

Exporting pet furniture to Europe

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Pet furniture has developed from purely functional items into home accessories. Design levels have increased and consumers are giving these products a prominent place in their homes. This has created new segments in pet furniture, especially for handmade products in mid-mid and mid-high markets. To appeal to the consumers in these segments, adding design and decorative value to your pet furniture is key. One way of doing this is by using innovative materials and techniques.

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1. Product description

Cat and dog furniture and homes provide pets with shelter, a place to rest and sleep, and create an own territory in the home. It includes products like cat and dog sofas, pillows, hooded baskets and benches.

Quality

Functionality

First and foremost, furniture for dogs and cats needs to be functional. It should provide the animal with a place to retreat and rest, a shelter that feels both safe and comfortable. All design features are in support of these primary needs.

In addition, pet furniture has increasingly acquired the status of a home accessory, meaning the decorative value of the items has increased. As a result, pet accessories now also have a firm aesthetic function on top of user (cat, dog and owner) friendliness.

Material

Materials can range from textile-based to natural fibres, such as rattan, and synthetics. Important issues are animal safety, the ability to be cleaned, durability, and weight, as well as look and feel.

Size

The furniture must be designed to 'fit' in terms of dimensions and ergonomics, and cater for animals of different

height and weight. Different size options (S, M, L) are therefore important. Dimensions vary, but a diameter of 45 cm fits average-size dogs, whilst cats need around 30 cm. Anything below or above that caters for alternative-sized pets.

Design

Depending on the use, popular shapes for dog or cat shelters are: sofa, hooded, pillow or kennel/bench types. Aesthetics are of growing importance, as they allow consumers to incorporate the pet furniture into the overall style of their home, consider trend colours, or even buy true craftsmanship.

Labelling

- Information on the outer packaging of pet furniture should correspond to the packing list sent to the importer.
- External packaging labels for pet furniture should include: producer, consignee, material, quantity, size, volume, country of origin, and caution signs.
- EAN or barcodes on the product label are common in Europe.
- Your buyer will specify what information they need on the product labels or on the item itself, such as logos or 'made in...' information. This is part of the order specifications.
- Use the English language for labelling, unless your buyer indicates otherwise.

Packaging

Importer specification

You should pack pet furniture according to the importer's instructions. They have their own specific requirements for the use of packaging materials, filling boxes, palletisation and stowing containers. Always ask for the importer's order specifications. These are part of the purchase order.

Damage prevention

Properly packaging pet furniture minimises the risk of damage by shocks. How an item is packaged for export depends on how easily it can be damaged. Packaging should make sure the items inside a cardboard box cannot damage each other. It should also prevent damage to the boxes when they are stacked inside the container. Some buyers prefer pet furniture to be crated, others accept wrapping in corrugated cardboard without an outer carton.

Dimensions and weight

Packaging must be of easy-to-handle dimensions and weight. Standards are often related to labour regulations at the point of destination, specified by the buyer. Boxes or crates are usually palletised for air or sea transport. You have to maximise pallet space.

Cost reduction

Pet furniture can take up much container space. Nesting, stacking or flat-packing them inside the container reduces costs. While packaging has to provide maximum protection, you must also avoid using excess materials or shipping 'air'. Waste removal is a cost to buyers.

Material

Importers are increasingly banning wooden crating and packaging due to their unsustainability and high material and disposal costs. Economical and sustainable packaging materials are more popular. Using biodegradable packaging materials can be a market opportunity. For some buyers, it can even be a demand.

Consumer packaging

Pet furniture often carries a manufacturer or retailer brand. This means your importer will have requirements as

to supplying tags or brand information, specified as part of the purchase order.

2. Which European markets offer opportunities for exporters of pet furniture?

There are no relevant trade or production data available for pet furniture. According to industry experts, the leading manufacturers of industrialised pet furniture are based in China, whilst distribution is through Western European importer-wholesalers. This is also where the bulk of the market is: the mature markets France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and Southern Europe.

Handmade pet products in natural materials originate from developing countries with a firm tradition in for example rattan (Indonesia), basketry (Vietnam, Bangladesh), or textiles (India). These supply to importer-wholesalers with broad offers of home decoration products that now also include pet accessories.

The European market for pet accessories was estimated at €7 billion in 2016, an increase of around 8% since 2014. Cats and dogs are the most popular pets in Europe. Approximately 80 million households own a pet, of which around 25% own at least one cat and 20% at least one dog. In total, there are around 72 million pet cats in Europe and 63 million pet dogs. France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland and Spain are home to the largest cat and dog populations.

Tips:

- Study your options in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, Italy, Poland and Spain.
- Compare your products and company to the competition from Vietnam, Indonesia, Bangladesh or India. You can use [ITC Trademap](#) to find exporters per country. You can compare on market segment, price, quality and target countries.

What is the effect of real private consumption expenditure on European demand?

- Private consumption expenditure is an important indicator for the European home decoration market. The sector is closely linked to economic conditions. When money is tight, consumers postpone buying non-essential items until they have enough disposable income.
- Between 2017 and 2019, European private consumption expenditure is expected to increase. This means that consumption of decorative products is likely to rise. Especially in emerging markets, consumers will have more money available to spend on decorating the home. Consumers in mature markets already spend a fair amount of money on decoration, so growth in their consumption will be moderate.

3. What trends offer opportunities on the European market for pet furniture?

Embrace your pets

Pets are a trend in Europe. The character of households is diversifying away from the traditional family unit to include one-person units. [Around a third of Europe's 220 million households are single-person households](#), making this the fastest growing type of household since 2006. For them, pets can be welcome companions and a way to connect with the neighbourhood. Families often keep pets to teach children a sense of responsibility and to keep fit (by walking the dog).

Pets play a significant role in Europeans' social lives across the demographic segmentations. This is fuelling the demand for pet furniture. For particular (high-end) groups in society, for example, pets are status symbols. The

choice of breed (preferably rare) as well as grooming and 'dressing it up' are good ways of distinguishing oneself from the crowd. Expensive materials, 'bling' finishes, limited-edition positioning and branding may appeal to these consumers.

You can position your pet furniture on the market by using the following criteria (or combinations thereof):

- User group: families require different accessories than the elderly
- Value: single consumers have less disposable income to spend on pets than rich consumers
- Product group: such as a focus on pets' sleeping gear or on complete offers for the pet
- Type of pets
- Indoor/outdoor use (incl. camping)

Tips:

- If you are a specialist in one or a limited number of materials and techniques, you can add lines of pets accessories to your main offer. For example, a specialist in rattan furniture could add a line of rattan pet homes.
- Consider collaborating with other manufacturers to be able to offer a broader range of pet accessories.
- Study the market for pets to understand the changing trends in keeping, feeding and socialising with them, for example through magazines or trade fair visits. This will help you anticipate changing needs in pet furniture.

The Beauty... and the Beast

Dogs and cats have increased their status from guarding the house to being real companions. Accessories for these pets have therefore also made a promotion and are now given prominent places around the house. They have transformed from mere functional feeding or grooming tools into accessories that match the overall decorating style of the home. This is particularly true for pet furniture.

Tip:

- Follow trends in home decoration, especially in the mid market, and apply them to your pet furniture. As pet furniture now holds a more prominent place in the home, it has to respond to the current decorative styles and trends in home decoration.

The natural home

European consumers need to feel close to nature and have a growing appreciation of natural materials in the home. In line with this, pet accessories are increasingly available in woven natural fibres, wood, textiles and so on. Natural fibres are much appreciated, both in basket types of pet furniture and textile-based options. This is not only better for the pet owner, but also for the valued companion itself.

Tips:

- Use natural materials to differentiate from the industrialised synthetic offers that dominate the lower and lower-middle end of the market.
- Avoid coating and sealing, combine materials and keep the look bright and light.

Handmade pet furniture

Pet items are still mainly industrialised, with lots of mass-produced items made of synthetic materials. However, hand-produced and more craft-oriented pet accessories are on the rise. As pets are increasingly considered 'one of us', they deserve better. Also, because pet furniture is more visible in the home, it needs to be brought in line with the look and feel of the home. This often means good levels of craftsmanship. Handmade adds a personal touch, authenticity and differentiation.

Buyers in this relatively more niche handmade segment need to rely on proactive suppliers, especially in logistics and design. They look for producers they can cooperate with to develop their own products, so-called 'co-creation'. This makes it extra important to showcase your special skills, production techniques and the variety of raw materials you work with.

Tips:

- Promote your core strengths in techniques, materials and processes to make your distribution partner understand what his options are.
- Be proactive in development for your main buyers. Get to know them and their position on the market, price levels and communication needs, then develop concepts proactively, targeted at your buyer's main segments.

Space and time solutions for smaller urban spaces

Many European consumers live in relatively small urban spaces. They are looking for products that can help declutter their home and generally save space and time. However, pets require both time and space, and so do their accessories. As such, pet accessories form an interesting countertrend to this need for time and space savers. Nevertheless, clever designs are welcome.

Tips:

- Offer various size options in your pet furniture. Make it collapsible, multipurpose, nesting, etc. to make it appropriate for smaller spaces too.
- Make your pet furniture durable and easy to clean.

Sustainability

There is a growing group of conscious consumers in Europe. In pet accessories, this has not been a very visible positioning so far. As pet accessories become more of a focus in home decoration, values related to environmental and social responsibility are expected to cross over to this category too.

Sustainability can be achieved through e.g. the use of renewable materials, as well as cleaner and fair trade production processes. Another interesting option is to develop concepts that can be reused or recycled.

Tips:

- Use sustainable materials and production processes and consider developing sustainable concepts.
- Communicate your sustainable values to boost your marketing.
- For more information, see our special study on [sustainability](#).

Smaller quantities and shorter lead times

European buyers change their collection at an increasing pace. As a result, they are looking for shorter lead times and smaller minimum orders. This is a distinct advantage for small to medium-sized producers like you, since you are more flexible and can generally supply smaller quantities than bigger producers.

Tip:

- If you are flexible in production and can supply smaller quantities, emphasise this in your promotion.

For more information, see our study about [trends for Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#).

4. What requirements should pet furniture comply with to be allowed on the European market?

What legal and non-legal requirements must your product comply with?

General product safety

The European Union's [General Product Safety Directive](#) applies to all consumer products, including pet furniture. It states that all products marketed in Europe must be safe to use.

Tips:

- Read more about the [General Product Safety Directive](#).
- Also use your common sense to ensure normal use of your product does not cause any danger.
- The [RAPEX database](#) lists products that the European Union has rejected at the border, or withdrawn from the market. Check the database for similar products for an idea of what issues may arise.

Packaging legislation

Europe has specific [packaging and packaging waste legislation](#). Among other things, it restricts the use of certain heavy metals. Europe also has [requirements for wood packaging materials](#) (WPM) used for transport, such as packing cases, boxes, crates, drums, (box) pallets and dunnage.

Tip:

- Read more in the [overview of EU rules on wood packaging material](#).

Restricted chemicals: REACH

The [REACH](#) regulation lists restricted chemicals in products that are marketed in Europe. For example, REACH restricts the use of the use of azodyes and certain flame retardants in textile products, as well as arsenic and creosotes as wood preservatives.

Tip:

- The European Chemical Agency provides useful information and tips on REACH. See for instance [REACH Annex XVII](#) for a list of all restricted chemicals. Also check out the [information on REACH for companies established outside Europe](#) and the [Questions & Answers on REACH](#).

Textile Regulation

According to the European Union's [Textile Regulation](#), textile products should be labelled or marked to indicate their fibre composition. These labels should be durable and tear-resistant, securely attached, easily legible, visible and accessible.

Tip:

- For more information, see the [Frequently Asked Questions about the Textile Regulation](#).

Wildlife Trade Regulations and the Timber Regulation

The [Wildlife Trade Regulations](#) restrict the international trade in specimens of wild animals, plants and derived wildlife products. This is the European Union's strict implementation of the [Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species](#) (CITES). According to the [Timber Regulation](#), you must prove any timber used was harvested legally. This also applies to wooden pet furniture. Products with a [FLEGT](#) or [CITES](#) license comply with the Timber Regulation.

Tips:

- For more information, see the [Reference Guide to the Wildlife Trade Regulations](#) and the [Frequently Asked Questions about the Timber Regulation](#).
- For more information on CITES permits, you can contact your [National CITES Management Authority](#).
- For more information about [FLEGT licensing](#), see the [FLEGT licence information point](#).

What additional requirements do buyers often have?

Sustainability

Social and environmental sustainability make your products stand out on the European market. Think of sustainable raw materials and production processes. European buyers increasingly demand the following certification schemes:

- [Business Social Compliance Initiative \(BSCI\)](#): European retailers developed this initiative to improve social conditions in sourcing countries. They expect their suppliers to comply with the BSCI Code of Conduct. To prove compliance, the importer can request an audit of your production process. Once a company has been audited, it is included in a database for all BSCI participants.
- [Ethical Trading Initiative \(ETI\)](#): This initiative is an alliance of companies, trade unions and voluntary organisations. It aims to improve the working lives of people across the globe that make or grow consumer goods.

You can use standards such as [ISO 14001](#) and [SA 8000](#) to read up on sustainable options. However, only niche market buyers demand compliance with such standards.

Tips:

- Optimise your sustainability performance. Reading up on the issues included in the initiatives will give you an idea of what to focus on.
- Buyers appreciate a good story. If you can show that you value your company's environmental and/or social performance, this may be a competitive advantage. You can do this, for instance, with a self-assessment like the [BSCI Self-Assessment for Producers](#), or a code of conduct such as the [BSCI Code of Conduct](#) and the [ETI base code](#).
- For more information, see our special study on [sustainability in the home sector](#).

What are the requirements for niche markets?

Fair trade

The concept of fair trade supports fair pricing and improved social conditions for producers and their communities. Especially when the production of your pet furniture is labour-intensive, fair trade certification can give you a competitive advantage.

Common fair trade certifications are from:

- [World Fair Trade Organisation \(WFTO\)](#)
- [Fairtrade International](#)
- [Fair For Life](#)

Tips:

- Ask buyers what they are looking for. Especially in the fair trade sector, you can use the story behind your product for marketing purposes.
- Check the [ITC Standards Map database](#) for more information on voluntary standards and their requirements, including fair production.

Sustainable textile certification

Across the home sector, sustainability is gaining ground. Although the actual use of certification is still not widespread in home textiles, there is an increasing interest from buyers.

The [Global Organic Textile Standard \(GOTS\)](#) ensures environmental and social responsibility throughout the production chain. To qualify, textile products must contain >70% organic fibres.

[OEKO-TEX](#) Standard 100 certification guarantees no hazardous chemicals were used during production.

The [EU Ecolabel](#) for textiles focuses on minimising environmental impact at the manufacturing stage.

Tips:

- Read more on [GOTS](#), [OEKO-TEX](#) and the [EU Ecolabel](#) in the ITC Standards Map.
- Determine which certification programme would be the best fit for you and apply if possible.

Woolmark

Woolmark certification provides consumers with guaranteed wool fibre content and an assurance of quality. It contains specific standards for several product groups, including wool-filled or layered bedding products.

Tip:

- Study [how to become a Woolmark licensee](#) and the Woolmark specifications for [wool-filled or layered bedding products](#).

FSC certification

FSC (Forest Stewardship Council) certification is the most common label for sustainable wooden products, including wooden pet furniture. The FSC label guarantees that a product's source material comes from responsibly managed forests. These products are especially popular on Western European markets.

Tip:

- For more information, see the [three steps towards FSC certification](#).

For more information, see our study about [buyer requirements for Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#).

5. What competition do you face on the European pet furniture market?

The competition for pet furniture does not differ significantly from the sector in general. Refer to our [10 tips for doing business with European buyers](#).

6. Through what channels can you put pet furniture on the European market?

The market channels and segments for pet furniture do not differ significantly from the sector in general.

Market channels

Importers of pet furniture can be wholesalers and retailers. For the handmade segment, typical distribution channels are lifestyle distributors, furniture specialists and garden centres. These importers may be buying for their own shops (chain stores, buying combinations) or distribute to a network of resellers that are part of their customer base (wholesalers). Some of these resellers may be specialists in pets, pet food and accessories.

E-commerce

E-commerce in home decoration is increasing and can help you reach a broader range of customers. Retailers often combine online and offline channels. Consumers research and purchase products online, shopping around and comparing prices on home decoration items. To supply e-commerce you must be able to work with individual packing and labelling, as well as limited minimum orders.

Tips:

- See our special study about [e-commerce in Home Decoration & Home Textiles](#) for more information.
- Target online business-to-consumer retailers if you can meet the additional requirements.

Trade fairs

These trade fairs are useful sources for finding trading partners in Europe.

- [Ambiente](#), Frankfurt, February
- [IMM](#), Cologne, January
- [Interzoo](#), Nuremberg, May
- [Maison et Objet](#), Paris, January and September
- [Tendance](#), Frankfurt, June
- [Zoomark International](#), Bologna, May

Market segments

The dominant segment in pet furniture is the low-end, functional segment. Here, pets' shelters are purely functional and lack much aesthetic appeal. This segment is dominated by industrial production and mass volume, mainly supplied by Chinese manufactures.

Handmade pet furniture offers you the best opportunities, in the mid-mid and mid-high segment. This segment is still small, but is expected to grow as pet furniture moves into the category of home accessories within the dominant 'lifestyle' segment in home decoration.

The lifestyle segment provides complete, coherent offers, usually in a particular style or 'atmosphere' (Scandinavian, colonial, romantic, country style, etc.). Players in this segment typically offer a cross-category collection, spanning all major categories in Home Decoration and Home Textiles. Due to the increasingly decorative value of pet furniture, more lifestyle buyers will include pet goods in their offers.

Adding design and decorative value to your pet furniture by using innovative materials and techniques is key. Knowledge of interior trends is also a 'plus'.

7. What are the end-market prices for pet furniture?

Prices of pet furniture depend on their functional and/or decorative value and the degree of innovativeness. Now that pet furniture is moving away from purely functional to more emotional segments, and from low and mass to mid-mid and mid-high, consumer prices have become more elastic.

Table 2 gives an overview of the indicative prices in the low, middle and high market segments.

Table 2: Indicative consumer prices of pet furniture

	Low-end	Mid-end	High-end
Pet furniture	Up to €50	€50-€100	€100 onwards

Consumer prices depend on the value perception by the consumer in a particular segment. This is influenced by your marketing mix: product benefits, promotion (brand or not, communication of product benefits), points of sale (reseller positioning), and a matching price.

Shipping, import and handling add 25% to the price of your pet furniture. Wholesalers account for a further


100% mark-up. Finally, retailers may add another 100-150% to the price.

Tips:


- The value perception of your product in the chosen segment determines its price. The quality and price of your pet furniture must match what is expected in your chosen target segment. To determine your price, study consumer prices in your target segment and adjust your price accordingly.
- Understand your segment. Offer a correct marketing mix to meet consumer expectations. Adapt your business model to your position on the market.

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