

REVIVAL OF

by Winnie Tse

Shops selling second-hand furniture and providing repair services have shown signs of growing business in times of economic downturn when people are cutting down on expenses.

Second Chance Trading, a second-hand furniture shop, has seen a recent rise in sales of 10 to 20 percent every month.

“Since the onset of the financial tsunami, there have been more customers who want to buy furniture of better quality at more favourable prices,” said Mavis Lui Kit-kan, the owner of Second Chance Trading.

She opened the shop with her husband, Richard Bowsie in 2006. The couple found the price and quality of second-hand furniture in Hong Kong quite reasonable, but they had trouble getting it delivered and problems assembling the furniture themselves.

Seeing the popularity of second-hand handbag shops, they came up with the idea of setting up a second-hand furniture shop in Tuen Mun.

The style of furniture they sell ranges from Oriental and Western, including local modern brand G.O.D. Ms Lui said that more used furniture is available now, as many expatriates are leaving Hong Kong and lots of



Before



After Renovation

PRE-LOVED TREASURE



WINNIE TSE

Second Chance Trading renews the showroom display every two to three days.

furniture shops have closed down due to poor business.

“We prefer furniture with special design to those with brand names. This really attracts customers, especially among the middle class,” Ms Lui said.

The company has a show room where the renovated furniture is arranged so customers can get an idea of how it would look in their home. They change the displays every two to three days.

Price is one of the major considerations of customers. Sophie Tremblay, a Canadian lawyer who has only been in Hong Kong for two weeks, said that she wanted to purchase furniture for her flat in the shop because the prices were low and she could save money.

“If I have to buy the furniture here in full prices, I wouldn’t be able to afford one item of all the items I have to purchase for my flat,” she said.



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A kids’ playroom is provided in the shop.

Second Chance Trading also provides additional services for customers such as free storage, free van delivery and free assembling service. It provides a kids’ playroom so that customers can browse more freely in the shop when their kids are having fun.

Meanwhile, Paul Kei Wai saw the growing need for a furniture repair among businesses and families and started his New Look Upholstery Company last summer.



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Mavis Lui Kit-kan (left), owner of Second Chance Trading is showing the furniture to her customer, Sophie Tremblay (right).



COURTESY OF NEW LOOK UPHOLSTERY COMPANY

He said that many people tend to repair an item of furniture, rather than buy something new one, so as to save money for paying the mortgage and dealing with business matters. Though some restaurants and bars have closed since the financial crisis kicked in, his business has recorded growth in the past few months, mainly from residential flats and chained stores, according to him.

Mr Kei is planning to expand his business by setting up a shop and hiring more staff and machinery in the near future as he sees greater demand for furniture repairing services.

Mr Kei said rent has dropped by 20 to 30 percent and it is affordable for him to start a retail shop. "I am planning to open up a retail store which sells furniture and fittings designed by me. It can attract more walk-in customers and widen the customer base," he said.

"When we can do things more quickly (with machinery), our profit figures can increase," he added.

He also plans to outreach the market in the mainland China and Macau in autumn this year.

Leatherware repair store Best Skill recorded a 15 percent growth in profit since last October. He said the types of repair work illustrates their customers' changing lifestyles during the financial tsunami.

"In the past, we mainly add zippers to new handbags or soles to new shoes for the customers. Now, what we mainly do are similar things on old handbags

Sofas before(above) and after(below) the renovation process from New Look Upholstery Company.



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The company provides furniture renovation services and repairs mainly for restaurants, bars, residential flats and offices.

Mr Kei said, "Most of the home clients are quite rich and each piece of their furniture is worth at least eight to nine thousand dollars. It is really a pity to dump it when there is only a bit of worn-out seating."

Without a shop, Mr Kei established a website and placed advertisement on the search engines Yahoo! and Google as well as newspapers. He is also planning to promote his service through the Hong Kong Trade Development Council and the business directory Yellow Page.

Hui Kwok-ming, owner of Best Skill, is using a hammer to restore the sole of a leather shoe.



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Leather shoes and handbags with brand names are common items for repair in Best Skill.

“In the past, we mainly add zippers to new handbags or soles to new shoes for the customers. Now, what we mainly do are similar things on old handbags and shoes.”

and shoes,” said Hui Ng Ah-chun, who co-owns the shop with her husband Hui Kwok-ming.

Mrs Hui also said that customers now tend to bargain for greater discounts and some customers even bring in a bunch of items for a bulk discount.

But the couple do not compromise on the price as they said their marked price was already lower than other shops by 10 to 20 percent and the quality of their work was worthwhile.

They said they do delicate repair jobs by hand instead of using a sewing machine, while most repair shops do not do that.

“The materials we use are made in France and America and so the repaired products are more durable than others,” Mr Hui added.

The couple opened their store in Causeway Bay in 2003 when the shop prices dropped significantly during the economic downturn brought on by SARS. They acquired their repairing skills by enquiring about the shoe structure from a shoe care products supplier and practising themselves.

Customers are usually referred by friends. Wun Chiu-tung paid his first visit to Best Skill to get his wallet repaired. As a fireman he has good job security, he is very conservative in spending.

“Even though I am not affected very much by the financial tsunami, I want to save money too. I wouldn’t buy things that are not necessary,” Mr Wun said.

Beside individual customers, Best Skill also has corporate clients, like noted brand name retail shops.

In contrast, with 30 years experience in the industry, The Groom Shoes Repair and Polish, a chain store specialising in leather care, shoes and handbags repair has experienced a loss in sales by 10 percent in October 2008, but the business rebounded one month later.

Kenneth Fung Hing-cheung, director of the company, said when compared with the economic downturn during the outbreak of SARS in 2003, he said the financial tsunami has posed little threats to his business. He is confident about the future.

“I always told my staff not to be complacent, treasure the customers and provide high quality service. In this way, the repair business can always keep the customers,” he said. ▣



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Kenneth Fung Hing-cheung, director of The Groom Shoes Repair and Polish, is optimistic about the future of his business.



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Hui Ng Ah-chun, owner of Best Skill, does delicate repair work by hand, instead of sewing machine.