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The word **in** office.



Big Interview

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June 2014



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Making your mark

Personalisation of the workspace is a key driver for growth in the desktop accessories category as sales begin to look rosier in this sector



by David Holes

IT'S been a tough few years for the OP industry and sales of desktop accessories took a big hit as companies reined in their spending. But things are looking up again and many manufacturers and resellers are reporting strong growth as global economies recover.

According to The NPD Group, although US bricks-and-mortar sales of desktop accessories were slightly down in the last financial year, e-commerce sales saw a healthy 13% upsurge (see also chart for dollar figures). The trend is similar in Europe with many companies reporting a pick-up in sales and feeling increasingly optimistic about the future.

Germany's Falk Butterwegge, Head of Office Supply, Stationery & Online and International Sales Consumer & Craftsmen at tesa, says: "Overall sales are steadily improving as markets recover. We've seen double-digit growth in our specialised tape products and e-commerce is growing 'like hell'."

Across the border in France, Bernard Roux de Bézieux, Marketing Director at Maped, reports a similar story with a 13% sales increase worldwide, backed by a particularly strong drive in

emerging markets.

As employment figures pick up across the globe, so will sales, according to Simon McLoughlin, Head of Traditional Office Products at UK wholesaler VOW. He sees it as a simple matter of 'bums on seats'. "Employment is the biggest driver of product consumption – more people at desks mean more desktop products needed and more consumables taken from the stationery cupboard."

Reflect your personality

As the feel-good factor returns, a number of key themes run through the revival of this category. The desire to personalise your workspace, either to stand out from the crowd or perhaps to match your home office décor, is one of these. It appears that there is a real urge among workers to turn their desk into a microcosm of their personality.

Manufacturers have spotted this opportunity and are keen to meet these needs. From quirky, fun products in colourful designs to sophisticated, coordinated themes that run across entire ranges, there are a host of products out there that allow consumers to stamp their own individuality upon their working environment.

Talking of stamps, Austrian manufacturer Colop has teamed up with Viennese agency Spirit Design to produce the brand new Printer, a model with individual design at its core. It aims to appeal directly to consumers through its looks that

shout "high-quality, simplicity and timeless elegance" and the company is confident that modern design will influence the demand for all desktop accessories in a positive way. Colop has also launched its ImageCard Designer software tool that allows customers to personalise its stamps, transforming them from mere functional tools into attractive desktop accessories in their own right.

Jaime Nascimento, Export Manager for Brazil-based Acrimet, sees "personification of the workspace as increasingly important", and the company is in the process of launching a line of matching desktop accessories to tap into this trend.

Fiona Mills, Marketing Director of Avery UK, believes that many offices are generally undergoing a style makeover and opting for "trendy product design over more formal styles". But she also regards the swing away from working in a traditional office environment towards working from home as pivotal. "Workers are now able to



pick and choose desktop accessories to suit their homes, with colourful designs and different materials to match their surroundings," she says.

Adrian Frost, Managing Director Office Products at Rapesco, has also noticed this shift. "Markets have changed. So many more people now work from home and want personal choice about the style and colour of their desktop products. Matching product sets that represent a full 'desktop solution' are also very popular. Consumers seek value for money, but want a quality product that lasts. This gives us an opportunity to grow sales in the SOHO market."

Maped's de Bézieux agrees, saying that "in an ocean of conservatism

The Martha Stewart Home Office with Avery range is a good example of this idea in practice. These desktop accessories come with a design theme, aimed at making them both look good and feel like they're part of your wider home décor.

Crucially, however, it's not style over substance. Quality, ergonomic design and the need to bring something innovative, unique and fundamentally useful to the market, is paramount.

David Conner, SVP of Sales at Amax in the US, backs this call for manufacturers to innovate and produce compelling products, citing

its Bostitch Dynamo stapler as "the first" to include an integrated pencil sharpener as a prime example. But, he adds, it's vital to let consumers know about these innovations through all available channels, from traditional advertising to in-store and online promotions, and by using as much social media exposure as possible. "We know our products are superior", he says bullishly, "and we just need one minute to show customers why they'll love them."

The need to embrace technology is another key theme that manufacturers know is vital if they're to prosper in the future.

Nick Giammarino, Sales Operation Manager at Victor Technology in the US, is a keen exponent here. "Customers want both innovation and style with integrated electronics that offers unique functionality. Our desktop accessory business is growing at 40% per year. This is because we are constantly innovating and launching new products – for example, integrating dock chargers and USB hubs into traditional desk accessories."

Frost has also seen a big technological shift: "70% of our products sold in the US are now power-assisted to provide effortless operation, rather than simply relying on your own muscle-power. We're also embracing technology in a different way by including QR codes on all our products, which helps with cross-selling into other areas."

Wholesaler VOW meanwhile sees 'ergonomics on the desk' as another trend that is driving growth. Welfare at work initiatives, coupled with legal requirements, mean companies are investing in ergonomically sound



products. These include items such as monitor risers and mouse mats designed to prevent or alleviate problems caused by poor posture and incorrectly placed desktop furniture.

Brand loyalty

Perhaps unsurprisingly, brand and brand loyalty is viewed as all important by the companies OPI spoke to. Sabine Ematinger, Marketing and Events Manager at Colop, says that branded products are threatened by cheap Asian copies and imitations and that having a strong brand is increasingly important. "A brand like ours stands for quality and innovation combined with excellent customer service, acting as a USP that makes us stand out from the competition."

"Our brand is our major asset," adds Acrimet's Nascimento. "It gives consumers a sense of confidence. Creating and leveraging a successful brand will drive higher customer loyalty and importantly, higher profit margins for the dealer."

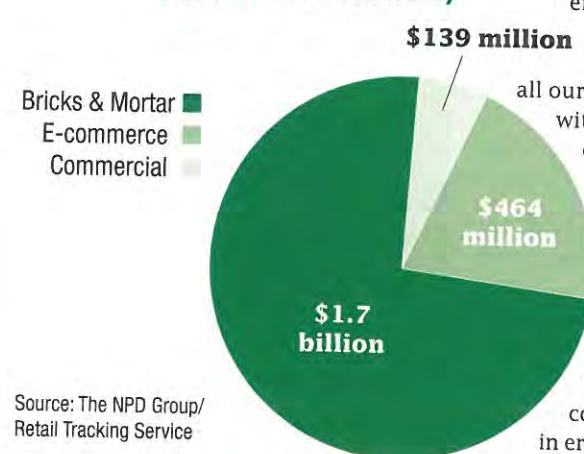
Looking to the future, manufacturers remain confident about the prospects of the category, many seeing advances in technology not as a threat, but as an opportunity.

However, Maped's de Bézieux sounds the alarm, saying: "The digitisation of the office will undoubtedly reshape our needs longer term. Fighting against this is senseless and companies had better shape their strategies accordingly."

VOW's McLoughlin agrees: "We cannot arrest the trend for digitisation. We simply have to develop products that add value and sell less for more by innovating, offering more consumer-led products and reinforcing our message of quality and service."

"In an ocean of conservatism... SOHO items seem to blossom"

Desk accessories US dollar sales (April 2013-March 2014)



Source: The NPD Group/ Retail Tracking Service