



Decorative Knobs

enjoy rising popularity in European market

Although the product group of knobs is small, it seems a good investment to enter it, as its popularity is rising. Door knobs have entered the 'soft' arena of taste, style and trend, and are given attention, both by the manufacturer, designer, and the consumer. Exporters of knobs can tap into both the project and consumer markets. Here, it is important to offer choice, variety, different price points and styles. New entrants will face the challenge of offering fresh design perspective within a mid-market price bracket.

Knobs, handles and hooks decorate dressers and drawers and as such range under furniture accessories. These knobs can be made from many different materials, including glass, plastic, wood, ceramic and metal. The most used materials are ceramics (especially porcelain and china), glass and wood. They can be industrially-produced or hand-made or –decorated and come in any shape and style.

Design & Quality

The quality of a decorative knob is primarily determined by the quality of the raw material (discussed under raw material quality), its design and its finishing. These factors determine the product's ability to withstand external forces, such as exposure to water, dirt and acids on high impact and regular use. High impact and extensive use include, for instance, the knob swinging into a wall (testing the toughness of the knob) or extensive and incautious use (mainly testing the securement of the decorative knob to the screw).

For ceramic decorative knobs, the following features of design and finishing must be considered to affect quality:

Glazing: The quality improves for ceramic knobs which have been finished with a glazing. The glazing fills the open pores, strengthening the raw material and making it water, acid and dirt proof. Glazing quality is determined by the substances used and the glazing method applied. Common failures include poor substance composition (causing peeling), ceramic-to-glazing thermal mismatches (causing breakage) and glazing bubbles (causing impurities that collect dirt).

Décor permanency: Also the durability of the applied decoration can differ. This can depend on the paint used or on the stage of glazing. 'Underglaze' decoration, whereby the décor is applied before the glazing process, is commonly the preferred method to guarantee a permanent decoration. The risk of fading of the decoration increases with 'inglaze' decoration, whereby the décor is applied simultaneous to the glazing, and even more so in 'onglaze' decoration, whereby décors are applied after the glazing process.

Product design: Additionally, the knob's quality depends on the design of the product. Poor product design is commonly related to the weak construction of the screw to the ceramic knob. But also the shape and a low strength-to-weight ratio affect the ease of breakage. For instance, a too heavy knob relative to the size of the screw increase the risk of the knob to break off of the screw. Also small protruding details, such as decorative trims, have a higher risk of breakage. As a bit of good service, add the mounting hardware to the knobs.

The quality of the raw material is determined primarily by its fracture toughness, its ability to withstand impact and intense use. Compared to other material, such as wood and metal, ceramic decorative knobs are more sensitive to breakage. Yet, different types of ceramics show a divergence in quality as well. The ceramic's toughness is the direct result of its crystalline structure, chemical composition and baking





temperature. For instance, porcelain (baked at above 1400°C) has a greater density and is far less breakable than stoneware (baked at 600°C) decorative knobs. Decorative knobs are primarily used on in-house products, such as cabinets and drawers. Their main purpose is to provide a support item to help open or close the door or drawer.

Ease & Convenience

Properties that determine the ease and convenience of the knob as support item include:

Size and shape: whether the knob can be easily grasped or turned and whether the hand fits well around the knob.

Feeling: functional feeling properties include the absence of sharp edges or ridges and a textured finish /non-slip coating to improve grip.

Aesthetics: the design of decorative door knobs include the shape of the knob as well as its overall look and feel. Decorative knobs come in a variety of shapes, colours and patterns. This is in line with trends in home decoration and the style of the furniture item. Each material and technique has its own tactile and visual impact. This needs to be appropriate to the style of the furniture item it is attached to.

Labelling

Information on the outer packaging of ceramic decorative knobs should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer. Labels for ceramic decorative knobs on the outer box should include the following information:

- Producer
- Consignee
- Material Used
- Quantity
- Size
- Volume
- Caution Signs

On the product label, EAN or Barcodes are widely used within Europe. Please note, your buyer will specify what information they need on product labels or on the item itself (logos, 'made in.....'). This forms part of the order specifications.

Labelling

Ceramic decorative knobs should be packed in agreement with the importer's instructions. Every importer will have their own specific requirements related to the use of packing materials, the filling of cartons, palletisation, and the stowing of containers. Always ask for the importer's order specifications, which are part of the purchase order. Proper packing of ceramic decorative knobs can minimize the risk of breaking through shocks. Whereas this applied to the packaging of all doorknobs, this is even more



important with ceramic knobs, given their fragility. Packing should prevent that the individual items inside a carton damage each other and the cartons

themselves when they are stacked inside the container. Packing, therefore, usually consists of inner and outer cardboard boxes, with appropriate materials to protect the products inside the inner boxes (this may involve materials such as bubble wrap or paper, depending on the preferences of the buyer). Weaker types of ceramics used will require more advanced packing.

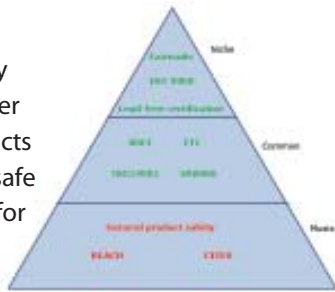
Packing needs to be of easy-to-handle dimensions and weight. Standards here are often related to labour regulations at point of destination and will have to be specified by the buyer. Cartons are usually palletised for air or sea transport and exporters are requested to maximise pallet space. Cost reductions can be achieved by nesting or stacking the items inside the container.

In packing materials, the balance is between using maximum protection and avoiding excess materials (waste removal is a cost to buyers) or shipping 'air'. Exporters can reduce the amount and diversity of packing materials by partitioning inside the cartons with the help of folded cardboard; matching inner boxes and outer cartons better and standardising the sizes of each; by considering packing and logistical requirements already at the design stage of the products. This implies specifically considering the use of tougher ceramic types; and asking their buyer for alternatives.

In terms of material, wooden crating and packing are increasingly banned by importers. This is a result of their unsustainability and high cost of the material and disposal. Alternative packing materials that are economical and sustainable are more popular. Using biodegradable materials in packing may form a market opportunity or can be demanded by buyers. At retail level, decorative knobs are usually displayed unpacked, i.e. displayed in a basket and then (gift-) wrapped by the retailer. On-line retailers apply simple, functional packaging.

Buyer Requirements

The General Product Safety Directive applies to all consumer products. It states that all products marketed in the EU should be safe to use and forms a framework for all specific legislation on specific products and issues.



Considerations for Action :

Study the specific legal requirements listed, but also use your common sense to ensure the product does not cause any danger in its normal use. Most buyers will require proof of the DC exporter on compliance with legal requirements. You can read more about the General Product Safety Directive in the EU Export Helpdesk.

RAPEX: Check the rapid alert system for non-food dangerous products (RAPEX), a database with information on safety risks in consumer products notified by European countries and the measures taken to alleviate these risks.

REACH: The Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemical (REACH) lists restricted chemicals in products that are marketed in the EU. In order to market your decorative knobs on the EU market, you need to make sure that your products do not contain hazardous substances as defined by REACH. For ceramic decorative knobs this includes the substances used in manufacturing of ceramics, as well as the dyes and enamel used for decoration. For instance, REACH regulation restricts the use of lead in the paints and glazing.

CITES: the "Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species of wild fauna and flora" (CITES) lays down provisions for international trade of endangered species. The EU has set



additional import restrictions. CITES Regulation must be considered by coaster suppliers made of natural fibres, including wooden coaster producers. Before exporting your products to the EU, you should check with the CITES management

authority of destination or with your importer, if there is any restriction that may impact the import of your product into the EU.

Common Requirements

Sustainability: social and environmental sustainability offer ways for companies to differentiate their products on the European market. Opportunities range from sustainable raw materials, production, certification and use of labels. The following certification schemes are increasingly demanded:

The Business Social Compliance Initiative (BSCI) is developed by European retailers to improve social conditions in sourcing countries. Suppliers of BSCI participants are expected to comply with the BSCI Code of conduct. To prove compliance, your production process can be audited at the request of the importer. Once a company is audited, it will be included in a database which can be used by all BSCI participants.

The Ethical Trading Initiative (ETI) is an alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations working in partnership to improve the working lives of people across the globe that make or grow consumer goods.

Standards such as ISO 14001 and SA 8000 can be used to meet buyer demands for sustainability. However, only in niche markets compliance with these specific standards will be demanded.

Since more and more European importers participate in BSCI and ETI, you can expect that complying with the BSCI and ETI codes of conducts will be seen as basic requirements. If you have not done so already, you may want to look into the possibilities of improving your sustainability performance. This may not always include immediate certification or application of a label, but familiarising yourself with issues included in the initiatives will give you an idea on what to focus on.

Niche Requirements

Fairtrade: Besides social and environmental aspect of production, Fairtrade certification also covers a fair wage to labourers involved in the production of decorative knobs. Production of niche-market decorative knobs commonly requires extensive use of labour. For ceramic decorative knobs specifically, this implies for instance the extensive use of labour in manually decorating the knobs. For these very labour intensive processes, compliance to labour-specific standards can offer substantial possibilities for the producer to distinguish itself from its (EU) competitors. Compliance with fair trade norms will also make it easier to acquire other social and environmental norms, as it is the most integrated system for sustainability.

Workers health protection: several industries make extensive use of Crystalline Silica, a chemical that, through inhalation, can cause lung cancer. Crystalline Silica is also used in the ceramics



industry, mostly in its form as quartz and cristobalite. There is currently no occupational exposure limit for the use of crystalline silica at the EU level and national occupational exposure limits vary. Nevertheless, EU buyers may demand the (non-EU) producer's good handling of the chemical in ceramic production to protect the firm's employee safety.

Consider the 'European Social Dialogue "Agreement on Workers' Health Protection through the Good Handling and Use of Crystalline Silica and products Containing It' as a means to signal your compliance with social good practices.

Lead-Free Certification: Lead-including paints and glazes can be used to decorate the knobs. For ceramics specifically, lead glazing can be used on a wide variety of ceramic ware, such as earthenware pottery, stoneware, and a range of porcelain type bodies. Though lead is widely used, it can be harmful. Therefore, to enter niche markets, producers can pursue lead-free certification, reaching above and beyond the REACH criteria on lead-limits. Particularly consumers with children will be sensitive to lead-free certified products.

Consider looking into Lead-free certification which is more popular in the US market. Even if that will not include immediate certification or application of a label, it is useful to be informed about different safety standards.

Quality certification: Producers can find added value in compliance with quality standards. Given the importance of high quality in niche markets, ISO 9000 certification will help producers signal your product quality commitment to EU businesses and consumers, to expand their reputation and presence in EU niche markets.

Acquire quality management certification to become visible for quality-demanding, niche product buyers. Consider for instance, ISO 9000 standards to add exclusivity in quality to your product. Please refer to the ISO 9000 for more information.

Trade and Macro-Economic Statistics

A statistical analysis of the major product developments and forecasts are given, based on trade and macro-economic statistics. The statistical indicators that are being analysed are import, export, production and consumption statistics for door knobs. No trade data are available for ceramic knobs specifically. Therefore, EU trade and macro-economic statistics of statuettes and other ornamental articles of porcelain and china are analysed to draw up conclusions for the trade, production and consumption of ceramic decorative knobs. European production of porcelain and china statuettes and ornaments has increased at an average annual rate of almost 12%, amounting to Euro 66 million.

Major European producing countries of porcelain and china statuettes and ornaments include Germany (41%), Italy (22%) and the UK (10%). Especially Italy has increased its share in European production value, explaining the increased value of total European volume. Italy's production value increased from Euro 4.8 million to Euro 14 million.

Be aware of (future) competition from European suppliers of porcelain and china statuettes and ornamental products, given that production levels have increased since 2010. Especially developments in Italy may be important to watch. In order to compete with strong European producers, make sure to add a uniqueness to your product. Furthermore, invest in long-term relationships with your buyers, giving them less incentive to switch to a competitor.

European apparent consumption of porcelain and china statuettes and ornaments has increased. Germany is the main consuming country accounting for 26% of total apparent

consumption. Other key consuming countries are Italy (25%), France (20%) and the UK (14%). Furthermore, Italian consumption witnessed a considerable growth of more than 20% on average per year.

Furthermore, as GDP and consumer confidence in Europe are expected to increase it must be expected that apparent consumption of porcelain and china statuettes and ornaments will rise in the near future. Monitor consumer confidence and GDP. Given that decorative knobs are luxury products, the increase in consumer confidence and GDP will consequently stimulate demand for decorative knobs.

Given the large share of West-European countries in total European imports, it is advised to consider the demands of West-European buyers specifically in your marketing strategies. For high value-added ceramics, like decorative knobs, a competitive edge can be found in innovation regarding i.e. design and marketing. Therefore, to compete with China and other important supplying countries, it is essential to distinguish yourself. Market your product by emphasizing on high quality and unusual design. Stress your product's uniqueness by showing its origin in addition to demonstrating the craftsmanship and materials used in producing your decorative knobs.

Market Trends

From Hard to Soft

Knobs used to be categorised as 'hardware', along with other accessories as door handles and coat hooks. Knobs formed an anonymous accessory to chests of drawers, and the design was set by the manufacturer, in support of the design of the furniture piece rather than as a design feature in itself. Now they have entered the 'soft' arena of taste, style and trend, and are given attention, both by the manufacturer, designer, and the consumer. They have acquired expressive value.

Although the product group of knobs is small, it seems a good investment to enter it, as a sideline, as its popularity is rising. Manufacturers who are offering materials (ceramics, metal, resins) and techniques (e.g. wood turning) that are also applied in knobs, may well include lines of knobs into their existing home collections. Manufacturers in neighbouring product groups or categories may find it worth their while to cross over to knobs as well. Makers of jewellery, buttons for garments, coasters, fridge magnets, door handles, coat hooks or



paperweights will not find a move into knobs too challenging.

Market extension

In the wake of this development, the knob has crossed a few boundaries. Firstly, it travelled from the professional or project market to the consumer market. Before, it used to be a business-to-business item – suppliers of furniture components offered knobs to manufacturers of furniture. It entered the Home arena as a mass-produced hardware item at DIY stores, with commodity appeal. Now, brands and wholesalers in home decoration are adding it to their lifestyle collections as a valued decorative

accessory with design value, and retailers prominently displayed their knobs, as an integral element of the shop's concept and style.

Exporters of knobs can tap into both the project and consumer markets and will need to source the distribution partners in each market. The remaining elements of the market mix (product characteristics, pricing and marketing communication) will also differ. To play a role in knobs as a furniture accessory, exporters need to study consumer needs, trends and developments both in the furniture market and in home decoration generally, as both have a significant influence on the nature of the knobs in demand in any given season.

Consumers in need of expressing their individuality and originality will no longer follow pre-set norms in accessorising their homes. An eclectic choice of knobs, even on a furniture item, expresses the mental independence of today's curator-consumer.

My Home is me

The trend towards increased personalisation is also finding expression through the knob. As seen in other product groups like vases in Europe, consumers express who they are through the items in their home. Details matter, including the accessories on a piece of furniture, and bring out the level of sophistication of the consumer's taste. It has helped the consumer to express their style that knobs are now available as individual products, so that the design of the cupboard can now be finished with the help of a personal choice in knobs. Consumers in need of expressing their individuality and originality will no longer follow pre-set norms in accessorising their homes. An eclectic choice of knobs, even on a furniture item, expresses the mental independence of today's curator-consumer.

To cater for the need for the consumer to make an individual statement in furniture and interior decoration, exporters need to offer choice, variety, different price points and styles. In distribution this requires a willingness to supply wide and un-deep ranges, with small runs.

Craftsmanship is luxury

Intricate designs in knobs are appreciated by modern consumers eager to surround themselves with items that have style and are well-made. Whilst this has potential to grow, knobs that are innovative different and stylish are seen. Knobs are a typical mid-market domain, dominated by industrially-produced offers at affordable prices. As a new entrant, the challenge is to offer fresh design perspective within a mid-market price bracket.

Kids market

Especially when it comes to figurative knobs, the market for children's bedroom decoration seems to have potential. If you are already catering to the target group of children or young adults, knobs may be a logical addition. Here, too, despite the possibility of grandparents acting as givers, prices are sensitive.

Market Channels and Segments

In Europe, all major retailers and department stores have online business-to-consumer platforms. Consider targeting online retailers, in order to reach a broader range of customers. This means, however, supplying small batches/ individually packed items, prepared to pre-stock and offering more just-in-time supply concepts. Since e-commerce is expected to grow considerably in the coming years, this is a strategy for exporters with the possibility to scale up in a short span of time. This is more so, since brick-and-mortar retailers are rapidly adopting

multi-channel marketing strategies, including e- and m-commerce.

Decorative knobs are available to the consumers through distributors of general home decor, or come to them as part of an interior decoration project. The project and consumer

markets each require an own marketing mix, a cocktail of product features, price elements, with a matching communication strategy and the right choice of distributor. If you have your own 4Ps in focus, sourcing and connecting to distributors will be more effective.

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Knobs as furniture accessories are predominantly a mid-market product. They are reasonably accessible in terms of price, design, and distribution – ranging from DIY stores, to general interior and lifestyle retail, as well as on-line. The value perception of the knobs is more important than the actual materials used. In leather, ceramics or any other material, an item can have a more precious or a more common 'look and feel', which can be based on the quality and intricateness

of the craftsmanship and the materials used, but is often not much more than a subjective notion based

on, indeed, 'look and feel'. All offer of knobs remains firmly within the mid-market, and a small price bandwidth.

Prices

Pricing is in line with the need in midmarket to be accessible in price and design. Also, since pieces of furniture will require a number of knobs, rather than just one, prices need to be friendly enough to allow the consumer this form of accessorising. Usually, knobs are available in sets of 2. Knobs for furniture in the lower-middle market would be upto Euro 5 and in the mid market and mid-high market, they would be Euro 5-10. ■ Source : CBI, Netherlands; Pic Source : Anthropologie, Nordal

