

BUSINESSFOCUS

Carpet company's focus floors competition

Quality meets global standards for Shandong firm, JV drives business

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In a carpet mill in Weihai, Shandong province, looms and other machines are working long hours to fill a lengthy list of orders, rolling out 4-meter-wide Axminster carpet in a variety of colors and patterns.

The mill is owned by Haima Group, which has 26 production lines manufacturing Axminster carpet, a 250-year-old British brand that calls itself the nation's "oldest, best known and most prestigious carpet designer and manufacturer".

Haima produced 3.61 million square meters of carpet in the past year, making it a top global Axminster carpet manufacturer.

Haima was recognized as a single-product champion in manufacturing by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology last year for its core competitiveness in producing carpet and its leading share in global markets.

Carpet produced by the company has been sold in more than 80 countries and regions, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Japan and South Korea. The company's carpet export volume in 2022 registered a year-on-year increase of 25 percent, according to the company.

Since the end of this year's Spring Festival holiday in January, the company said it has been working strenuously to meet rising demand for carpets, including upscale Axminster products for restaurants and hotels, polyethylene carpet squares mainly used in office buildings and carpet for cars.

Single-minded target

Liu Jianwei, chairman of Haima Group, said the company has been able to develop into a world-leading producer of carpet by remaining focused on one thing and striving to make that perfect. Since its start in 1958, the company has worked to develop only one product — carpet.

"During the past 65 years, we have stuck to strict principles on products we put on the market," he said.

"We won't manufacture products that don't amaze us or has quality that isn't superior to others in the market," he added.

Couristan, a US-based rug and carpet supplier founded 97 years ago that prides itself on its commitment to excellence, has entered into an agreement with Haima that will give the group's high-end carpet an even larger global share.



A worker checks a yarn production line in a factory of Haima Group in Weihai, Shandong province on March 9. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



An employee works on carpets for export in a workshop of Longfu Recycling Energy Sciencetech Co Ltd in Binzhou, Shandong province, on July 12, 2020. CHU BAORUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

"Couristan was looking around the world for partners that can produce quality carpet and rugs. The company conducted research in many countries and decided to work with us after learning about our techniques, equipment and development orientation," Liu said.

In 2005, the two companies formed Couristan China, a joint venture that has built one of the largest woven carpet and rug manufacturing facilities in the world.

"It was also in 2005 that we decided to develop and manufacture Axminster's high-end carpet to expand our global market," Liu said.

Before producing Axminster carpet, Haima sent groups of technicians to the US and Europe to learn advanced production techniques.

Wang Zhaoqi, former chairman of Haima, encouraged technicians to polish the production process repeatedly until they could produce carpet that met the world's top standards, the company said.

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Liu Jianwei, chairman of Haima Group

"We have strict requirements in producing quality carpet in order to make our products durable, soft, quiet underfoot, good for insulation and free of any undesirable odors," Liu said.

"We select wool from around the world to ensure materials are the best," he said, adding that the wool used for Axminster carpet is imported.

It cost the company tens of millions of yuan worth of carpet before rolling out products that

met top international standards, he said.

"As long as the carpet had one aspect that couldn't meet international standards, we would scrap them and try again," Liu said.

A year later, Axminster carpet bearing the logo of Haima were sold in the US through the joint venture.

The total sales of Axminster carpet produced by Haima reached 2.6 million square meters in 2012, setting a world record, according to the Chinese Carpet Industry Association.

As it grew, Haima at one point considered whether to invest in other sectors, Liu recalled.

The company registered for a license to develop real estate in 2008. After getting the license, Wang, the former chairman, convened a board meeting.

"What is the goal of Haima Carpet?" Wang asked the board members at the meeting. The board members answered in unanimity that their goal is to be number one in the carpet sector.

Wang then asked what the goal was for Haima to develop real estate and board members fell silent. "If we don't have a goal, how can we succeed?" he said.

Since then, the company has continued to put all its efforts into developing its carpet business.

"We have been number one in Axminster carpet production and

sales for 10 years in a row," Liu said. "In domestic markets, our carpet is being used by 75 percent of five-star restaurants and hotels."

Innovative fervor

Haima has also been working with scientific research institutes and universities to develop more environmentally friendly carpet, officials said.

The company said it has spent over 70 million yuan (\$10.17 million) on research and development in the past three years, completing 360 innovations in its manufacturing technique that have made its carpet more comfortable and environmentally friendly.

Carpet squares made with polyethylene, also called PE — a material widely used in products including clear food wrap, bottles and shopping bags — is one of the new products the company has been producing in recent years.

The PE carpet squares, mainly used in office buildings, had been manufactured primarily in the US before Haima succeeded in developing its own production techniques after more than 500 experiments, Liu said.

"Domestic demand for PE carpet squares couldn't be fulfilled due to COVID-19, which affected transportation, so we started to study and develop the PE carpet in 2020," he said.

By working with universities and scientific research centers including Dalian University of Technology for nearly two years, the company finally mastered techniques for manufacturing PE carpet squares.

After conducting 400 experiments, the company was able to produce PE carpet squares up to international standards, Liu said, but the company wanted its products to be better, so it continued to upgrade its carpet to make it more comfortable.

"We worked to find a perfect point at which the carpet is not too hard nor too soft," he said.

Production started on the PE carpet squares in June 2022. Since then, the products have been used in several big buildings, Liu said.

"The PE carpet has no irritating odors and it can be recycled, making the product popular in the market," he said.

The company has been using automatic and smart production facilities to increase efficiency. Only two people are needed to operate a production line for Axminster carpet. The automatic machines have also saved yarn, Liu said.

Du Pingji, deputy general manager of Haima, expects greater demand for carpet with the economic recovery from the pandemic, especially with the robust recovery of tourism.

"Orders from home and abroad have risen during the past month," Du said.



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