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Gardening & Home Improvement



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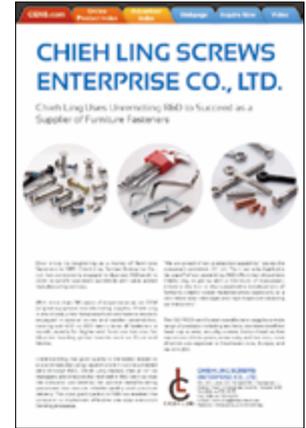
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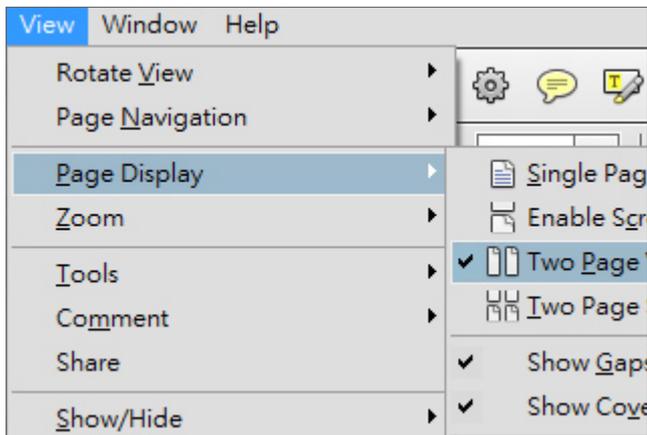
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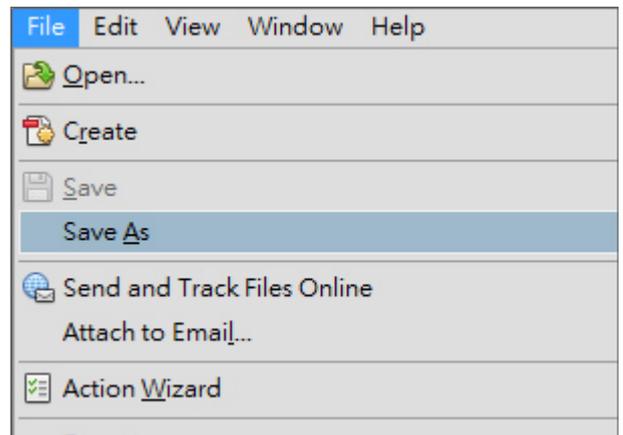
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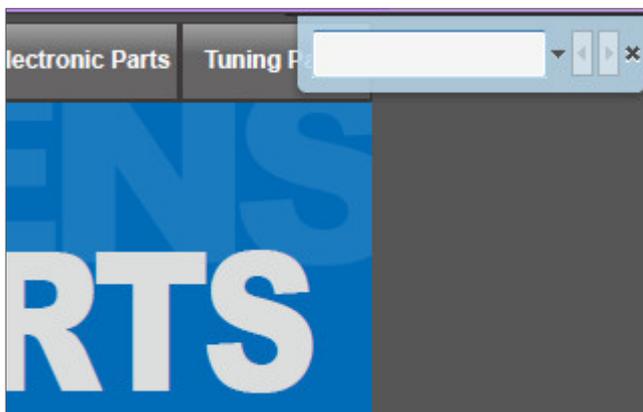
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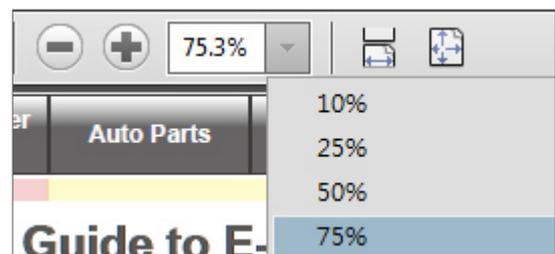
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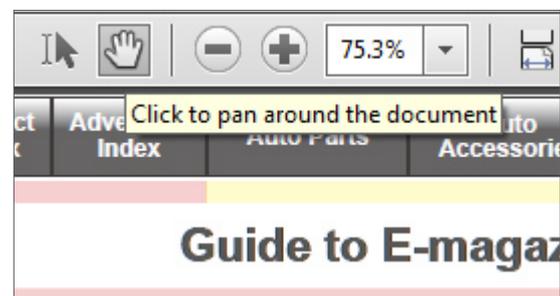


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Taiwan Garden Tool Makers Sharpen Edge for High-end Market

Less export stateside but more to Europe and emerging nations

By STEVE CHUANG

Known as the "Kingdom of Hand Tools," Taiwan has long been the world's major supplier of general hand tools, and now some makers on the island are taking aim at the high-end market.

With the help of industry and government-backed institutions, such as the Metal Industrial Research & Development Center and Taiwan Regional Hand Tools Association, Taiwanese hand tool makers have been upgrading to high-end and higher value-added products with ergonomic, compact, and multifunctional designs. Branding is another trend that is helping local producers separate their products from the pack.

Shifting to the High-end

One Taiwanese hand tool maker that is moving up market is Ho Cheng Garden Tools Co., Ltd. Founded in 1971 in Changhua County, central Taiwan, the company has specialized

in manufacturing garden tools for more than 30 years.

Ho Cheng began with producing shears mainly on an original equipment manufacturing (OEM) basis, and it has prospered over the years by turning out low-end products at competitive prices. In today's changed competitive landscape, however, the company realizes that price alone is no longer a surefire strategy for success.

Seeing the writing on the wall, Ho Cheng has been phasing out its low-end product lines and stepping up development of advanced manufacturing technologies to sharpen its competitive edge. The company has upgraded its product lines into high-end, value-added garden tools, according to Eric Huang, manger of the company.

Today the company sells a broad line of

garden tools, including hedge shears, lopping shears, by-pass pruners, by-pass lopping shears, anvils, trowels, prong cultivators, transplanters, tree pruners, rakes, hoses, and other tool kits for gardening. Over 90% of its output is exported.

A common theme across all of the company's product lines is compact size, innovative functions and effort-saving, ergonomic designs. "We do everything in house from developing, designing, and modeling to manufacturing and final processing. That way we can ensure the quality of each new product," Huang says. "Our goal is to add value to our products by turning out premium, high-end, and easy to use items."

"Our products highlight classic designs and professional functions instead of low price. It's like the difference between a Mercedes Benz and a Nissan car," Huang says. "Quality is everything. So we insist on using the best materials. We also are constantly adding new functions and design concepts. Our highly skilled and experienced workers are another competitive edge."

By focusing on the high-end market, the company has been able to tap into demanding markets such as the U.K., the U.S., France, Japan, and Germany. It is also making inroads into emerging markets, such as Russia and Poland.

Ho Cheng has patented its garden tools in the U.S. and Europe. Its products have also won national quality awards for innovative design.

Designing and Branding

Founded in 1980, G-Pro Co., Ltd. is another notable garden tools maker, who is focused on making high-end products, with a specialization in spray guns and nozzles.

About five years ago, G-Pro began making spray guns for washing cars. The company's Tornado-branded TV spray gun series was the hottest product at the time, and has helped

the company to build a name in Japan, the U.S. and Europe.

The company's spray gun has a streamlined design and high performance functions. It was dreamed up from scratch by Gordon Chih, owner of G-Pro. "I usually come up with a new shape or a product in my mind, and then I draw it, model it, and then refine the design over and over," he says. "When everything works well, the new product is set for mass production."

"I prefer to design a new product step by step, rather than reverse engineer something, so that I can work out any problems as soon as possible," Chih adds.

The company also recently resumed production of garden tools, with one or two new products joining the line each year. Chih says that G-Pro works out the best combination between design and functions. "We don't try to compete on low price. Our garden tools are high-end and innovative."

Chih is extremely proud of the company's newly developed garden tool, Dual Channel Multi-Pattern Nozzle, a compact and stylish unit with high performance capabilities. The nozzle can spray water through two channels at the same time with different spraying patterns. The design reduces watering time and the amount of water used. The nozzle also has a reinforced structure that has twice the pressure limit of competing products.

Chih says that his company has learned from past experience with copycats and is now careful to patent-protect its innovative products. "We have lost a lot of money to copycats, especially on our Tornado spray guns," Chih recalls with a shrug. Today the company spends heavily on patenting its product designs and functions. Patenting also adds value to products, Chih says. "We print the patent numbers on the packaging to prevent piracy," he says.

The company is also building its G-Pro and Gordon brand product lines. "Branding is tough for Taiwanese garden tool makers because of their limited resources," Chih observes. "So we encourage importers to sell our products under the G-Pro brand by exempting them from additional fees. For small batch orders we always require that the products are sold under the G-Pro brand."

Technical Applications

Lilun Plastics Enterprise Co., Ltd. also sees the future in high-end products. The company specializes in sprinklers and related components, based on eight years of experience in manufacturing bathroom hardware and fittings.

Lilun says it has fully integrated in-house production processes, from designing and modeling to manufacturing, to handle both OEM and ODM production. The company is also applying specific technologies from its bathroom hardware line to improve conventional garden tools, says company owner Yu Ching-chih.

The company recently introduced an advanced sprinkler timer with a water regulator, a garden irrigation timer and a humidity sensor. The high-end timer has an adjustable operating time and eight different spraying patterns. It can operate for up to two years on a single 9V battery.

The timer has a reinforced waterproof housing made of acrylonitrile styrene acrylate (ASA) copolymer from Germany. The housing prevents weather-related damage to the timer, improving durability. The ASA-made cases are available in a variety of colors and have a compact design.

The sprinkler timer also has an innovative, built-in electromagnetic valve to control water supply with a response time of only 0.3-second, far faster than that of conventional models.

In conjunction with the humidity sensor the

electromagnetic valve can also reduce water waste and electricity consumption. The device meets CA, RoHS, CE, UL, CPU, and NSF standards. "The electromagnetic valve took us more than one year to develop. It has helped pave the way for our entry into the high-end garden tool market," Yu says.

Since its debut, the sprinkler timer has drawn a lot of attention from buyers in the U.K., Malaysia, Italy and Chile. Lilun can turn out 30,000 units per month and welcomes orders on an OEM basis.

"Although we lack the resources for it now, branding is our goal. We are sharpening our competitive edge through constant improvement of our products."

Experienced

One of the oldest veterans in Taiwan's garden tool industry is Dayeh Garden Tools Co., Ltd., which boasts a history of more than four decades.

Dayeh's comprehensive product line includes a number of high added-value products, which are sold in Taiwan under the Dayeh brand. Its more than 200 product items include shovels, spades, rakes, shears, hoes, and sickles.

The company exports snow shovels and spades to Japan, and it plans to penetrate the U.S. market with the help of foreign traders, according to Yeh, owner of the company.

Dayeh is unusual among its local counterparts in its focus on the domestic market. "We have promoted our new product line of hammers in Taiwan on a trial basis to further develop own brand," Yeh says.

"With the price of metals and other materials spiraling up, we have tried to cut costs by farming out some production processes," Yeh says. She emphasizes, however, that Dayeh never compromises on its commitment to quality. [CENS](#)



Gear Transmission Lopper

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Gear Transmission Hedge Shear



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Gardening Tools

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Pump, Garden Tools, Booster



MH



S3 puls MTS



MVH



HWCP

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Car-washing Equipment



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