

**U.S. Mattress Manufacturers Make Products
to Meet Diverse Needs of the Consumer**

The innovative and highly competitive mattress industry makes and quickly delivers products to consumers that meet their wide-ranging needs for a great night's sleep on a comfortable, supportive mattress. As a result, manufacturers make a broad variety of products that vary from market to market, and in many cases, from retailer to retailer.

Unlike many industries that only use an automated process to mass produce and inventory a few basic models of products, or that require consumers to place orders weeks in advance before the product is delivered to their home, the mattress industry takes a different approach. Many companies instead follow a "just-in-time" manufacturing and distribution model that allows them to make and promptly deliver the exact mattress that each consumer wants.

Rather than maintain large inventories of generic mattresses, in general, manufacturers make their beds only after the customer has placed his or her order. The consumer selects the specific mattress model and size from the variety of products and price points that a retailer offers that meets individual comfort needs and fits their budget. Afterward, the retailer usually orders that product from the manufacturer that same day, and the manufacturer assembles the desired mattress and delivers it to the consumer a few days later.

This manufacturing model serves American consumers well for several reasons.

First, the industry recognizes that mattresses are highly personal products that must meet the unique sleep and comfort needs of a diverse range of consumers. For example, consumers have different sleep habits, comfort and temperature preferences, and physical conditions or ailments that affect how they sleep. These factors vary as we age and mature and as our lifestyle changes. Mattress manufacturers have developed a broad array of product styles, sizes and technologies to address the different and changing

preferences of the consumers. This product variety would be much more limited if the industry only sold standard mass-produced models.

Second, the industry's approach means that retailers do not tie up their working capital in maintaining a large product inventory. Instead, they can use their financial resources to build comfortable and convenient showrooms to display the many different mattress models and technologies that the consumer can "rest test." It also allows them to invest the time and effort needed to train their sales associates on the features and benefits of the different products. A knowledgeable sales associate can help the consumer find the mattress that addresses his or her comfort, support and sleep needs.

Third, the product diversity available today helps each retailer develop its own merchandising strategy. To be competitive, each retailer works hard to select which products to sell, which prices to charge and how best to sell those products to its specific customer base. Factors that influence a retailer's merchandising strategy include the geographic region and climate of the area serviced; the ages, tastes, and buying habits of its customers and whether they are interested in new technologies, environmentally friendly products, or other product features.

For example, one retailer might focus its strategy on mattress sets that meet the comfort and support needs of an aging population. Another will feature bedding made from natural or renewable materials. By understanding the buying trends of its target consumer, a retailer can supply the combination of product features, styles and materials in the mattresses it offers that are in demand.

In addition, many retailers will invest more time and effort in training their sales associates on the features and benefits of products that are specific to their store. As a result, the variety of bedding products available today on an exclusive basis with many retailers benefits consumers because the retailer's sales associates are better equipped to help the consumer find the mattress that will best fit his or her needs.

Nevertheless, the broad variety of products available to the consumer can make mattress shopping a complicated experience. The industry has prepared a number of

resources, including www.bettersleep.org and the *Better Sleep Guide*, to inform consumers about the different mattress technologies available today. These resources suggest factors consumers should consider when deciding which mattress set is best for them. This information helps consumers compare different product features (e.g., the differences between innersprings, foam or air cushioning systems) when shopping for their mattress. Likewise, many manufacturers have information on their Web sites that describe the variety of product features available on mattresses that they make.

Above all, nothing is more important than how each mattress feels and whether it meets the customer's sleep and comfort needs. Seemingly slight variations in product construction, materials, tailoring or dimensions can significantly influence how a mattress feels. As a result, it is critical that the consumer "rest test" each mattress for at least 15 minutes before deciding whether to buy the product.

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