

PERSONAL JOURNAL.

Making Adjustable Beds Less Stodgy to Shoppers

Remote-Controlled Bases Tailored for TV, Reading, iPods—Even Stretching

BY ANJALI ATHAVALEY

Adjustable beds, or those that can be elevated at the foot or head via remote control, are fixtures in hospitals. Now mattress makers want to sell them as luxury beds to a younger population, with features like massage therapy and iPad docks. Some marketers are de-emphasizing the term “adjustable”—which they say brings to mind a hospital bed—and instead calling their products “ergo” or “power” beds.

Sealy Corp., Tempur-Pedic International Inc. and Select Comfort Corp., the maker of the Sleep Number adjustable bed, say demand is growing for “lifestyle” beds, which are beds tailored to activities beyond sleeping. Sealy, which launched the new Embody line with an adjustable base option in May, says it went into the homes of 40 consumers last year and asked them

Bedding makers face a challenge in expanding the market: How do you make what many customers view as a hospital bed hip?

to list what they do in their beds.

“Consumers in general are doing a lot more in bed than sleeping,” says Jodi Allen, chief marketing officer at Sealy, based in Trinity, N.C. “Lots of people are reading in bed, watching TV in bed or even just snuggling with their kids or spouse.”

The trend is spurring innovation in bed design. Hollandia International, for instance, is coming out with a new adjustable base that the company says helps folks stretch in the morning. Hollandia, an Israeli company that sells luxury mattresses in the U.S. and 16 other countries, has released a new Trio bed, which the company calls a “yoga” bed. It can be adjusted to make the head and feet lower

than the back, to “arch and stretch” the body. Priced at \$27,000 for a queen-size mattress and adjustable base, the bed comes in 600 different fabrics.

When designing the bed, Hollandia says it talked to an employee who is a yoga teacher and his students about what kind of bed they’d find useful. “So many people are waking up from bed and stretching,” says Hollandia chief executive and president Avi Barssessat. “Here you do it while you are in the bed. It’s wonderful.”

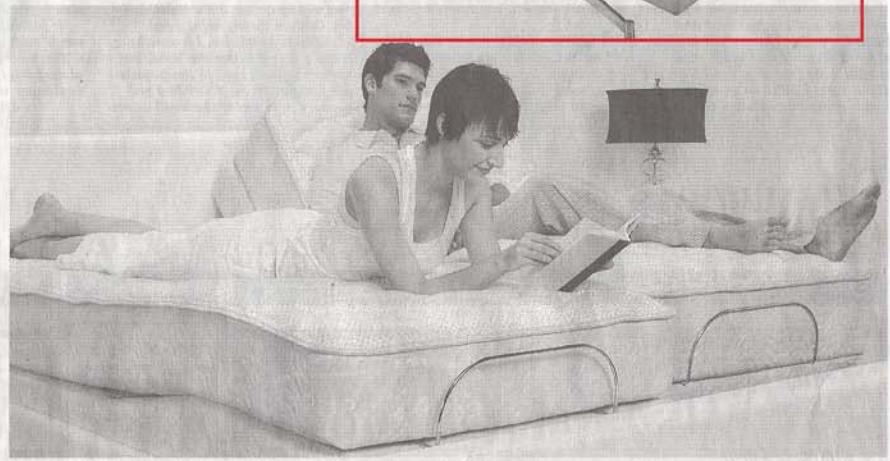
Adjustable bases, located underneath the mattress, move the bed into different positions via remote control (the mattress conforms to the contour). The base is generally offered as an alternative to a basic box spring when consumers are buying mattresses.

Not all mattresses are compatible with adjustable bases, and buying one can add hundreds to the price of a bedding system at retail. For instance, Sealy’s Bronze adjustable base—which offers head elevation—is priced at \$999; the Titanium version, with a vibrating massage and “snore feature”—which allows people to raise their partners’ elevation so that the noise will stop—is priced at \$1,599. Neither includes the mattress.

But some consumers say the price has been worth it. “I think the thing that attracted me was that I read in bed, so I’m constantly stuffing pillows behind me,” says Karen Lansing, 54, of Dellwood, Minn. Ms. Lansing bought a Select Comfort FlexFit bed with an adjustable base last summer. Along with the base, she purchased a Sleep Number mattress, which allows consumers to customize their own level of support and firmness by choosing a number between zero and 100.

“There’s something about sitting in a bed that’s propped, as opposed to propping yourself with pillows,” she says.

The market for adjustable bases is small: Leggett & Platt Inc., a Carthage, Mo., manufac-



From top, the Hollandia Trio bed base has a modern look with curved steel legs. Center, Leggett & Platt calls its line of adjustable beds ‘power foundations.’ Below left, Aminach makes a bed with an iPod dock built into the headboard. Below right, another Aminach model has six motors to fine-tune the position.



turer, that says it has 62% of the adjustable-base market, estimates that adjustables make up just 2% of the overall market for mattress foundations.

But the category is growing. Tempur-Pedic, for instance, says that in its third quarter ended Sept. 30, it posted a 40% increase in unit sales of its Ergo adjustable-bed bases. Leggett &

Platt says sales of adjustable bases are up 2% this year.

And retailers say they are putting more models on their floors. Sleepy’s has added a new adjustable model each year since 2008, bringing its total to five.

Still, those in the bedding business say they face a challenge in expanding the market: How do you make what many

customers view as a hospital bed hip? Leggett & Platt this year is trying a new strategy: changing the name of the product. The company says its research shows that the term “adjustable base” wasn’t resonating with a younger audience.

“The association with health care was just way too strong for us to overcome,” says Herman

Tam, vice president of sales and marketing for Leggett’s consumer product group.

Six months ago, the company started using a name it says consumers find more appealing: power foundations.

“Changing the brand name doesn’t matter,” Mr. Tam says. “You have to rethink the category.”



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Leggett & Platt

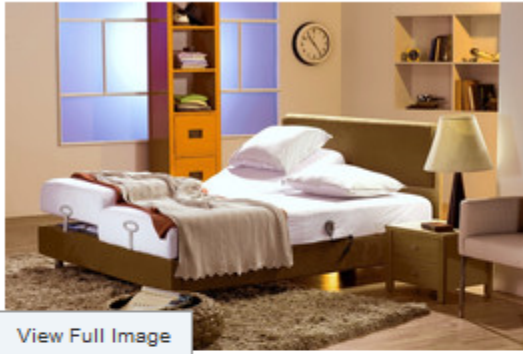
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Write to Anjali Athavaley at anjali.athavaley@wsj.com