

Sweet dreams of success

A business deal with a Belgian firm is helping Icelanders sleep more easily. Thanks to an agreement set up with the help of the Innovation Relay Centres network, an Icelandic bed company is selling individually adjusted beds designed to make bad backs and restless nights a thing of the past. The Belgian inventors of the system say the deal is proving an ideal stepping-stone to tackling the wider European market.



A customer's body is measured on the Ergosleep test bed.

When Valdimar Grimsson travelled to Belgium to see a patented system for individually customising beds, he did not need to sleep on it before making up his mind. "It took me ten minutes to decide that this was the technology for us," says Grimsson, from Lystadún-Marco, a specialist bed supplier based in the Icelandic capital, Reykjavik. "I lay down on the test-bed that measures your weight and profile, and within minutes the computer-based system had re-shaped the bed so that it was a perfect fit," he remembers.

The LS Bedding Ergosleep bed system is based on moveable slats on the bed base, which can be adjusted in pairs to four different heights, giving scores of different profiles to suit nearly every conceivable body type. Frank Verschuere, LS Bedding's managing director, explains that when it comes to beds, one size definitely does not fit all. "Our bodies are all different. It does not make sense that we should all sleep in more or less the same bedding systems. That would be just like selling clothes all in the same size. Today, back pain is a major problem, and while it is not all about our sleeping position, that can be a major factor," says Verschuere.

Test studio

At the core of the LS Bedding system is the automated test studio with a measuring bed and a computer. A would-be customer is asked to lie on the measuring bed and, using a sophisticated programme with data from thousands of previous customers, the bed registers the user's build and converts the readings into a chart.

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To achieve the ideal sleep settings, five areas of the body are examined: the head, shoulders, lumbar region, pelvis and legs. As the customer lies comfortably, tiny motors automatically adjust the pairs of slats so that each part of the body has the recommended amount of support.

The finished bed has a fixed profile, but the slats are designed to flex as the sleeper moves about. Special mattresses supplied with the system provide additional comfort and support, and the slats can be readjusted to allow for changes in body weight, or pregnancy.

Special mattresses

"We think that in getting the right fit, the ergonomically designed slat position is 70% of the solution, the flexing ability of the slats is 15% and the mattress the other 15%," says Verschuere. The company says its mattresses differ from conventional ones in the way in which they accommodate the body and distribute the pressure. Each mattress core has at least five 'comfort zones', constructed in a specific way so that the mattress conforms to the shape of the body.

The adjustable beds are priced to appeal to customers towards the top end of the market, but LS Bedding insists that at €700-€1,000 for a double bed, they are by no means the most expensive option. Some models have motors fitted so they can be reclined or raised up, and there is a low-profile version that offers three different slat positions rather than four. For double beds, LS Bedding recommends buying two separately adjustable bed bases and using either separate mattresses or a 1.8m wide double-bed mattress.

It was the all-in solution including the measuring test bed and high degree of customisation that sold the deal to Lystadún-Marco. The company has its main shop in Reykjavik with one of the automated test beds, and two other outlets. It sells other bed makes, including one popular model based on spring technology that also provides varying support to individual parts of the body. However, Grimsson says that the degree of customisation available with the Ergosleep system outstrips the competition by a comfortable margin.

Customisable

"The Ergosleep system is more expensive than our other beds, but interest is growing a lot. Of course, people with back problems are part of that, but there are also some customers who just want the best bed they can buy. The biggest problem we have is getting people to lie down on the test bed. Some people just want to browse and the process does take a few minutes. But once they try it they are sold," he adds.

Iceland has a relatively small population of just 300,000 people and Lystadún-Marco now sells around 300 Ergosleep beds a year. The investment in the test bed was paid back inside a year, and the company says it is more than pleased with the economics of the deal.

Lystadún-Marco had been actively looking for something of this type using the IRC network, and LS Bedding admits that most of the momentum came from the Icelanders. As a small SME, the Belgian company had previously limited its sales drive mainly to what it regards as its home market of the Benelux countries.

"Until now we have not been trying to push our markets out too far, because we are quite a small company and this product needs to have committed, specialist retailers who understand the bedding market and the needs of customers," Verschuere explains. "Lystadún-Marco was very pro-active. For us the deal has been an important test of the



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business case for expanding into new markets. Now we are starting to think about looking at Scandinavian countries, France, Germany, Spain and even the UK."

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