

HOW HAS THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY CHANGED IN POLAND AND IN THE WORLD AS A RESULT OF THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC? HOW WILL IT CHANGE IN THE FUTURE? WE ASK THOSE QUESTIONS TO REPRESENTATIVES OF THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY AND WE PRESENT THEIR ANSWERS IN THE „BIZNES.MEBLE.PL” MONTHLY. IN THIS ISSUE – KRZYSZTOF RYKOWSKI, DIRECTOR OF IMOS POLSKA.

Automation and digitization

– worth thinking about

The world facing the coronavirus is no longer the same. The COVID-19 pandemic has changed the social and economic situation drastically. The world economy system is at a crossroads and has been stuck in many respects with doubt and uncertainty. It cannot be denied that the current situation, related to COVID-19, is a new situation, not only for the furniture industry, but generally for the whole economy in the macro scale, referring to large regions: countries and even continents. We have never had to face such state of affairs before – in such a dimension, degree and scope. How long will it last, how is it going to end and how will we recover from it? I do not know. We ask ourselves many questions that are difficult to answer.

NEW REALITY AND THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY

If one looks at the furniture industry in Poland in 2019, we can see that it generated over 11 billion EUR. We are currently in third place among the world leaders in furniture production. Analysing furniture sales data for 2015-2019, we see an increase in exports by 33.4%, and imports by as much as 58.5%. Those results inspire

optimism, confirm high dynamics of Polish furniture manufacturers and great potential of Polish furniture industry. Therefore, if we look at 2020 and the beginning of the pandemic, we can observe big drops but over time this trend evens out, returns to normal level at the end of the year and to increase in following months of 2021.

It should be remembered that the furniture industry is indirectly related to other sectors of the economy and all problems of other industries translate into difficulties for furniture manufacturers – because when the construction industry is brought to a standstill, when hotels, shops, offices, cafes are not working, there are no orders for their renovation, orders for new equipment and furniture. Everyone loses.

It is similarly with exports which are crucial for Polish furniture manufacturers – nearly 90% of furniture, components and semi-finished products are shipped abroad – so if the pandemic unfolds adversely in other countries, it will have a negative impact on our production.

Poland has one of the lowest recessions in Europe. Despite many fears, it turns out that the Polish economy is rather safe and resistant to the tremors caused by COVID-19, especially in the furniture industry. Government's actions were not without

significance here. A number of support programs were launched and monetary policy focused on maintaining the economy in the best possible condition.

LONG-TERM PLANNING

It is hard to deny that the current COVID-19 situation is far from normal. We assume that the reality we are experiencing now is unlikely to return to its pre-pandemic state, and if it does, it will be significantly changed.

Therefore, it is worth considering adopting good solutions, methods and business long-term strategies that would be beneficial for companies and for this kind of activity in general. It must be remembered that the furniture industry in Poland consists of over 27 thousand enterprises that employ approximately 165 thousand employees. Adopting appropriate know-how with the right plan and specific procedures means not only real current benefits but also a new model of operation for the future, which can benefit any enterprise, both large and small. What models of operation are we talking about?

The undoubted result of the pandemic, or rather its consequence that can be observed in the field of operation of many companies, was redefinition of the organi-



zation of work, communication and execution of orders in such a way that they meet all safety requirements and administrative guidelines. This could not be avoided.

Some companies decided to work remotely – it turned out to be often a very good decision. Enabling work in the home office formula allowed some companies to maintain the continuity of operation and employment.

Our company, Imos Polska, which operates in the field of IT solutions, sup-

an administrative decision. Lockdown shut down almost all trade.

In the current situation, the furniture manufacturers industry, as has already been done by other sectors, should focus on e- sales. It is definitely the best moment.

It is also worth considering the automation and digitization of manufacturing processes. In other words, furniture factories that now decide to use automation technology to improve production

without prior preparation, can easily create any piece of furniture and purchase it. The order data generated by the configurator is then automatically transferred to the order processing department and then, after validation check, sent to the factory that carries out the order. Within just a few days, the customer receives a piece of furniture with detailed assembly instructions.

As we can see, this technology has great potential that goes far beyond the well-known, traditional showroom sales. The benefits it brings in times of widespread pandemic is quite obvious.

However, one should understand that the Imos System has much more possibilities and applications. First of all, it enables comprehensive furniture design, its presentation and operating CNC machines.

Imos has direct access to an extensive library of components and fittings from leading suppliers. Thanks to this functionality, each created furniture design can be equipped with any individual parts and accessories.

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port and educational services oriented to the furniture industry, has gained a lot by introducing the possibility of remote work. Good organization in this respect allowed us to develop such methods of mutual cooperation that the presence in the office ceased to be obligatory. We can now understand the sense of doing so and we are inclined to adopt such solutions in the future.

However, we are aware that not all companies can introduce such model of operation. Therefore, I assume that, in individual cases, companies need to take additional steps, apply different tools and implementation strategies that will help to break out of this pandemic deadlock.

STRONGER ONLINE AND DIGITIZATION OF PRODUCTION

There is no doubt that the most popular and most common method of retail furniture distribution so far has been stationary sales. Through stores and furniture showrooms, manufacturers provided customers with an offer from which everyone could choose the product they were interested in and make a purchase. This method of selling furniture worked successfully for many years, until 2020, the beginning of the pandemic, when everything changed almost overnight – all large stores were closed by

will not only gain a production advantage over the competition, but also, should the threat of a pandemic grow, minimize downtime losses.

The use of online tools and diversification of the offer, developing new products, changing the marketing strategy focused on new distribution channels with particular emphasis on the Internet, and the automation of the production lines is a chance to overcome the crisis and improve the economic results for each company. Let's take a look at the solutions we can use.

IMOS IX NET AND ONLINE DESIGN POSSIBILITIES

Every furniture manufacturer knows how important distribution is, especially when it comes to retail. Imos iX Net is an advanced furniture configurator that, when used on the store's website, allows customers to easily create individual furniture pieces and order them with home delivery. This configurator is easy to use and works on almost any device – from a desktop computer, through a tablet to a smartphone. The configurator is based on 3D technology which significantly speeds up and facilitates the creation of individual furniture. It is equipped with an interface through which the customer,

SUMMARY

Nowadays, consumers buy new furniture more often than in the past which is largely due to the rising standard of living and the steady increase in disposable income in all areas. The demand for furniture therefore has a steadily increasing rate and hopefully that will not change, regardless of the current situation and crisis we are experiencing right now.

The past year has undoubtedly been directed by global pandemic. It turned social and economic life around the world upside down. However, it turns out that the Polish furniture industry coped with this difficult time extremely well, and maybe even brilliantly. Half a year ago, no one would even dare to consider such an optimistic scenario: repeating the result from 2019, but it happened. Bravo! However, it would not be possible without the mobilization of administrative assistance funds. Thanks to them, many companies have managed to maintain production flow and employment.

Nevertheless, it is worth learning lessons from this situation, thinking it over and taking care of the future – there are many possibilities. Especially since the pandemic is still ongoing and no one knows when it will end. ●