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The Monday Morning Quarterback • June 9, 2008

# MMQB

THE BUSINESS OF THE CONTRACT FURNISHINGS INDUSTRY

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**Conference seating  
gets comfy with  
NuBax technology**

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carpet brand  
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**Steelcase Debuts Mega Showroom at NeoCon**



# Back to the Comfort

The NuBax technology can go into any foam-based seating product with minimal changes to the existing production process. **By Rob Kirkbride**

**W**e've all been there: stuck in a conference or at a banquet sitting in a back-breakingly uncomfortable chair as a speaker drones on endlessly.

While designers have taken great strides over the last decade to address ergonomic comfort in task and executive seating, conference and banquet seating has lagged woefully behind.

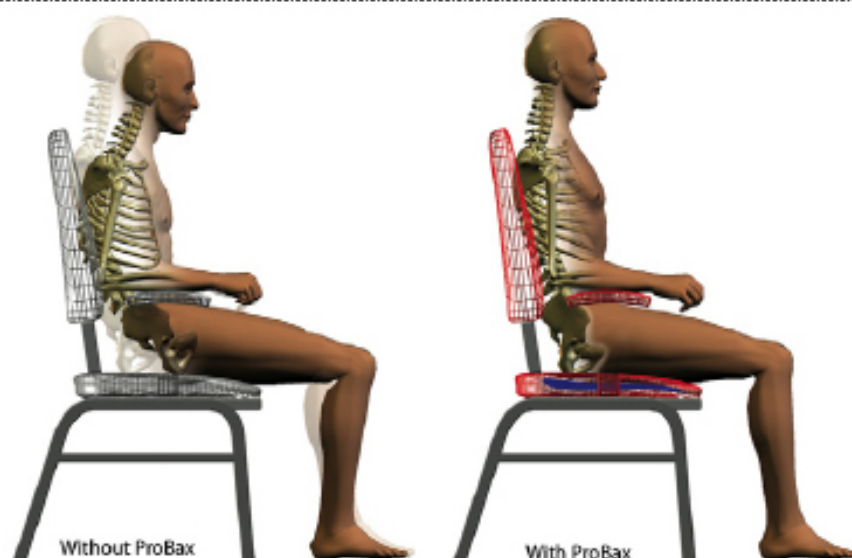
MTS Seating, a privately-held company based in Southeast Michigan and one of the largest conference and banquet seating suppliers, believes it has the answer for "banquet back."

The company has signed an exclusive licensing agreement the North American market with NuBax Limited to use its ProBax technology as an option on all of its seating lines.

The technological advancement makes sitting on an MTS chair a far better experience than the foam-on-board construction found in most conference and banquet seats, said Bart Kulish, vice president and general manager.

"Many of the major hotels have put significant emphasis on improving their conference facilities," he said. "All of them are competing with other venues for that conference business. They all are trying to entice conferences to come there. At MTS, we've tried to take the lead on innovation in this market over the last 10 years."

That's good news for conference goers and banquet attendees. MTS is a major player in the conference and banquet seating market. The 475-employee company based in Temperance, Mich., about 40 miles south of Detroit on the Michigan-Ohio border, works with all the major corporate flags, including the



Hyatt, Marriott, Omni, Hilton and Starwood brands.

The company, which is privately held by the Swy family, also does tremendous volume with convention centers. For example, it recently filled the New Orleans Convention Center with 40,000 of its chairs.

MTS also does a large volume with restaurants, serving Chili's Grill & Bar, Dunkin' Brands, Red Robin and Applebee's, to name a few.

NuBax Limited is no stranger to the office furniture industry. The London-based seating technology company worked with Bretford on its enhanced Plus Soft Seating Chairs and Sofas that are targeted for higher education and office environments.

NuBax technology also is used in Charles Allen Inc.'s healthcare-focused Sovereign and Winston series.

"We think we have taken what is best in conference and banquet seating out there and made it even better with ProBax," said Ian Moore, chief executive officer of NuBax.

MTS and NuBax connected through Burgess

Furniture, a conference and banquet furniture maker in the United Kingdom that worked with MTS on an aluminum chair line.

Through that connection, NuBax and MTS developed a prototype. From that prototype, the MTS line using ProBax technology was born.

In the conference and banquet seating area, innovation is particularly important because of offshore competition, Kulish said.

"Our focus is to constantly try to combat import products by being innovative and adding to our product line. Right now, we have the broadest line of banquet seating in the market today. We want to add new and innovative technology to our offering," he said.

ProBax not only will help keep MTS ahead of the curve when it comes to technology, it also will help those fighting to stay awake at conferences and stay comfortable at banquets.

"With ProBax, our customers will be able to deliver significant benefits physically and have (conference attendees) who are more attentive long-term and will prevent back problems," said Dave Dimmer, marketing manager at MTS.

**MTS launched its ProBax line several weeks ago and started taking it to its customers last week**



Since the day wood met foam in a stacking chair, most have been uncomfortable. Not a lot has changed over the years.

But Dimmer said MTS is driving comfort into a seating segment where little existed before. Its web seat construction and flex back has helped "dramatically improve the sit of the chair."

"ProBax continues to help us enhance what we've built on in the past," Dimmer said.

## **Two years ago, Lotus became the first car manufacturer to introduce NuBax technology in all its current road models.**

The background of NuBax Limited is rooted in the medical field. Seating and ergonomics grew out of that background, Moore said.

"That's where our partnership with MTS works so well," he said. "We partner with MTS on the design, which can be connected to our medical background. It gives us access to good design techniques and helps MTS from a medical and ergonomic standpoint."

NuBax's technology is patented and licensed to manufacturers. The technology helps lung function and improves blood flow, Moore said, and helps the body adjust to sitting -- a posture the human body was never meant to assume.

"When we sit, we put the spine in an abnormal position," he said. "That leads to problems with the spine and discs in the back and causes fatigue and aching."

"We use geometric shapes in foam that allow for a more natural posture when seated. In conference settings, that helps with higher levels of alertness and less fatigue and muscle ache."

The NuBax technology can go into any foam-based seating product with minimal changes to the existing production process.

MTS will offer ProBax technology through its entire seating line as an optional upgrade.

"This is something that we can bring to the market at a minimal cost to the customer," Kulish said. "At the lower end of the market, price is always the driv-

ing force, but at major convention centers and corporate facilities, they are in a competitive environment for customers. They are interested in what they can do to make their environment superior."

MTS launched its ProBax line several weeks ago and started taking it to its customers last week.

And it recently tested the product on itself. At a recent sales meeting, half of those attending sat on the MTS seat with ProBax. The other half sat on chairs without the technology. Half way through the meeting, they switched. Moore said there was a noticeable difference.

"The half sitting in ProBax sat upright, still and very attentive," he said. "It really made a difference. With MTS manufacturing and design and ProBax technology, regardless of the competition, is going to take the market by storm."

The furniture market isn't alone in reaping the benefits of NuBax's technology. The technology can be incorporated into most forms of seating. In addition to furniture, the company also has its technology in the automotive and aviation markets.

Two years ago, Lotus became the first car manufacturer to introduce NuBax technology in all its current road models. Similarly, technology from NuBax is already available in the corporate jet market. Marketed as AeroBax for aviation applications, the company said the technology is bringing improved comfort and health benefits to travelers in private aircraft. By offering the potential to reduce weight by eliminating the need for bulky lumbar mechanisms, the technology also is gaining interest from commercial carriers.

NuBax isn't alone in licensing seating technology. Herman Miller has licensed its Aeron technology to wheel chair and infant car seat makers. Steelcase's Leap technology is used in Cathay Pacific's aircraft seats. ➔



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