



Carpet mill, car maker have a lot in common

BY STEVEN FELDMAN

One year ago, the carpet mill formerly known as Bentley Prince Street returned to its roots – the Bentley Mills brand – and re-embraced its heritage as a Los Angeles manufacturer. Twelve months later, the mill that had developed a reputation for selling high-fashion, high-end broadloom ever since Ralph Mishkin established it in 1979 has maintained that reputation while also attempting to reach price points that are more budget friendly to architects, designers and their clients.

Ralph Grogan, president and CEO, likens today's Bentley Mills to high-end auto manufacturer BMW – a company that caters to the luxury market but also offers vehicles that are affordable to the masses without sacrificing quality or style. "Over the past year Bentley has been able to invest in both product innovations and backing innovations," Grogan said. "In the past, Bentley had budget constraints. You thought Bentley, you thought expensive. Now we have highly styled, competitively priced products that can hit budgets."

Grogan wants designers to look at Bentley Mills as they would BMW. "You think of BMW as high quality and high style, but BMW also has a 3 series for volume. Think of our less-expensive products as you would the 3 series: We offer top design and use the best ingredients, like Antron nylon, so you know the products will perform."

Truth be told, Bentley Mills really had no choice: The market is dictating this strategy. "If you look at the pie today, there are not as many jobs at the upper end," Grogan said. "We want architects and designers to look at us for jobs where they may not have thought of Bentley in the past."

To that end, Grogan said between 20% and 25% of 2014's introductions are in that price-sensitive level – that 3 series. "We want that upper-end law firm's conference room to be Bentley, where broadloom price points can range from the upper \$30s to low \$40s a yard, but also some of the other areas, like individual offices [where product may run \$20 a yard]."



New from Bentley Mills this year is Arcade Legend, a high-quality, highly styled carpet tile designed to hit lower price points.

A big chunk of the business today is in that \$18-\$22-per-yard range, Grogan said. "Bentley never sold much carpet there; that is where we need to grow. Last year our average selling price for carpet tile was in the low \$30s a yard. Competitors were in the high teens to low \$20s. This year our average selling price on carpet tile will go down to the mid \$20s, but our volume will increase dramatically. The trick is to keep that high-end image while letting people know that we can hit budgeted price points."

How can Bentley Mills do this while still offering a quality product? According to Grogan, today's tufting technologies allow machines to run faster, and the efficiencies of the tufting machine allow for lighter face weights. "Sometimes a 22-ounce product with a nice, dense construction will perform better than a 40-ounce product that is chunky," he said. "A higher face weight does not necessarily translate into better performance. Just like styling and design on the BMW 3 series is just as good [as a 5 or 7 series]."