

## UK MANUFACTURERS MISSING OUT!

**W**ELCOMING British visitors at Domotex this year, the Belgian carpet firms exhibiting must have felt somewhat daunted. The plunge in value of the pound against the Euro had forced them to raise prices on some of their products destined for the UK.

Since Britain accounts for up to a third of turnover for the major Belgian carpet producers, they are understandably deeply worried. In common with manufacturers world-wide, they are also being burdened by higher costs for energy, raw materials and transport. But their determined response is to increase efficiencies even further.

British carpet manufacturers, on the other hand, may be smugly smiling at the plight of the Belgians, but are they actually doing anything to turn it to their advantage? The currency situation has created an open door for quality British carpets into mainland Europe. So you might expect to see loads of UK companies prominent at Domotex, proudly promoting their products. Not bloody likely!

There were, in fact, fewer UK exhibitors this year with most big name British carpet producers conspicuously absent. Apparently, they much prefer sitting back and grumbling that three out of four carpets sold in Britain are made overseas, mostly in Belgium. This attitude of surrender contrasts with the approach of the Belgians, who are vigorously targeting buyers in this country with improved service and exclusive patterns designed for the British market (see page 7).

Despite the global economic downturn, Domotex was –

perhaps surprisingly – bigger than ever this year, breaking records for attendance (47,000 visitors from over 100 countries) and exhibitor numbers (nearly 1,500). Every year around 2,000 people from the UK travel to Germany to visit Domotex, but only a handful go to exhibit.

‘Where are the British?’ I was asked on several occasions. The Chinese as expected had a high profile presence. Even the Americans fielded a pavilion emblazoned with the Stars and Stripes with modestly sized ‘booths’ hosting a score of US flooring firms. But where were the Union Jacks?

Is Domotex not right for British manufacturers? Burmatex and Ryalux think it definitely is (see page 8) and for the CFA this year, it was a great success (see page 12).

For many British companies there is simply no excuse not to export. UK Trade & Investment, the government backed agency, offers a comprehensive range of advice and help, including grants for setting up in foreign countries and exhibiting abroad ([www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk](http://www.uktradeinvest.gov.uk)). The fact that so few UK flooring firms appear keen to exploit any of these potentially highly lucrative opportunities is sad, very sad!



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