

Logistics of Home Delivery Influence Some Vendors' Product Development

Master Motion "RELAXXX" POWER MASSAGE RECLINERS Studio 54		Master Motion "RELAXXX" POWER MASSAGE RECLINERS Studio 54	
			
<i>(click photo above to enlarge)</i> \$999 RETAIL "FULL MARK-UP" FULL LINE OF "360-SWIVEL" MASSAGE RECLINERS WITH MASSAGE, PWR HDST, PWR LUMBAR AND THEY ALSO GLIDE AND GO INTO POWER FEET RECLINE AND WILL 360-SWIVEL	<i>(click photo above to enlarge)</i> \$999 RETAIL "FULL MARK-UP" FULL LINE OF "360-SWIVEL" MASSAGE RECLINERS WITH MASSAGE, PWR HDST, PWR LUMBAR AND THEY ALSO GLIDE AND GO INTO POWER FEET RECLINE AND WILL 360-SWIVEL	<i>(click photo above to enlarge)</i> \$1199 RETAIL "FULL MARK-UP" FULL LINE OF "360-SWIVEL" LEATHER MASSAGE RECLINERS WITH MASSAGE, PWR HDST, PWR LUMBAR AND THEY ALSO GLIDE AND GO INTO POWER FEET RECLINE AND THEY 360-SWIVEL	<i>(click photo above to enlarge)</i> \$1199 RETAIL "FULL MARK-UP" FULL LINE OF "360-SWIVEL" LEATHER MASSAGE RECLINERS WITH MASSAGE, PWR HDST, PWR LUMBAR AND THEY ALSO GLIDE AND GO INTO POWER FEET RECLINE AND THEY 360-SWIVEL

*Master Motion Studio 54 Power Massage Recliners with power headrest, power lumbar, power recline and dual airbag massage backs.

HIGH POINT — Motion furniture faces inherent challenges in serving the e-commerce channel, particularly when it comes to direct shipment of goods to consumers. Those challenges relate both to the nature of the product itself — big, with heavy metal mechanisms — that create logistical issue with delivery.

As a result, some vendors are rethinking their approach to product development for motion and recliners. Take Abbyson, which established its business foundation in the e-commerce channel before expanding its approach to brick-and-mortar customers.

“The e-commerce shopper is focused on simple clean styling, whereas the brick-and-mortar shopper is looking for functionality and style,” said Executive Vice President Rodd Rafieha. “Abbyson has developed two separate and unique line ups for both divisions of our brand that is very strong.”

E-commerce is changing Flexsteel’s motion and recliner product development approach.

“Considerations such as packaging weight and ease of assembly of motion furniture will continue to drive future development for both our Flexsteel and homestyles brands,” said Jenni Jungers, director of product.

Franklin Corp. Vice President of Sales and Marketing Peyton Passons identified the logistics of shipping heavy recliner and motion furniture long-distances, as well as the high transportation cost and increased chance of damages, as a challenge.

“As our volume with our e-commerce partners has continued to grow, we have evaluated and increased our packaging standards to help mitigate the potential damage that could occur in transport,” he said.

New Classic Home Furnishings Senior Vice President of Sales Scott Hill said standard motion furniture is a lot easier to sell online for brick-and-mortar stores and larger e-commerce players already accustomed to white-glove delivery out of their own warehouse.

“Their drivers know how heavy it is and how to get it into the home safely and efficiently,” Hill said, adding that shipping online sales directly to consumers is a different story. “The biggest challenge for us with direct shipping is having product consumers can understand, handle and assemble themselves. We’re meeting that challenge by working with our manufacturing partners to condense the size of the pieces and improve packaging to make sure it holds up during transport but keep the weight down to control costs.”

He added that e-commerce’s impact on product development “depends on the channel.”

“If it’s through a brick-and-mortar store doing its own delivery, I don’t have to change anything,” Hill said. “We’re coming up with a different way to develop product for direct-shipping, such as RTA, modular pieces to ease the burden of the physical aspect of distribution while addressing the cost aspect of shipping. In the next couple of months, we’ll have goods in place to work with direct shipment of recliners and motion sofas.”

Scottie Johns, director of e-commerce at Southern Motion, also pointed out the channel-dependent differences of selling motion online.

“One of our biggest challenges is the logistics to deliver from B2C,” he said. “Most manufacturers are not set up to stock, package or deliver to the end consumer the way retailers are accustomed to doing.

He added, “The weight and bulk of motion furniture is difficult to ship and deliver directly to the end consumer, so we really prefer working with our brick-and-mortar retail partners to sell, deliver and service these consumers.”

That said, Southern is gearing some product toward direct shipping, with one such chair already in the works.

“We were in the process of developing parcel-service product when COVID-19 hit, and we’re a couple months away from shipping that way,” Johns said. “We’ll offer it either way, LTL or parcel shipping through e-commerce directly to the consumer. We’ll have a second chair we’ll introduce this summer or fall. At some point we’ll gauge an ROI and make a judgment on that path.

“With the growth of e-commerce we wanted to make sure we were developing product for that space,” Johns continued. We want to see if we can lower the freight cost of delivery to the consumer direct, which makes the product more attractive online.”

While online merchandising of motion is an area where Ashley concentrates now, the product itself has to match the channel as well.

“It’s challenging to show and demonstrate features and benefits of some motion product online, but high quality video clips and 360-degree product viewing partially addresses that constraint,” said Senior Vice President of

Sales Al Matthews, adding, “Designing product to manage overall size plus engineering recliners to meet the direct to consumer carton length, width, and total weight limitations is an important step.”

A modular approach

Manwah USA CEO Guy Ray agreed with others that motion’s issue with the e-commerce channel has been with weight and size as well as transportation costs. He believes some pure-play e-commerce retailers try to sell cheaper goods to avoid those costs.

“These inferior goods don’t give consumers the same experience which is confusing and unjust to the category,” Ray said. “However, Manwah has been building our products in modular pieces, which creates what we call ‘unlimited configurations with limited SKUs’ giving our traditional retailers a distinct advantage in selling this category online.”

Master Motion has always taken a modular approach to motion.

“We make all of our products completely modular, so every modular seat is connected together to make sofa, sectional, home theater, making e-commerce ordering and delivery much, easier with less damages from shipping, handling, and delivering,” said CEO Michael Nanni. “We also completely box each individual modular piece allowing for shipping to the retailer or directly to the retail customer avoiding any shipping damages or the need to lift, carry and deliver a 200-plus-pound sofa or loveseat.”

In addition to easier delivery to apartments and using elevators, the modular approach fits mobile lifestyles, he added.

“For a population that is now moving every one to three, three to five years, the modular configurations make it easy for the retail customer to design their own living space at home and move their furniture along with their lives and reset up their furniture in a different configuration at their new residence,” Nanni said. “They could use their modular pieces to make a sofa and loveseat in one residence and using the same pieces make a sectional at their new residence.”



[Powell Slaughter](#) // Senior Editor

I’m Powell Slaughter, senior editor at Furniture/Today. I returned to the publication in January 2015 after nine years of writing about furniture retail strategies and best practices at a monthly magazine focusing on home furnishings retail operations. Prior to that, I spent 10 years with F/T covering wood furniture, the last five of those as case goods editor. Upon my return to F/T, I developed coverage of the logistical and service aspects of the furniture industry as well as following the occasional, home office and home entertainment categories. In April 2018 I took over the upholstery category, with responsibility for coverage of the fabric and leather stationary and motion upholstery, recliners and massage chair categories.