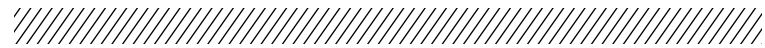


# 46. BMA Ergonomics



An ergonomic  
office chair that  
is good for the  
environment

recentre



Hannelore Schotsaert © Rien Geypen

BMA Ergonomics started life in 1988 as a biomechanical consultancy. The consultants criss-crossed the Netherlands analysing workplaces and providing ergonomic advice. “BMA Ergonomics came to the conclusion that there were very few ergonomic chairs on the market that could prevent back and neck complaints”, says Hannelore Schotsaert, marketing and communication manager of the Belgian division of BMA. In 1991, work started on the development of a chair to fit the bill, which was launched on the market in 1998. In 1999, besides the Dutch-based parent company in Zwolle, the Belgian branch was opened. In addition, BMA Ergonomics also has a subsidiary in Germany, the UK and Ireland.

The founders of BMA Ergonomics did not just want to launch an ergonomically chair on the market, but wanted to develop it with minimum environmental impact. The company aims to work with recyclable materials produced from recycled material. Since BMA is an assembly company that works with external partners for the production of custom components, this is often an onerous task. “We devote a great deal of attention to choosing the partners that we work with”, says Hannelore Schotsaert. “The vision of those companies must fit into our own vision. The Development department is always on the lookout for better and more environment-friendly ways of developing the office chair.”

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The Axia® office chair by BMA Ergonomics is unique in terms of ergonomics and biomechanics as well as design. “Years of research have shown that adequate support for the lower back and neck is essential. We achieve this by using 4D elbow rests which ensure that the arms always remain beside the body. In addition, the Axia® chair has a



AXA Profit © BMA Ergonomics

special movement mechanism. Moreover, we use a patented forward tilting technique for the seat, which means that dynamic users keep both feet in constant contact with the ground.

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The way BMA sees it, looking after the body is a form of sustainability. “An employee who has no neck or back complaints is satisfied, and the chair is likely to be kept for longer.” If the chair ever becomes surplus to requirements, BMA Ergonomics would like to take the chair back as it is 98% recyclable. “We are firm believers in the cradle-to-cradle theory and in recent years, we have been thinking really hard about the possibilities for recycling the office chairs. So we decided it would be a good idea to set up a collection service.”

BMA Ergonomics also aims to be sustainable in its choice of materials. It negotiates agreements with partners who manufacture custom components. After years of development and environmental research, the chairs are currently made of at least 67% of recycled material. “Our target for mid-2012 is to produce our Axia® from a minimum of 75% of recycled material. Together with one of its partners, BMA Ergonomics has developed a 100% recycled polypropylene which is used for various components of the chair, such as the star base, back shells and the armrests. That means that we cut our CO2 emissions by fifty per cent, but each chair produced also generates a financial saving of three euro. That cost saving is explained by the use of recycled polypropylene and the optimisation of the production process.”

According to Hannelore, it is not always easy to be as sustainable as the company would like. “Where we are still

having difficulties at the moment is the upholstery of the seat and back support, and the foam that fills it. We are looking very hard for environment-friendly applications and are testing other materials ourselves. So, for example, we are examining materials made from PET bottles or stinging nettles. It is also important that the fabric should be long-lasting. Currently we work mainly with materials made from wool and synthetic material. Due to the use of the blend, the fabric is up to four times as durable as a 100% wool fabric. When the chairs are recycled, the fabrics go to the rag trade and are turned into dusters. The foam is currently made into balls.”

BMA Ergonomics is advised by Beco, an international consultancy advocating return on sustainability. In addition, its Dutch subsidiary has an environmental knowledge centre. The environmental impact of the product is determined at this centre. “A lot of attention goes into design for assembly, design for disassembly and eco-design. We collaborate with designers to come up with a timeless design for the chairs. But by working with Beco, the production process is also put under the microscope. We try to save energy and curb our CO2 emissions. We use ‘green’ trucks, and load them in such a way that no half-empty trucks hit the road. Our workforce receives the training required to work in an environmentally-sound way. Furthermore, the company makes use of videoconferencing to reduce the need for travel to other sites.”

BMA Ergonomics has made enormous efforts to comply with standards. Every product that leaves the plant is checked and meets EN, NEN, BS and DIN standards. In addition, the company has ISO 9001 and 14001 certification. “We are also proud that we have won a number of awards, such as the Good Industrial Design Award. In addition, we earned the FIRA Ergonomics Excellence Award as well as receiving the FX, innovation in design, Award.” Yet sustainability is not a selling argument. “Companies are not focused on it enough. There are some that share our vision and therefore opt for us. And there are companies that choose us for our service. For small companies,

money is more likely to be the decisive factor. Our chair is more expensive than an office chair from a giant furniture supplier.

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But our chair lasts so many years longer, which means that ultimately, it is not more expensive. Moreover, at the end of the chair's life cycle, we pick it up and the company gets a discount on the purchase of a new Axia® chair. What is needed the most is a change in mentality. Doing business sustainably needs to become a habit. Our new service also fits into our vision. We are recording hours of sitting and we aim to hire out the office chairs. That way, we are sure to get the chair back and can recycle it."

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Kizzy Van Horne for REcentre

Interviewee /

Hannelore Schotsaert, Marketing & Communication Manager  
at BMA Ergonomics Belgium

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Sector • office items

Year of foundation • 1988

Number of employees • 100

Turnover (2010) •  
19 million EUR

