

The DOs and DON'Ts of Seating Your People

So, as a church, you're growing. You are excited to see your community impacted positively by the Kingdom. Every week, you see people change, and changed people tend to want to share that change by bringing others. It is a great place to be as a church; and, while you and your members are ready, your facility may not be. Of the several facility-related areas that will be most impacted by growth, sanctuary seating will likely be one.

Okay, so you are handling the growth by multiple services in the short term, but, in the long term, you'd like to have everyone come together during one or two weekend celebration services. To do so, you have decided on expansion. For the sake of brevity, we will assume you have ruled out both pews and theater seating based either on cost, flexibility, or preference. Whatever your reason, you have decided to purchase fully upholstered, pew-style stackable seating.

While you can find stackable seating almost anywhere, a great value seating for your church facility can come from dealing with one of several USA manufacturers that build chairs specifically for churches. Because these manufacturers build here in the USA, quality tends to be consistent, and regulatory factors, such as meeting CAL-117 Flammability requirements, are assured. (Caution: while you maybe able to find a cheaper imported chair, investigate quality and determine whether they meet regulatory requirements for your specific area.)

So, what's next?

DO compare chairs.

Get product information, but, more importantly, ask for samples of the chairs you are interested in and perform the following recommendations.

DO sit on each of the sample chairs.

Remember, your members will be sitting on these chairs for several hours each week. Compare the comfort and feel. Compare the individual manufacturer's claims and specifications of the foam and seat cushion configuration to ensure you are getting commercial-grade virgin foam (no chemical fillers).

DO feel free to rough the chairs up a bit to check for durability.

Drop them from 3 or 4 feet high. Take care to stay clear of the chair.

DO stand and/or jump on them.

Do this cautiously! After all, you are not as young as the teens in your youth group who will definitely do this.

DO inspect the welds to see if they hold and check if the legs keep shape.

DO pound on seats, beat on the backs, and even cut them open to see what materials are inside.

Also, compare the individual manufacturer's claims and specifications of the frame, structure, and components of the chair.

DO ask questions.

Ask lots of questions; company representatives know their products. Test them.

DON'T be fooled by weight.

Heavy does not equal heavy-duty. Particle board weighs more than plywood, but it is far more susceptible to moisture and provides inferior screw holding power needed to keep seats and backs securely attached to the frame. Polymers are lighter than plywood; they create the best consistency in screw holding power, the highest level of durability, and the least amount of weight.

DON'T fall prey to the "limited lifetime" warranty game.

Unfortunately, warranties are only as good as two things: 1) the company's ability (will the company be around?) or willingness (how good is the customer service?) to make good on a claim, and 2) the buyer's diligence in tracking the warranty. Companies that want the marketing buzz of "Lifetime Warranty" often chose the risk of over-extending warranties, anticipating that 95 percent of their customers will forget about it and never use it. Avoid the trap by asking for "real" well-defined warranties in writing, including what's covered and for how long.

DON'T take after-the-sale service as a given.

When a manufacturer says they have great customer service, don't take their word for it; ask their customers. See if they will gladly give you customer references...and not just the "rosy" ones. Look for a company that can admit that they don't always get it perfect, but one that will always do what it takes to make your order right. Service in the long term will ensure your chairs serve your needs for many years to come.

While you could spend more time digging deeper into the details, remember that your church is growing. Seating is just one of the tools you need in order to accommodate what you are here to do: further the Kingdom, see lives changed, and impact the community. Let the very reasons you need seating be your focus and guide your decisions.

This article is courtesy of Bertolini Sanctuary Seating, www.sanctuaryseating.com.