

Rocking Chairs

See strong recovery in European markets

After a period of fluctuation due to the economic crisis, the European market for rocking chairs is experiencing a strong recovery. European consumers have started to appreciate (or re-appreciate) the rocking chair as a piece of furniture that is fun, that offers good design value and that adds atmosphere to any indoor or outdoor space, hence their popularity. Although the

market is dominated by Chinese exporters, this recovery provides exporters from other countries with interesting opportunities as well, especially in the middle and higher market segments. Promoting the story behind a design adds value to the product. Focusing on health-enhancing design, sustainability and craftsmanship provides an edge to exporters in developing countries.



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Rocking chairs are classified in the category of indoor furniture and chairs, and they are usually grouped with armchairs. In some cases, they are also classified as 'garden furniture' if they form part of collections of outdoor seating. Rocking chairs come in any material (e.g. wood, metal, synthetic materials), and they are a specific type of informal or relaxed seating, due to the use of curved legs or 'rockers' underneath the chair.

Rocking chairs are primarily intended for relaxing, whether actively (e.g. reading, watching television) or passively (napping). Unlike easy chairs, rocking chairs are not dedicated to extreme comfort in the sense of offering a combination of such features as upholstery; arm and foot support; or a high and/or reclining back.

Typical dimensions for rocking chairs are similar to those of easy chairs, with some additional height for the rockers: approximately 95 cm height x 75 cm width x 90 cm depth. The dimensions are obviously highly dependent on the design of the chair. The frame and seats of the rocking chair can be of metal, wood or synthetic materials, or combinations. The seat, legs and rockers may form a unified whole made of a single material (e.g. as when produced from a single mould) or of several different materials (even with detachable rockers). Rocking chairs are also used outdoors which necessitates the use of materials that are weatherproof. Contemporary rocking chairs are fun items, in terms of both use and appearance. For this reason, designers are



currently making a serious effort to create a rocking chair that is conspicuous and an eye-catcher for any room in the home. Their designs focus on all aspects: shape, material use, colour and technical prowess. Aesthetic quality is the foremost selling point, expressing the fun value of the rocking chair. In addition to being fun, rocking chairs are nostalgic (a central value in mid-market segments) when retro styles are used. Rocking Chair W recalls the iconic Windsor chair.

Labelling, Packing & Packaging

The labelling on the export packing of chairs facilitates the logistical process. Product labelling is a function of marketing communication. Information on the outer packing of rocking chairs should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer. The labels for rocking chairs on the outer carton or packing should include the following: Producer, Consignee, Material used, Quantity, Size, Volume and Caution signs. Within Europe, EAN or Barcodes are widely used on product labels. Use the English language for labelling, unless your buyer has indicated otherwise. Please note that buyers will specify the information that they need - on the outer cartons, the product labels and the actual items (e.g. logos, 'made in...' statements). This forms part of the order specifications. Information on the product or product label usually supports the reseller in communicating to the end consumer. If the importer or reseller has a brand identity (e.g. logo, strap line), the importer is likely to prefer to have this information on the product label rather than the brand identity of any exporter.



Packaging Tips

- # To facilitate the logistical process, be aware of your buyer's position in the supply chain and the related needs.
- # Make sure that you have received and understand the entire set of specifications. Offer the buyer any alternatives that may be more effective.
- # To facilitate marketing, be aware of the buyer's needs in terms of style. Assist your buyer in marketing communication by offering any background stories (branded or not).
- # Offer a full set of dimensions, including the access dimensions of your chairs. Offer.

packaging and packaging-waste legislation includes restrictions on the use of certain heavy metals. Europe also has requirements for wood packaging materials used for transport (WPM), including packing cases, boxes, crates,

avoiding excess materials (waste disposal is a cost to the buyer) or shipping 'air'. Exporters can reduce the amount and diversity of packing materials by:

- improving matching of inner boxes and outer cartons better and by standardising their respective sizes;
- considering packing and logistical requirements in the design stage of the products (e.g. flat-pack constructions or detachable components); and asking their buyer for alternatives.

Consumer packaging for rocking chairs facilitates transport home from the retailer. It usually takes the form of a carton, which can be the original export carton or a box provided by the retailer.

Demand

Europe's chair imports are expected to continue increasing, with a substantial share sourced from developing countries. As Europe's leading importers of chairs, the United Kingdom, Germany and France are interesting focus markets. While China is Europe's leading supplier, Eastern European countries (e.g. Poland) are becoming strong competitors to suppliers in developing countries. In 2014, European imports in the Home Decoration and Home Textiles sector amounted to Euro 120 billion. Since 2010, furniture has consistently accounted for about 21% of these imports. Between



drums, pallets, box pallets and dunnage. Proper packing of rocking chairs can minimise the risk of damage through shocks. The fragility of the item determines the type of extent of the packing needed to prepare the products for shipment. Packing should prevent individual chairs inside a carton from damaging each other and the cartons themselves when stacked inside the container. Some buyers prefer the chairs to be crated, while others accept wrapping in corrugated cardboard without an outer carton. Packing should be of easy-to-handle dimensions and weight. Standards in this regard are often related to labour regulations at the point of destination, and they must be specified by the buyer. Cartons or crates are usually palletised for air or sea transport, and exporters are requested to maximise pallet space. In the use of packing materials, a balance must be found between using maximum protection and

2010 and 2014, European furniture imports showed an average annual growth rate of 0.9%. Although this rate is promising, it lags slightly behind the growth rate of 2.5% for the sector as a whole. Between 2010 and 2014, European imports of chairs fluctuated slightly. With an annual growth rate of 0.3%, total European chair imports grew from Euro 8.9 billion to Euro 9 billion. This increase was primarily due to a strong performance in 2014. In the coming years, European imports are predicted to continue to exhibit moderate growth. Although Europe's chair imports are dominated by intra-European trade, developing countries account for a large share (41%) that is predicted to grow slightly in the coming years.

With imports amounting to Euro 2.3 billion, Germany is the leading importer of chairs in Europe, followed at quite some distance by France (Euro 1.4 billion) and the United Kingdom (Euro 1.2 billion). With regard to imports from developing countries, however, the United Kingdom is the European leader, with imports amounting to Euro 831 million, accounting for 2/3 of its total imports of chairs. In Austria and France, chair imports from developing countries are also exhibiting growth (Euro 14 million and Euro 4 million, respectively). In the other leading importing countries, however, imports of chairs from developing countries have declined. The Netherlands, Italy, Belgium and Spain have experienced particularly remarkable declines. It is interesting to note that, as is the case in the United Kingdom, developing countries are performing well in



Ireland, where they account for a 35.8% share of all chair imports. European chair imports from developing countries are dominated by China while other leading suppliers from developing

countries include Vietnam and Indonesia. Chairs produced in Poland or other Eastern European countries (where production is relatively inexpensive) constitute strong competition against which to benchmark your products. Predictions of GDP and private consumption expenditures are important indicators for the European home decoration market. The sector is closely linked to economic conditions. When money is tight, consumers postpone replacing non-essential items in the home until they once again have sufficient disposable income. European GDP and private consumption expenditures are expected to increase. This implies that consumption of luxury and decorative products is likely to rise. Increases in GDP create room for this type of spending, especially in emerging markets. Due to saturation, growth in consumption will be moderate for mature markets.

Trends as Opportunities

The Rocking Chair: The Fun End of (Informal) Seating

Around 1862, Thonet introduced the first bent-wood rocking chair (in solid beech, with a woven cane seat and back, and a footrest with leather straps). It was an instant hit, first in the US, and then in Continental Europe. The sweeping curves suggested movement, and the chair would eventually become the iconic shape for rocking chairs. This was followed by a slump towards the mid-20th century, as the rocking chair began to be seen as an 'un-cool' chair for old people. Moreover, chair design was considered a serious business, engaged in the creation of formal, ergonomically correct chairs. The 1960s and 1970s created a great deal of freedom: chairs could be fun and informal seating (as with beanbags or poufs), which was exactly what the younger generation needed. The rocking chair was re-appreciated as the ultimate fun chair, and it remains hip to this very day. Leading designers and furniture brands are all embracing it as a serious design and commercial option. These developments have brought the rocking chair to the fun end of informal seating.

The ongoing history of chair design can be instructive and inspirational, and it may help you to find a place in today's market. It can teach you about designers' constant adaptation to consumer needs, as well as about manufacturing challenges. In this case, we have learned that the Thonet chair is the iconic rocking chair. Every consumer, whether consciously or intuitively, associates rocking chairs with its shape, its set of materials, its craftsmanship and its history. When contemporary rockers deviate from these standards, they are making a design statement and giving the consumer's associations with rocking chairs, a twist. The product trends described below provide a clear indication of the new directions that are available. Use internet and books to learn more about the history of your sector and how it relates to consumer value today.

Rock Yourself Healthy

An opposite trend is reflected in the widespread drive to improve oneself, as manifested in the desire for better health, greater knowledge and the development of new skills. The hazards of sitting down all day at office



jobs has resulted in a slew of interesting solutions, several of which involve two-legged chairs, standing desks and rocking chairs that rock while their occupants sit on them, unless they actively use their lower torso muscles to keep them straight. Doing so ensures better

posture. This trend will undoubtedly grow, especially in the segment of office furniture. Health-enhancing furniture can be a viable source of positioning, especially as it is expected to develop into an increasingly strong driver of consumer spending



relating to physical and spiritual wellness trends. Most of the furniture in this segment is minimalist and lacks 'flavour'. One idea might be to use solutions and styles from your own context to introduce authenticity and warmth into this segment.

Sustainable Solutions

Consistent with the trend towards living a better life, consumers are developing greater awareness of and care for People and Planet, and they are increasingly adopting 'green' solutions as a reason for buying. We are seeing an increase in the use of sustainable materials and clean processes, as well as recycling, re-use and fair-trade options. The handmade segment has traditionally been India's domain. Bring this out in your rocking chairs, and do it in a sustainable manner. People and environmental friendliness has become a source of differentiation and status for the modern consumer, therefore representing a serious source of added value. Green values appear to be particularly important for identity purchases (e.g. rocking chairs).

The Joy of Making

In furniture, craftsmanship has regained its rightful status as a prime form of added value. Innovative or time-honoured techniques (whether industrial, manual or a combination), visible construction and novel shapes all testify to the fact that the rocking chair is alive and relevant in the market. Rocking chairs are a focal point in the home, and consumers are therefore appreciative of items made with care. From its inception, the rocking chair was a masterpiece of craftsmanship: solid wood was bent in amazing curves through a technique that had only recently been mastered. Contemporary designers are devoting their attention to material and technical innovation. Be a part of it!

Consumers Want It Their Own Way

One general trend in furniture is that consumers are wanting to participate in the creation of their own chairs or, at the very least, to have options from which to choose. In this way, consumers can distinguish themselves from others and express their own identities in their purchases. This applies to the rocking chair as well. Although a rocking chair does not lend itself very well to having consumers assemble their own chairs, options should be offered in terms of the type of material (e.g. a variety of wood types) and colours, if possible. From the perspective of the manufacturer, the rocking chair is usually part of a collection of easy chairs, rather than a stand-alone product. For this reason, the options in a given style can include rockers or regular chairs. Recent developments have led the rocking chair to be regarded as a system: a limited number of seats can be attached to a nearly endless number of legs, in various styles, materials and sizes. Offer choice. To suit the consumer's need to express personal taste, consider offering rocking chairs with such options as different wood types, different colours and with and without armrests. Because a collection of chairs offered by a retailer or wholesaler usually only includes one rocking chair, develop your rocking chair as part of a wider collection of chairs, preferably in a coherent style.

Garden Rockers

With the ongoing trend of the garden becoming an extended living room in terms of style and decoration effort, the rocking chair has also found its way outdoors, both in its usual form and in various hanging options that resemble giant swings.

Lounging in the garden can therefore take place in deck chairs,

horizontal loungers and rocking chairs.

Most outdoor rockers are quite distinct from their

indoor



counterparts, due to the use of weather-resistant materials, although some are used both indoors and outdoors. The garden can be a serious target market for furniture makers. With regard to informal seating, the rocking chair should be included in any collection of garden furniture, due to its increasing popularity in outdoor spaces as well. The durability demands for your chairs are obviously higher if they are to be used outside.

Segmented Seating

The consumer base for rocking chairs has extended from an older to a younger customer base, including children.

Uses for the rocking chair are more limited than is the

case for other types of easy chairs: a

spacious living room for indoor



use and the veranda for outdoor use remain the primary segmentation bases for the use of the rocking chair. Beyond the consumer market, we have seen the wellness market (especially for office seating) emerging as a new direction for marketing. In positioning yourself in the market of rocking chairs, consider existing or new consumer types and uses. Develop a coherent marketing mix (4 P's) for your positioning. Study the specific requirements relating to functionality and price well before you start designing.

Market Channels & Segments

The channels that apply for easy chairs as a whole applies to rocking chairs as well. In Europe, easy chairs are now being distributed more broadly than ever. In the past, the trade in rocking chairs was the domain of specialist furniture retailers, who formed a larger section of importers than was usually the case in the home decoration sector. This is changing, given that furniture is becoming more of an element of lifestyle. In other words, it is becoming part of a wider collection of home decoration, which is usually branded under a single, overarching style. It has increased the significance of importer-wholesalers, who create coherent home collections (including furniture), for their networks of retailers. The rocking chair in particular underscores this development in distribution, due to its ability to stand alone, thereby playing a role in any type of collection of interior items. E-commerce in home decoration is increasing, often in the form of multi-channel approaches that combine online and offline retail. Rocking chairs are no exception, despite their bulky size and the fact that they are usually not flat-packed. When product specifications are clear, visual information is attractive, and service levels are sufficiently high, European consumers are not afraid to purchase their rocking chairs online. To date, however, they usually do so through national e-tail brands rather than from across the border. The market for rocking chairs can be segmented according to type of use (including wellness

and applications in office settings), type of consumer and space (indoor/outdoor). Rocking chairs are stand-alone items and eye-catchers in the indoor and outdoor environment. Never functioning as an anonymous functional basic, the rocking chair is particularly likely to be found in the middle to higher segments; the lower end is relatively thin. Rocking chairs with light-footed, accessible and trendy designs feature mid-market traits, for both indoor and outdoor uses. They can become true 'statements', when craftsmanship and aesthetic innovation are matched with brand stories, taking the rocking chair to premium segments (again in both indoor and outdoor contexts).

Prices can be classified according to the classic 'low, middle and high' value segmentation. The lower end offers indoor and outdoor rocking chairs for under Euro 200, with affordability as the primary selling point. Consumers will pay up to Euro 750 for an outdoor rocking chair in the mid-market segment, and up to Euro 1,000 for an indoor chair, although this obviously depends on the combination of material and aesthetic quality. At the premium end, prices can go over Euro 3,000 for a statement-quality indoor or outdoor rocker. In general, indoor rocking chairs are somewhat less price-sensitive than is the case in the outdoor context, where consumers are less accustomed to spending much for their furniture. Pitch your prices well, in line with your positioning in the market. As one of your four P's, you should carefully determine the price bandwidth that is appropriate in your segment. As a general guideline, trendier rocking chairs are more price-sensitive than is the case for 'statements'; outdoor chairs are more price-sensitive than is the case for indoor chairs. Avoid simply adding a fixed percentage of margin on top of your cost price, as it may be either too high or too low for your target market. Instead, study what your rocking chair can take. If your rocking chair forms part of a wider collection of chairs, make sure that the price points between the items in your collection are logical and acceptable. ■ *Source: CBI, EU*