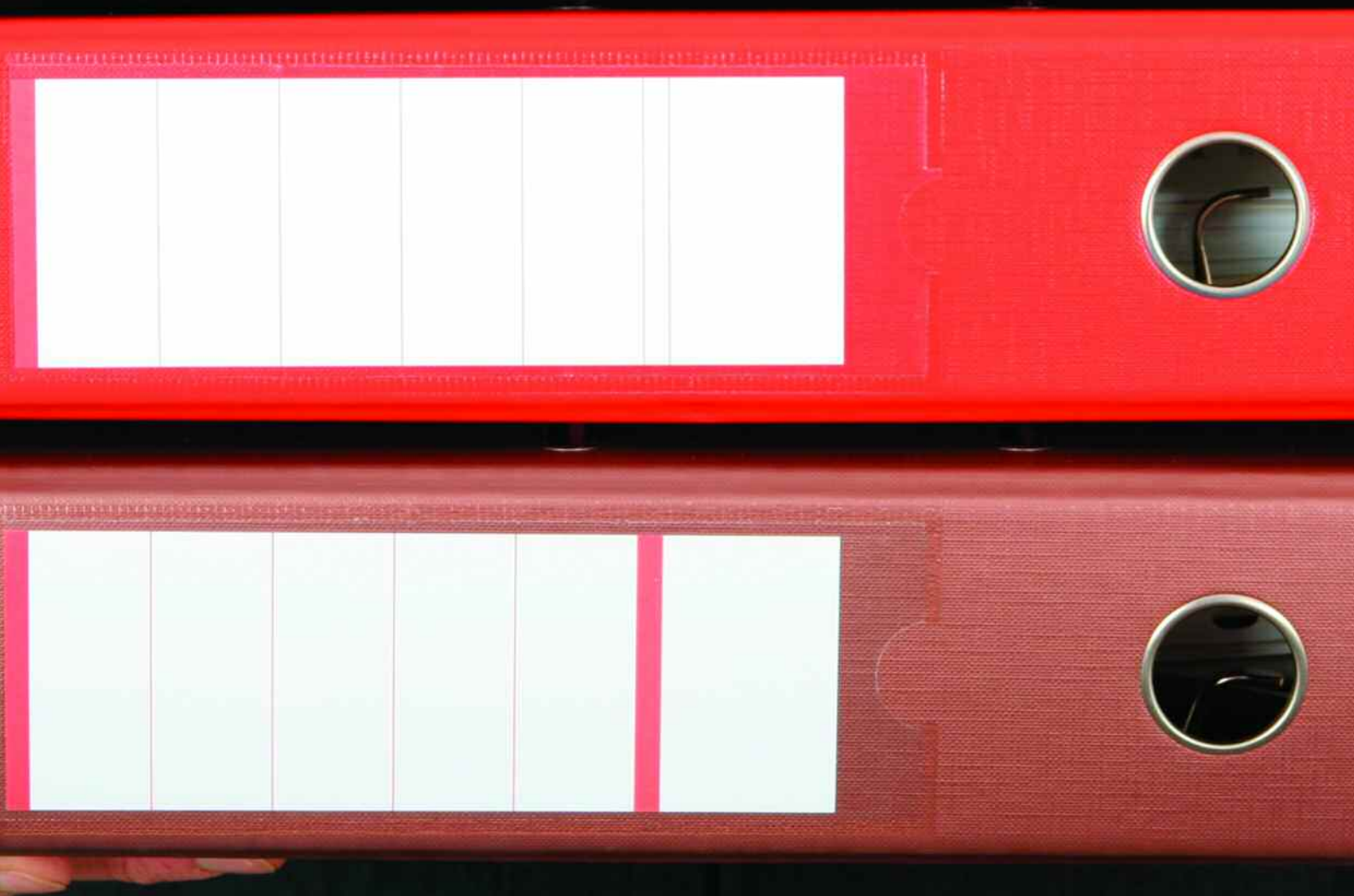


filing OUT





What impact is the home working revolution having on the filing sector? And what do dealer salespeople need to know to equip themselves for the changing marketplace?

Filing

With the environmental and cost-saving benefits involved in home working, it's a trend that's globally making waves. Good news for Easter Island.

In the UK alone, a campaign is daily waged by Work Wise UK, a not-for-profit organisation, to increase the levels of flexible/home working among the UK business community. Currently around 3.1 million people, 11% of the UK workforce, are regular home-based workers, according to the ONS's Labour Force Survey 2005. And, says Karen Couling, Acco's European product manager for Mobile Storage and Organisation, that figure's too low.

"These figures still represent a considerable underestimation of the phenomenon, referring to people who work mainly from home and not including the additional millions who work from home occasionally (i.e. 1-2 days a week) or who use home as a 'base'," says Couling. "The 2004 Workplace Employment Relations Survey showed an increase in the availability of home working to individuals up from 16% to 28% since 1998."

Peter Thompson, director of the Future Work Forum at Henley Management College, agrees that working life tends to be more of a hybrid now, with people working from home some of the time, going to meetings and having some time in the office as well. The continuing growth of home working, in particular teleworking, has been one of the most marked features of workforce change in recent years. The number of teleworkers – people who work with computers and telecommunications from home - has risen sharply by 150% since 1997, according to Couling.



It's a trend that's come to bear heavily on the form of a number of product sectors this year, and filing is no exception. Amy Collins, marketing manager for Avery Dennison, says that ease of use and space efficiency have been two defining trends this year – and both lend themselves, very obviously, to supporting the home worker sale.

Additionally, Esselte UK's marketing manager, Juliet Tipton, identifies highly stylised or 'fashion' items that look good in the home as another big trend. "There's also been a return to colour in the office, although black and blue remain the standard 'office' colour," she adds. "Five years ago, purple was in highest growth. This was replaced by pink and now the trends are moving strongly towards orange and lime green. At the Crème secretarial exhibition and in the *Office Secretary* magazine sampling programme there was a big demand for files in orange and lime green."

The cherry on the top is, according to Tipton, that margins can be good. "Filing products are high volume so the additional cash margin they can generate from repeat sales of premium products will have a significant impact on their business," she adds. As further proof of this important point, Tipton cites statistics from a filing survey, which Esselte ran with a UK magazine for office workers, that showed an overwhelming 70% said that they would pay extra for features that would make their working life easier and more efficient. Most of them also thought that the products needed to look good too.

So how can dealers make the most of this opportunity? Targeting the right people is a good start. Couling says that 90% of home workers are involved in managerial, professional, technical, and skilled occupations. Additionally, the trend towards smaller companies, and local satellite offices with around ten workers caters for the same product types as those that appeal to the home worker, according to Tipton.

"Additionally, large corporations are increasingly encouraging telesales operatives to set up home working arrangements," says Tipton. "Esselte predicts that in the future there will be fewer traditional offices to sell to. There is also a growth in the number of self-employed secretaries who offer their services to multiple clients and who work from home. Women also account for a significant proportion of new business start-ups, so females are not simply gatekeepers for office products in large sized businesses but also in the SME environment. All these workers have the same demands as the home/mobile consumer."

How should a dealer salesperson approach the sale? According to David Rand, MD of Resource by Morris, the obvious point is that the buyer will have a very clear focus on price. That will be important, he adds, but so too will be the quality of products and how well they match the interior of the home.

"The growth in interest in interior design is reflected in the number of makeover shows we see on television," says Rand, "so there is potential to sell something a bit better and a bit sexier to buyers and I can see that becoming more important as an issue than price, especially for affluent buyers."

Innovation will also help encourage the buyer to choose the more expensive option, says Avery Dennison's sales manager, Cheryl Marsh. "Raising awareness of innovations that save time and money, make administrative duties easier and create a professional impression is fundamental to success. So, encourage the consumer to trade-up wherever possible," she advises. "Also encourage sampling. The Avery Consumer Centre, like a lot of manufacturers, offers free sample packs to consumers of all of its products so encouraging consumers to request these are a good way of allowing them to experiment with the product and aid conversion to purchase."

Finally, Tipton makes the point that effective communication is key. To support brands, she continues, dealer salespeople will have to educate consumers in understanding their value. They can't just leave a catalogue and expect it to sell a product.

"As well as consumers responding well to innovative products, they also respond to innovative marketing and promotional approaches and will listen to dealers giving product advice," she says. "To capitalise on these opportunities, dealers need to support manufacturers' marketing campaigns and set up their own marketing programmes."

So, whether it's filing cabinets, wallet folders or suspension files, home workers are looking for stylish, high quality and compact products of good design for their homes. And they're happy to spend the money. If only all customer profiles were so enticing... ●

→ Ease of use and space efficiency have been two defining trends this year – and both lend themselves, very obviously, to supporting the home worker sale