing like when we started... Even (since) three years ago, our line has changed completely.

BBJ: *What's the reason for the change?*

White: It was a way to stay ahead of everybody. The way I usually explain it is that Intel comes out with a Pentium 4 before anyone can copy the Pentium 2.

BBJ: *How are you feeling about the economy and your business in the short term?*

White: I'm very optimistic right now because business has picked up dramatically in the last 30 days.

It went down that fast and I can't believe it's came back that fast. (But) that will temper itself when everybody gets back in inventory.

BBJ: *Looking back, how has the recession impacted your company?*

White: We've doubled every three and a half years since I've been in business. When you're used to going up 30 percent every year, going down 20 is like going down 50.

I probably let go of more people in four months than I have in 10 years, but now I'm having trouble finding people.