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OM5 series

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simple, ergonomic chairs

M⁵ series

by **officemaster**

celebrating **25** years

The Cheap (and green) Seats

The company wants to creating seating that increases employee morale and productivity while decreasing time away from the job.

By Lauren Folks and Rob Kirkbride

Just because a chair is inexpensive doesn't automatically mean it can't be green. That's the message from many small or mid-market seating makers who rightfully feel they don't get their share of the spotlight for doing what's right for the environment.

While some of the companies might not have the marketing budget to file for the alphabet soup of environmental certification programs, most are just as committed to the environment as their larger competitors.

Office Master, a mid-market seating maker, believes in a program it calls "sustainable environmentalism" -- providing seating that is price effective and cost effective to its customers with a focus on recyclability and use of recycled materials. "As a smaller company, we are very conscious of environmentalism," said Wilson Chow, director of marketing.

The California-based company has worked to introduce recycled content into the back shell of its chairs and other parts that can tolerate higher levels of recycled materials. "In reality, if you go part by part, the materials we use are almost identical to the big boys," said President Wallace Hwang. "We put environmentalism into our every day life. We are not any less than any company in this industry. They can afford to spend a lot of marketing money. We can't afford that kind of big marketing money, but that doesn't make what we do any less."

While no one would mistake Staples for a small company, it faces some of the same misconceptions about its environmental record.

Some large office furniture makers have entire departments devoted to working on environmental certification, said John Bueno, Office Master's product development manager. Companies like Office Master can't afford that kind of specialization.

"I think in some ways all of these certifications create barriers for customers," said Hwang. "We can't afford to go through every certification and that might cause some people to get the wrong impression on what we believe about protecting the environment. For small companies (trying to follow all the environmental certifications) can really be a burden. In a way, it is unfair because we are not doing anything less than our larger competitors."

While no one would mistake Staples for a small company, it faces some of the same misconceptions about its environmental record. It is a big company. And it believes firmly in protecting the environment. Business Interiors by Staples develops and sources low-cost, green seating—something of a hot commodity in the market these days.

A staple of Business Interiors is the belief that what is good for the earth is also good for your wallet. John Michael, vice president and general manager of Business Interiors, spoke on the phenomena of green paired with low-cost. Two forces catalyze commitment to green practices; a consumer demand and the green integrity of the Staples empire. "Five years ago there was a premium for green products, and you don't really see it as much in the market today," Michael said.

That's because the price gap is closing between green and non-green materials. "Part of being a trusted source for customers for furniture

solutions is making sure we understand what they value and providing products that fit with those values," Michael added. "Staples as an enterprise is very socially-conscious and environmentally-aware and has a lot of aspirations around being an environmental steward, through products and the way we conduct our business."

The strategies to uphold the green goals covers various energy sources to the type of truck transportation. Low cost, green seating has been selling remarkably well, even considering the recent economic downturn. Michael referenced the evolution of green products and design. "We are in the second or third generation of green design products for manufacturers," he said. "They are better designed, sleeker and less expensive."

Green products follow a natural continuum: As they are better made they become more enticing and competitive. An aggregation of well-constructed, less-expensive, green chairs include their own Verdesol chair and seating from Global, HON, Allsteel and National. Verdesol, a high-back task chair, contains fabric made from 100 percent recycled plastic soft drink bottles and the potential for LEED credits.

HON's Ceres task chair is certified by Scientific Certification Systems (SCS) and earned level 2 from BIFMA with nearly 100 percent recyclable parts. Allsteel's rubber-based suspension Inspire chair targets the education market, such as environmentally-friendly institutions and earned three certifications through SCS, McDonough Braungart Design Chemistry (MBDC) Cradle to Cradle, and level. Global's Sonic-task chair was assembled with 65 percent recycled content, contributes toward LEED points and is Greenguard certified. National's MIX-IT, a high-back chair level 1 certified by SCS to the BIFMA e3 Standard as well as certified to SCS Indoor Advantage GOLD, is also a top seller.

Material content, design and manufacture process, and packaging and transportation, all factor in to the environmental appraisal of products. Green does not necessitate a higher cost than its traditional materials. "It's pretty close to a level playing field. Design gets smarter and manufacturing gets more efficient. Both those things allow the cost of green products to come down," Michael said.

Moreover, the economic downturn did not specifically affect the cost of green materials. "The downturn obviously reduced demand overall, so the demand for green products went down with everything else, but I don't think as a percentage of our total sales it came down any more or less than traditional products," he said.

Numerous forms of green certifications and rating help companies validate the green aspect of products, but, it is not simplified for the customer. "One of the things I hope will occur in the next five years in our industry is more transparency and simplicity in various certifications," Michael said.

For Office Master, being based in California helps since it is a state that puts a premium on environmental matters. Still, that doesn't make it any easier to keep up with the various environmental certification programs.

"It is hard to know what is important to our customers right now," Chow said. "All of our products and printed pieces are FSC certified. We try to do our best where we can. In our manufacturing process, we have eliminated the need for some cardboard packaging and we recycle. Still, there are no certifications for all the things that Office Master does to protect the environment. We just do it." †

EVENTS

MILAN / April 12-17, 2011

SaloneU cio 2011. Milan, Italy
(<http://www.cosmit.it/tool/home.php?s=0,2,67,71,80>)

DUBAI / May 17-19, 2011

Mideast office furniture show, Dubai World Trade Centre, Dubai.

CHICAGO / JUNE 13-15, 2011

NeoCon 2011 at Chicago's Merchandise Mart.

TORONTO / SEPTEMBER 22-24, 2011

IIDEX/NeoCon Canada - Canada's National Design Expo & Conference. Direct Energy Centre, Toronto.

www.iidexneocon.com

BALTIMORE / NOVEMBER 2-3, 2011

NeoCon East 2011.

Office Master Celebrates 25 Years

Mid-market seating manufacturer Office Master, Inc. of Southern California is preparing to celebrate its milestone 25th year, and the yearlong celebration officially kicks off this coming Friday.

The company plans to mark the event first with an internal celebration thanking its staff and then later this month with the formal introduction of the innovative, new OM5 Series™ chair.

"We're very excited about passing this milestone and will reach out in the coming months to truly thank our customers for entrusting us with solving their seating needs over the years," said company president, Wallace Hwang. "But, relatively speaking, we're still a fairly young and customer-focused company and I would say that this birthday simply reinforces what I've been saying for a while now: That we're still small enough to care about each order, while large and experienced enough to handle any sized order."

Founded on March 18, 1986, the company started by producing value-oriented, ergonomic seating out of a small facility in San Diego. Since that time, the company has experienced steady growth and last year completed construction on an efficient and green 102,000 sq ft. headquarters located in Ontario, California.

Today known as the home of Smart Seating Solutions, the company has developed its line significantly over the years into a broad offering of comfortable and high-quality, situation-appropriate seating that is capable of meeting the majority of today's seating needs.

With an impressive client list that already features many well-known corporate, healthcare, education and government names, the company is poised for even greater success and growth in the years ahead as it continues to push for improvements in both its own line as well as in the contract seating market as a whole.

Now Playing:

Configura launched ConfiguraTV (www.configura.com/tv) with the intent of showcasing CET Designer users talking about why they like the software.

"The videos are short – about 30 seconds each – and focus on a particular aspect of the software that a user especially likes," explained Training & Support Manager Tracy Lanning. "Our users are our best ambassadors about CET Designer. This is a platform to share their thoughts."

Designer Kori Locicero talks about how CET Designer is like three tools in one; she's able to go from concept to completion in a much shorter timeframe using CET Designer.

Designer Seana Turner talks about how CET Designer and its Extensions are continually improved and updated with the most current information from manufacturers.

Currently, there are about a dozen short videos on the "channel" with more to come. Additional videos can also be found on Configura's YouTube channel at www.youtube.com/configuraab.

ECi Acquires FMAudit

eCommerce Industries, Inc. (ECi), a provider of industry specific business and ecommerce software solutions, announced that it has acquired FMAudit, LLC, based in Jefferson City, MO. FMAudit's suite of print assessment, remote meter, supply and service data applications provide real time information that allows organizations to automate labor intensive business processes.

"We are excited to include FMAudit's powerful solutions and talented team in the ECi portfolio of companies," says Trevor Gruenewald, COO of ECi. "Adding FMAudit to the suite of solutions available for our customers fits perfectly within our business strategy of providing our existing and prospective customers a "one stop shop" service. Customers using FMAudit have experi-

enced tremendous results by implementing the ability to reduce overhead, automate service and increase sales in their dealership. I think it's clear that the unique and cost effective solution FMAudit is providing dealers and manufacturers is imperative for managed print services success."

"We believe this is a great opportunity for FMAudit to further exceed our goals for aggressive growth and we are excited to become part of the ECi family," said Kevin Tetu, President and Founder of FMAudit. "From the beginning, our mission has been to help our customers build stronger businesses. This transaction will enable FMAudit to significantly enhance our customer offerings by helping us deliver high value solutions to the market faster and with more seamless integration. We're now able to move to

BRIEFING

Fabric Maker Kravet acquires Brunswick & Fils

European fabric maker Kravet Inc. has acquired Brunswick & Fils through a bankruptcy court auction and should begin operating the business by the end of the month.

Kravet was the highest bidder for the financially beleaguered Brunswick & Fils, which led for Chapter 11 protection in January, citing a business downturn because of the recession. The auction drew significant interest from national and international, financial and strategic potential bidders.

A purchase price was not disclosed. During the Chapter 11 transition, Kravet provided \$4 million in post-bankruptcy financing to ensure that Brunswick & Fils would continue to be a financially sound trading partner. Both companies said they expect the transition to be seamless.

Brunswick & Fils is based in White Plains, N.Y., and has showrooms in 21 cities with a design studio in New York's D&D Building. Brunswick has international distribution in 24 countries.