



The Tish Flooring staff with Mel, center, and Harry behind him.

TISH FLOORING

BUSINESS STATS

Location:

Indianapolis, Indiana

Years in Business:

27

Number of Stores:

1

of Employees:

21

Promotional Mix:

Advertising, relationships with area realtors, TV, website, social media

BEST PRACTICES

■ By Jessica Chevalier

Tish Flooring is a fiercely independent flooring retail “experiment” based in Indianapolis, Indiana. Started by Fred Tishler, the business focuses solely on residential replacement—often sold in-home—and was built via nurtured relationships with area realtors. Today, Tish Flooring—run by Fred, his brother Harry and his father, Mel—has eschewed affiliation with a buying group in favor of relying on its unique, customer-centric approach to win business.

GENERATIONS OF EXPERIENCE

Though Tish Flooring is a relatively young organization, the Tishler family is deeply rooted in the flooring industry. Around the turn of the 20th century, Louis Kort traveled the Ohio River in a paddleboat, selling clothing and textiles, including area rugs. In the 1930s, Louis’ son Herman opened a furniture store in Louisville, Kentucky, and when Herman’s daughter married Mel Tishler, Herman brought his new son-in-law into the family business by opening a small carpet section in 1949 for him to oversee. Mel went on to work in many different retail flooring operations across the U.S., including Olson Rug in Chicago, Don Mendenhalls’ CarpetTalk, New York Carpet World, Tile City, Pittsburgh’s Prizant’s Carpet, and JM Benson/Carpet Factory Outlets.

Mel fathered three sons: Fred, Bruce and Harry. All of the brothers have been in the flooring business during, and even prior to, their entire adult lives, often working warehouse jobs at the locations where their father was employed. (Today, Bruce is in the import area rug business, unaffiliated with Tish Flooring.)

In 1992, Fred launched Realty Carpet in a Ford Taurus station wagon. He borrowed money to fund his venture, loaded samples into the back, and visited every real estate office on the north side of Indianapolis, promising realtors, “My price will be lower than anyone else’s, and I’ll take care of your buyers

and sellers.” Harry says that his brother’s quiet, authentic nature convinced people to put their trust in him, and after a while, it became common practice for realtors to advise their clients, “The only person to call for carpet is Fred.”

For more than six years, Fred worked this way. When he wasn’t traveling in his Taurus, he worked out of a 12’x15’ office. He didn’t advertise, and he didn’t diverge from targeting realtors.

At the turn of the century, Mel left retirement in Florida to answer phones for his son, and Fred was able to take on a little more business.

Harry, meanwhile, had been cutting his teeth in some of the most dominant flooring retail operations of the day. He started at New York Carpet World, working for Marvin Berlin, in 1977 at age 15, unloading trucks. He also worked for Rick Meyer at Carpetland USA and for Bob Shaw during Shaw Industries’ dip into retail in the late ‘90s. In 2000, Harry joined his brother and father at Realty Carpet, with the vision of growing it into a bigger company.

Today, all three Tishlers are still involved in the business. Fred continues to focus on carpet sales, and Mel, at the age of 90, works seven days a week, coming in at 6:30 a.m. Monday through Saturday and at 7:30 a.m. on Sundays.

Harry says that the culture of the business today is directly

rooted in Fred's quiet, authentic nature. "We're very lucky," notes Harry. "We've worked together so long that we don't have any disagreements. Our values are the same."

LAUNCHING THE TISH BRAND

In 2013, as the company was preparing for its first run of TV ads, the Tishlers determined that it was time to change the name of the business from Realty Carpet. With a focus on appealing to the sensibilities of the female customer it was hoping to attract, they decided that the soft-sounding first syllable of the family name would make a good moniker. "From an optimistic standpoint, we knew that we couldn't use the name Realty Carpet anymore," recalls Harry. "We needed an identifiable brand that would work well for online searches and resonate with the people that we wanted to be relevant to, primarily women ages 45 to 62. We wanted something soft, distinctive and inviting. Our business is about fashion, color, texture and style. Flooring is a very visceral purchase. We wanted visuals that are inspirational."

Working with a graphic designer, the Tishlers sought a look that would match the concept and settled on a circular logo with "Tish Flooring" written out in a clean but curvaceous, lower-case font. The white letters are set against a fresh spring-green tone, a color Harry chose because it has been proven in focus group studies to convey trust and appeal to consumers. Across the Tish Flooring website—which is custom-made by a local digital marketing firm—the color palette is refined, soft and appealing, with pops of the business' signature color throughout. Tish works intimately with its marketing firm in developing the brand and messaging. "We message in a different way," says Harry. "We don't advertise price. It's all about the identity of our brand and creating a connection with the customer. We hope that this type of messaging sets up a different expectation for the customer."

In addition to all the standard offerings, the Tish Flooring website features a number of interesting components: an active and frequently updated blog with custom content; a selection of customer reviews that includes links to Tish Flooring's Angie's List, G+ and Nextdoor review pages; a "schedule an appointment" button that invites potential customers to request an in-home visit; and a visual listing of each staff member and installation crew chief, noting their years of experience in floorcovering installation (which ranges from 13 to 37 years, incidentally). Overall, the site is pleasant to use, appealing and informative.

The digital marketing firm also manages Tish Flooring's Facebook page. Harry meets with them twice monthly to discuss content for the page.

SHOP-AT-HOME WITH A SHOWROOM

Unlike most retail flooring operations, Tish Flooring is not focused on pulling customers into its showroom. Instead, it

prefers to visit them in their homes. "We believe that when you go into the customer's home and show them large samples, something special happens," says Harry. "It's so much different than when they're in a foreign showroom environment under fluorescent lights."

Tish offers flexible scheduling, visiting homes evenings and weekends if needed, to suit the customer's scheduling needs. In-home appointments are the company's preferred method.

Tish Flooring does, however, have a showroom in northwest Indianapolis and approaches the design of the space somewhat uniquely. The showroom has no prices on products and prominently features several collections that are more inspirational in nature than they are high-volume sellers; these include Mirth Studio's patterned hardwood tiles and dynamic, patterned cement tile. "Customers come in and see inspiration," says Harry. "And even if they end up with a mundane product, they will see a cool variety of patterns and textures first. We made a decision that we don't want to focus on cost. We want customers to find something they love. Then it's our job to make [the equation] work."

THE TEAM

The Tishlers are extremely grateful for their 21 employees, as well as for their subcontractors. "Our company would not continue to grow and thrive without [our employees'] daily dedication and rock-solid commitment to serving our clients," says Harry. "I have worked at public companies and retail chains over the course of my professional life, and I have never worked with a more committed and supportive team than the one we are blessed with here at Tish Flooring. We are grateful."

Harry attributes his success in finding this top-notch team to luck but also notes that his time at Shaw—during which he was involved with developing and staffing 200 retail locations—was a positive learning experience with regard to hiring. "Shaw had very sophisticated HR processes for the time," Harry recalls, "and I learned the way to best uncover whether someone is right for your culture and the position you're hiring for."

As for the installation side of the business, Harry reports that a few years ago he was having difficulty finding quality flooring installers. "I had been following closely what the industry had been doing to alleviate the shortage but felt strongly that the industry wouldn't solve the problem for us. We're fiercely independent, and I felt that we would start going to local trade organizations, schools and religious groups to find good candidates." It didn't come to that, however. "In the last couple of years, people have been coming to us," Harry reports. "I like to think it's because of our reputation. We take the relationship with our installers very seriously, and we always have. We play no games with installer pay or retainage. We take their livelihoods as seriously as we take our employees'."

Each day, the Tish team discusses the particulars of each of the day's installations with the crew chiefs, page by page. In addition, Tish has hired two staff members who are in the field daily checking to make sure that floors have been leveled and properly prepped prior to floorcovering installation. Says Harry, "I'm fanatical about what type of experience our installers are delivering, especially in creating appropriate expectations for our customers."

ACCOLADES

Last year, Tish Flooring was named "Best Flooring Company" in the Indy Star Best Things contest. Over 170 community members cast votes through the Indianapolis Star, selecting the businesses that best serve residents.

FLOOR NOTES

Douglas B. Bingham was promoted to CFO and treasurer.

STARNET announced the creation of two new staff positions. Eric Boender was promoted to vice president of business development, overseeing site applied surfaces, adhesives, floor prep and moisture mitigation systems as well as the floor care business, and Bruce Campos was appointed to the position of vice president of business development.

NOURISON tapped Laura Gibson as senior designer for its hospitality business segment.

PARTERRE promoted Chris Easler to senior vice president of national accounts.

Taj FLOORING named Susan Ford vice president of sales.

QUALITY CRAFT tapped Ken Durning to oversee its U.S. surfaces division.

The **AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ARCHITECTS** inaugurated William J. Bates as its 96th president.

■ GREEN NOTES

METROFLOR announced the achievement of the JUST social transparency label for the second Chinese factory, Zhangjiagang Yihua Rundong New Material Co., otherwise known as Yihua.

■ VITAL STATS

Real gross domestic product increased at an annual rate of 3.4% in Q3 2018, according to the third estimate released by the Bureau of Economic Analysis.

Buoyed by falling mortgage rates, builder confidence in the market for newly-built single-family homes rose two points to 58 in January on the National Association of Home Builders/Wells Fargo Housing Market Index.

The American Institute of Architects' Architecture Billings Index score for December was 50.4, compared to 54.7 in November.

Total existing-home sales decreased 6.4% from November to a seasonally adjusted rate of 4.99 million in December, according to the National Association of Realtors.

Consumer sentiment for December rose 0.8% to 98.3, from November's 97.5 rate, according to final results from the University of Michigan Survey of Consumers, and fell 7.7% to 90.7 in January.

The Producer Price Index for final demand fell 0.2% in December, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported.

Industrial production increased 0.3% in December after rising 0.4% in November, according to the Federal Reserve.

Construction employment increased 280,000 jobs in 2018, or 4.0% over 2017, while the industry's average pay accelerated and unemployment decreased to a historic low, according to an analysis of government data by the Associated General Contractors of America.

Prices for U.S. imports decreased 1.0% in December, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported, after a 1.9% fall the previous month.

After a year marked by numerous price spikes, construction costs declined in December but remained elevated compared to year-earlier prices, while prices of new buildings also moved higher, according to an analysis by the Associated General Contractors of America of new Labor Department data.

Private sector employment increased by 271,000 jobs from November to December, according to the December ADP National Employment Report.

Total nonfarm payroll employment increased by 312,000 in December, and the unemployment rate rose to 3.9%, from 3.7% in November, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reported.

The NFIB Small Business Optimism Index remained basically unchanged in December, drifting down 0.4 points to 104.4. ■

BEST PRACTICES

KEEP ON KEEPING ON

Looking ahead, Tish Flooring doesn't have its sights set as much on making changes as it does on perfecting what it's already established. The company continues to nurture its realtor relationships, attending their conferences, offering them resources and taking care of their buyers and sellers as it always has.

Tish Flooring has no plans to diversify into other product segments, as many retailers have done. "Even with all the advertising we do, I still feel like many people don't know who we are. We've had opportunities to diversify, but why wouldn't I just become more relevant to more people in what we're expert at?" Harry asks. "We want to create more marketshare

by expanding our reach with those in our market who don't know who we are yet."

Harry doesn't close the door on expanding into additional markets in the future, but he doesn't foresee the company giving up its independence. "We have been able to grow using our own approach, and it works for us," he says. ■

Floor Focus' goal with this monthly column is to not only give recognition and acclaim to a successful dealer but also provide our readers with ideas they can put to work in their own stores. If you know of a retailer who exhibits exemplary leadership in any facet of their business, please let us know either by email (info@floorfocus.com) or by mail.