



Motion, Recliner Resources Consider Online Sales Opportunities

Master Motion "RELAXXX" MASSAGE SLEEPER-SOFA Studio 54	
 <p><i>(click photo above to enlarge)</i> \$1299 RETAIL "FULL MARK-UP" FULL LINE OF PERFORMANCE FABRIC W/FABRIC & NAIL-HEAD GLIDER MASSAGE SOFAS: (WITH HAND-NAILED ACCENTS) INCLUDES 2 MASSAGE, 2 PWR HDST & 2 PWR LUMBAR FOR \$1299 RETAIL. AT AN \$1399 RETAIL, BOTH LEFT & RIGHT ARM OF THE SOFA WILL GLIDE & GO INTO POWER FEET RECLINE!</p>	 <p><i>(click photo above to enlarge)</i> \$1599 RETAIL "FULL MARK-UP" FULL LINE OF 1.1-1.4MIL THICK LEATHER W/NAIL-HEAD GLIDER MASSAGE SOFAS (WITH HAND-NAILED ACCENTS) INCLUDES 2 MASSAGE, 2 PWR HDST & 2 PWR LUMBAR FOR \$1599 RETAIL. AT A \$1699 RETAIL, BOTH LEFT & RIGHT ARM OF THE SOFA WILL GLIDE & GO INTO POWER FEET RECLINE!</p>

HIGH POINT — It's no secret that online sales of home furnishings have been increasing at a faster rate than overall retail business in the past couple of years. Also apparent is COVID-19's impact on consumer purchasing habits that will likely extend beyond the pandemic's immediate boost to the e-commerce channel, both for brick-and-mortar stores and pure-play e-retailers.

Vendors in the motion category, one of furniture's hottest on brick-and-mortar retail floors, see great opportunity online but face challenges in coming up with product that's easier to assemble in the home, is configured for shipping that doesn't break the bank on transportation costs, and is easy for consumers to understand and shop for online.

"When shopping online, consumers want to be able to understand what they are buying," said Josh Walter, CEO of BrandJump, a leading e-commerce sales and marketing firm dedicated to the home furnishings space. "Without the advantage of a live salesperson to walk them through the features, benefits and competitive comparisons, online buyers rely on the content and imagery provided to tell them the whole story.

"The challenge for consumers when looking to buy a more complex product with sophisticated features, such as motion furniture, is that the story can't be told with just a few images and bullet feature points."

Motion and recliner resources are looking to tell their story online, as well as examine SKU selection and product configurations that suit the e-commerce channel's demands on efficient delivery to consumers' homes.

Gauging the opportunity

Furniture Today asked vendors for a sense of how much of their recliner/motion furniture goods are sold online and where that's headed. Responses varied, but the consensus is those figures will only increase.

Southern Motion has seen significant online growth the past two years but particularly in the last 60 to 90 days, according to Director of E-commerce Scottie Johns.

"I do believe online sales will continue to grow, not only for true online retailers, but through local brick-and-mortar sites as well," he said. "I think most retailers have seen the power of the online consumer these past few months, and the savvy ones will now invest more into their online strategy going forward.

"As more consumers get comfortable purchasing online, more will continue to shop and purchase through that channel," he added.

While Parker House sells a limited number of Internet-only dealers, its upholstery focus is brick-and-mortar furniture retailers and not direct to consumers, so online represents a small percentage of motion sales right now.

"Due to the pandemic, we're seeing an increase in online motion sales through pure-play e-commerce retailers and our brick-and-mortar accounts, which are developing and expanding their online reach," said President Chris Lupo. "We're working hard to support them with these initiatives.

"Our large inventory, domestic warehousing and flowing of product have been assets to our dealers during these difficult economic conditions. We continue to ship orders within 48 hours."

Online motion sales have nearly doubled recently at Ashley, along with such sales of other categories.

"Currently e-retail sales have grown to mid- to high-single digit sales as a percentage of total sales and will continue to grow," said Ashley Senior Vice President of Sales Al Matthews.

Ekornes' online sales of its high-end Stressless goods are done through its dealer base and currently account for about 5% of overall Stressless sales.

"We would see this number staying flat or increasing slightly over the next six months," said Marketing Manager Beverly Kastel, who noted Stressless shoppers still prefer the in-store experience.

From its inception in 2017, Master Motion Studio 54 has taken to social media to drive business to retailers, and that's positioning the company well for Internet sales, said President and CEO Michael Nanni. Master Motion went directly to social media platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn, Yelp, YouTube, Twitter, Zoom, Vine and Snapchat to advertise, display and promote its products.

"We are promoting directly to the retail customer on all these platforms, and when they click on a photo of one of our collections, a list will pull up with the retail stores they can buy it from with their websites and brick-and-mortar locations," Nanni said.

“The chance today that a retail customer will find something they like, by finding (a retailer’s) website and browsing all the products, has far less success today than the customer getting specific images sent to them, not by the company, but through social media like, YouTube bites, Pinterest recommendations,” he added.

“I would guess that in five years, if not sooner, more than 75% of our business will be done online, finding the retail customer online, directing them to the retailer’s website to buy or to their brick-and-mortar locations to buy.”

Numbers aren’t exact

More of Manwah’s traditional retailers are realizing their website can be transactional as well as information-oriented.

“It is hard to say how much business has been transferred to online sales, but it is safe to say that the industry’s traditional retailers have found a comfort level in selling on line with better goods, and this will continue,” said Manwah USA CEO Guy Ray. “It is all about how the consumer wants to shop. We know they are loyal as well as trust the retail brands and want better goods than are on the pure play e-commerce retailers. With that in mind we have seen our retailers now accommodate consumers on line or with in-store purchase.”

Because almost Kuka Home’s online business is through omnichannel retailers and not pure-play sites, it’s also hard for the company to get an exact percentage of online motion sales.

“But in talking to our omnichannel dealers, they tell us the percentage of their business sold online is growing very fast,” said CEO Steve Lush. “We feel this trend will continue to grow as more and more consumers discover the convenience of online shopping.”

Flexsteel doesn’t yet have definite e-commerce numbers either.

“Flexsteel retailers do not currently report which of their sales are from e-commerce and which are from their brick-and-mortar operations,” said Tim Newlin, vice president of product and marketing, but he believes there’s an increase in recent years that has accelerated over the past three months.

“We believe this trend will continue. This represents a growth opportunity across Flexsteel’s product line, including recliners and motion furniture.”

New Classic Home Furnishings started out in e-commerce around five years ago, primarily with smaller items, according to Senior Vice President of Sales Scott Hill, and that motion will certainly account for more online sales.

“For the past three or four years, motion has been one of the fastest growing sectors of our industry,” Hill said. “The question is how we make those six-piece sofas something people are comfortable buying online.”

Franklin has sold recliner and motion goods through e-commerce retailers for a number of years, according to Peyton Passons, vice president of sales and marketing.

“All trends point to more furniture being purchased online as customers grow more comfortable with making big-ticket purchases through online channels,” he said, noting the range of goods online presentation makes possible. “Consumers appreciate the variety that is available via online platforms.”



[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.