



DESKTOP WORKSHOP

Rob Harradine, category manager for Spicers, explains the desktop accessories marketplace, what's on the up, what's on the slide, and how best to approach the sale.

With a UK market valued at over £130m (source: MPA) at manufacturer selling prices, desktop accessories are big business.

For many years now these products have been an essential part of any stationery order, be it a letter tray, magazine file or even a lowly waste bin. Virtually all workplaces will contain, and therefore require, these products as they enable the employee to work efficiently and in an organised manner.

With the emergence of new working practices over the past five years such as hot desking, clear desk policies and home working, the traditional desktop accessories market has seen both volume and value decline.

Add to this the increasing commoditisation of the category, driven by the increasing penetration of private label, and lower cost, Asian-sourced products; it has all had the effect of driving down the overall value of the category, thus increasing margin pressure for all in the supply chain.

Recent product innovation has sought to combat this category decline with the introduction of more stylishly and thoughtfully developed ranges made from clear acrylic, natural, and translucent materials as well as recycled ranges. New products specifically aimed at users in the mobile working arena are now also increasingly prevalent.

One potential downside to recent product innovation is that, as new styles are developed in the market with no substantial corresponding cull in longer-standing, more traditional products, there is a vast choice for the consumer of often very similar products and ranges. However, it should be noted that habitual buying whereby users seek to 'top-up' and maintain the look of their office space drives the majority of purchases. The most popular ranges in volume terms remain those in the more staid black and blue colour variants.

Clearly everyone will know what a letter tray is, but do they fully understand the benefits and selling

opportunities that exist around other complimentary desktop products?

Increasingly employers are having to take the issue of workspace ergonomics very seriously. Every day on average six people in the UK leave their jobs due to an RSI (Repetitive Strain Injury) condition (source: Health and Safety Executive)! As a result employers are now adopting preventative measures to ensure safe and comfortable working conditions for their staff. This includes conducting workspace risk assessments as required by the Health and Safety at Work Act 1974. Not all employers are aware of this and could be held responsible if any injuries are suffered due to an unsafe and uncomfortable workspace.

This alone presents a fantastic opportunity to sell the concept and benefits of ergonomic products and allow sales people to introduce new items into a consumer's workplace.

There are many other selling opportunities presented with the continuing evolution of the SOHO (Small Office Home Office) and mobile working practises. The proliferation and coverage of broadband internet access now means that

more and more people are working away from a fixed office base than ever before. Again this allows salespeople to introduce new products specifically designed for this emerging market/user-base.

Another significant area of the desktop accessory category is stapling and punching. With a UK market value of over £20m at manufacturer sell prices (source: MPA) this again is big business with several key players in the UK jostling for market position with no one clear market leader.

This again, coupled with increasing own label penetration (of around 40% in volume terms) has led to a multitude of product variants being offered in the market – many of which are very similar in terms of design and specification.

However, reasonably new to the stapling fraternity are the power-assisted products that make the process of stapling much easier, with virtually no effort needed to staple the paper.

In summary then, although desktop products may not necessarily be the most advanced, sexy or innovative products available, all offices need them and there are some great cross-selling opportunities available. Whenever a desk is sold there should be a desktop set sold with it, and with that there should be the add-on of a stapler and a punch. Whenever a desk set is sold we should be looking to sell the additional products



to compliment the range – especially those that fulfil a clear ergonomic need.

Switched-on salespeople might want to offer their customers the service of performing a risk assessment for them and, if there are products missing that should be situated on their desk, they will be in a favourable position to get the order.

What is key to selling this category is that, while there are clear margin pressures at the more traditional end of the category, there are opportunities to grow sales profitably by embracing new product developments and talking to customers about product features and overall workspace solutions. ■

WHAT THE EXPERTS SAY...

"The SOHO channel and the evolution in today's office worker offers manufacturers the ideal growth opportunity. The changing workplace environment has moved consumers away from the solid black stapler that is shared and often lost around the office. These design and fashion conscious workers are driving a consumer-led demand for stylish designer products to complement their lifestyles. This is where brands can engage consumers, with feature-rich products and a range of differentiated colours and materials."
SAM SWIFT, RAPESCO

"The current market for desktop accessories is moving away from design-led products to conservative, low cost, low profit, utility and private label products. Research commissioned by Esselte shows that end users much prefer their work environment to be more peaceful, efficient and attractive. Workspaces are getting smaller and more mobile. Office accessories are having to adapt to this."
TRACEY MORETON, ESSELTE

"Oh yeah! And I'll have three black letter trays please". When these words are added to the end of a consumer order, the reaction of most dealers' staff is to respond by looking up the cheapest item available in their specific wholesaler catalogue or mailer. Instead of looking up the cheapest... offer a quality item that is part of a family of products; and concentrate on creating an order that can be built on. Margin enhancement is the responsibility of every dealer employee, and selling quality at every opportunity is the best way to achieve this objective."
DAVID WILLIS, CEP