

## News Watch: Housewares Panel Predicts Trends

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*The Hourglass Cold Brew Coffee System, introduced at the IHHA show, gives a nod to the wellness trend by using BPA-free Tritan copolyester, supplied by Eastman Chemical, Kingsport, Tenn.*

Participants of a panel discussion titled "Top Trends for 2010" outlined six issues for the housewares industry to consider in its planning for next year. The panel's experts presented their views at the 2009 International Home and Housewares Show, held in March in Chicago.

In reviewing the first topic, which revolved around respecting generational divides, the panelists divided consumers into four age groups — GenY, GenX, Baby Boomers, and Prime Timers — and noted that all four groups view the kitchen differently. The Gen Y group (14-33) is completely connected and wired all day, and most rent an apartment rather than own a home. The GenX group (34-43) is often raising a family, so the kitchen is a family communications hub for them.

Baby Boomers (44-63) are either entering the empty-nester phase or are experiencing children and/or parents moving back in with them. The panelists said the group needs to work longer than planned, but still remains the group with highest discretionary income for housewares. Prime Timers (64 and up) are concerned with safe aging-in-place. They want to grow old where they are, and their focus is on ergonomics and intuitive design. Product weight and visibility are key considerations for this group. Recognizing and addressing each generation's different "touch points" provides a recession-proof strategy, the panel said.

The second trend is the increasing amount of time people spend in their kitchens, up to 3 to 4 hours a day on average. Housewares marketers, therefore, must think about the entire kitchen experience and how this impacts the way they should segment and cross-sell products, taking into account that the kitchen may be used for food preparation, dining, gaming, crafting, and entertaining.



*The Butterball Indoor Electric Turkey Fryer, shown at IHHA, caters to the cooking-for-fun trend. The appliance is made by Masterbuilt, Columbus, Ga., and is CSA certified to UL 1083 standards.*

The third trend concerns the need for everyone to live within their means and how that relatively new worry changes the way consumers view decisions such as cash vs. credit or price vs. durability. These concerns present a huge opportunity for the housewares industry, but also challenges, as marketers must fight harder for a smaller share of the consumer's discretionary income.

The green kitchen concept, representing a consumer desire to operate in a more environmentally friendly manner, is a trend that is gaining momentum with each day, the panel said. Even consumers who aren't naturally inclined to be green are getting pressure from their children, parents, and co-workers. The green movement is a powerful force, but the panel stressed the need for housewares makers to have authentic green credentials. Consumers are increasingly well-informed on the issue and better able to sniff out false claims.

The preoccupation with wellness is another important trend that affects housewares, given that the nutritional aspect of wellness influences food storage and preparation. A desire for wellness also impacts purchases relating to water and air quality.

The final trend discussed was cooking for fun, which involves creating shared experiences and enjoying life's simpler pleasures. Both housewares retailers and manufacturers need to show that they understand the cooking enthusiast and create marketing tools that provide inspiration and education. Cooking enthusiasts understand the value of an upgrade, and that presents many long-lasting opportunities for the housewares industry, the panel said, because the cooking-for-fun trend is here to stay.

### CLOTHES WASHER TEST

The Association of Home Appliance Manufacturers (AHAM), Washington, D.C., is developing a voluntary, uniform industry test procedure for manufacturers to determine clothes washer drum volume. The procedure, expected to be finalized by the end of 2009, will result in standardized volume measurements that can be applied across all washers — traditional and high-efficiency top as well as front loaders — and can be used by consumers to compare washer volume regardless of platform.

### SMART GRID DEVELOPMENT

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), Washington, D.C., has set forth a proposed policy statement and action plan related to the development of a new power grid for the United States. The FERC statements pertain to the development of general rules that would govern a modern grid and bring long-term savings to consumers.

### PORTABLE DEVICE MEETING

The Consumer Electronics Association (CEA), Arlington, Va., will host two discussion groups addressing the need for standards covering universal wireless charging and the ability to transfer metadata between portable and handheld devices. The meetings will be held at the CEA's Technology and Standards Spring Forum, occurring May 14, in St. Louis, Mo.

### PORTABLE GENERATORS STANDARD

Underwriters Laboratories (UL), Northbrook, Ill., has announced the publication of UL 2201, a standard for

portable engine-generator assemblies. Prior to this standard, there was no voluntary safety standard for portable generators sold within the U.S.

### **VOTING SYSTEMS TESTING**

The National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST), Gaithersburg, Md., has opened for public comment new methods for testing future electronic voting systems' compliance with voluntary federal standards. The new tests will replace multiple proprietary laboratory testing techniques with a single, transparent set of tests. Manufacturers also will have a better understanding of how their systems must perform to comply with the standards.

### **ENERGY STAR REQUIREMENTS**

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) has announced new Energy Star requirements for computer monitors, digital picture frames and other displays. For displays less than 30 in. diagonal, the specification will be effective October 30, 2009. For displays 30 in. to 60 in. diagonal, the specification will be effective January 1, 2010.

### **LOW-GWP BLOWING AGENT**

Honeywell Specialty Materials, Morristown, N.J., said it is developing a new low-global-warming-potential blowing agent for energy-efficient polyurethane foam insulation. The announcement was made at the UTECH Europe conference and expo held in Maastricht, The Netherlands, where polyurethane industry leaders gather every three years to discuss issues facing the industry. Honeywell expects the new blowing agent will offer performance benefits comparable to those of other fluorocarbons, but with a global-warming-potential that is less than 15. In addition, the blowing agent will have an atmospheric lifetime of just a few days. These properties are expected to result in lower greenhouse gas emissions impact on the environment while also providing the blown foam a high insulation performance, dimensional stability, and compressive strength. The non-flammable liquid blowing agent will provide customers with an alternative to hydrocarbons and traditional hydrofluorocarbons (HFCs). Honeywell expects the product will be available in limited sample quantities for customers later this year.

### **CELL PHONE USE**

More than 60 million American consumers are likely to cut back on cell phone plans if the economy continues to worsen, according to a survey by Opinion Research Corporation (ORC), Washington, D.C. The survey reports that as many as 40 million Americans may switch from contract-based to prepaid cell phone services. The survey also reports that as many as 19 million Americans may terminate cell phone extras, such as Internet connectivity, email and texting.



*MIT students and residents of Ventanilla, Peru work on bike/washing machine. Photo: Gwyndaf Jones/MIT News Office.*

### **PEDAL-POWER WASHER**

Students and staff at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, Mass., have developed an inexpensive, pedal-powered clothes washer that could improve the quality of life in developing countries. The inventors hope the machine, made from empty barrels and readily available bicycle parts, will be manufactured in the countries where it is to be sold. A prototype was recently tested outside Lima, Peru.

### **ELECTROLUX CLOSSES FACTORY.**

Appliance giant Electrolux has announced plans to close a factory in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 2010, citing cost pressures. The factory manufactures washing machines mainly for the Russian market and has approximately 250 employees.

### **SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY.**

Miele, Gütersloh, Germany, has been certified to SA8000, a social accountability standard. Certification body Rina, Genoa, Italy, issued the certification. The standard covers voluntary requirements to be met in the workplace, such as worker's rights, workplace conditions and management systems. The standard is based on national law, international human rights norms and the conventions of the International Labor Organization (ILO).

### **SMART GRID PILOT.**

Smart grid infrastructure developers Silver Spring Networks, Redwood City, Calif., and OG&E Electric Services, a utility serving Oklahoma and Western Arkansas, have completed the initial phase of a Smart Grid technology pilot project. The network infrastructure and the Silver Spring's Greenbox energy management Web-based portal were placed in 25 homes in Oklahoma City. In addition, meters connected to Silver Spring Networks' technology were installed in about 6,600 apartments in the same area to allow remote initiation and termination of service. OG&E selected the pilot program location due to the area's historically high number of service calls, approximately 10,000 per year. Using the technology, OG&E responded to service requests and remotely reconnected service during outages in less than 10 seconds. In the past, a representative would have to go to the location, obtain a reading, and complete any maintenance work on the meter in person. Homeowners in the study were able to view information about pricing and energy demand in real time, through the Web portal.

### **MANUFACTURING INEFFICIENCY.**

Modern manufacturing methods are very inefficient in their use of energy and materials, according to a Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), Cambridge, Mass., analysis of energy use of 20 major manufacturing processes. The study finds that new manufacturing systems, such as those that produce solar panels, are anywhere from 1,000 to 1 million times bigger consumers of energy than more traditional processes, such as those that produce manhole covers.

**NEW AHRI MARK.**

The Air-Conditioning, Heating and Refrigeration Institute (AHRI), Arlington, Va., will begin using a new unified mark to identify heating, ventilation, air-conditioning and commercial refrigeration products that have achieved third-party certification of their performance ratings. The new mark will replace the ARI Performance Certified, GAMA Efficiency Rating

Certified and I=B=R marks.

**WIRELESS SMART GRID.**

AT&T, Dallas, Texas, and provider of IP-based smart grid solutions SmartSynch, Jackson, Miss., have introduced an alternative for electric utility companies looking to provide smart grid technology to the residential sector. The solution allows each meter to communicate directly with the utility over the AT&T wireless network, providing a new way for utilities and consumers to monitor energy use.

**BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY.**

According to a survey conducted by GlobalSpec, Troy, N.Y., a search engine and business resource, American businesses, despite the recession, still see opportunities in new markets, green initiatives, and sectors such as biotech, energy, and aerospace/defense. The survey found that 59 percent of respondents will be spending more time and effort in 2009 entering new markets; 50 percent plan to spend more time on energy saving projects; and 48 percent plan to spend more time on working to reduce waste and scrap.

**MEDICAL BANDWIDTH.**

A dedicated frequency band for medical devices would boost confidence and stimulate uptake of wireless technology within a healthcare environment, according to a report by ERBI Medtech, Cambridge, Mass., and Cambridge Wireless, Cambridge, Mass. The report was produced following a workshop that brought together experts from the fields of medical device development, wireless technology and healthcare.

**NANOGENERATOR.**

At the 237th National Meeting of the American Chemical Society, Washington, D.C., held in March 2009, scientists from the Georgia Institute of Technology described technology that converts mechanical energy from body movements, or even blood flow, into electric energy that can be used to power electronic devices without the use of batteries. The researchers described harvesting energy from the environment by converting low-frequency vibrations into electricity using zinc oxide nanowires that conduct electricity.

**PIZZA VENDING MACHINE.**

Researchers at the University of Bologna, Italy, with support from Unilever, have developed a vending machine that creates fresh pizza. The machine kneads flour and water into dough, spreads tomato sauce and selected toppings, and then cooks the pizza with an infrared heating system. The entire process takes less than 3 min. The machine has already been tested in Germany, and its creators eventually expect to deploy it across Europe and the U.S.

**SELF-REPAIRING COATING.**

Polymer scientists Marek W. Urban and Biswajit Ghosh, both of the University of Southern Mississippi, have developed a polyurethane coating that repairs its own scratches when exposed to UV light. The key ingredient in the material is chemically similar to chitosan, a compound found in crab shells. The research was reported in the March 13 issue of Science.

**ONE-TON ICE MACHINE.**

Manitowoc Ice, Manitowoc, Wis., introduced a new line of ice machines that can produce more than one ton of ice in a 24-hour period. Manitowoc's S-3300 water-cooled and S-3070 QuiteQube ice machines target large chain restaurants, casinos, hotels, and convenience stores. Manitowoc's Quadzilla evaporator system places four high-output individual evaporators into a compact 48 in. icemaker.

**BATTERIES CHARGE AHEAD.**

The U.S. demand for primary and secondary batteries will increase 2.5 percent annually to \$16.8 billion in 2012. Growth will be supported by demand for replacement batteries in a number of battery-driven electronic products and a shift in the product mix toward higher-priced, better-performing batteries, according to U.S. Batteries, a new study from The Freedonia Group, Cleveland. Sales of primary batteries are expected to rise 3 percent annually to \$5.8 billion in 2012 and demand for secondary batteries is projected to rise 2.2 percent annually to \$11 billion in 2012.

**SMALL SOLAR CELLS.**

Solarmer Energy, El Monte, Calif., is developing plastic solar cells that generate energy from the sun for portable electronic devices. The technology is based on licensed technology invented at the University of Chicago. The company is working on a commercial-grade prototype cell that will measure 8 sq. in., have a lifetime of at least three years, and achieve 8 percent efficiency. To date, it has reached 6 percent efficiency. Researchers at the University of Chicago developed a new semiconducting material called PTB1 that converts sunlight into electricity and has an active layer that is 100 nm thick. The license covers several polymers under development at the University.

**PLASMA TRANSISTOR.**

Researchers at the University of Illinois have created a plasma transistor that could be used to make lighter, less expensive, and higher resolution flat-panel displays. By integrating a solid-state electron emitter and a micro cavity plasma device, the researchers can control the plasma conduction current and the light emission with an emitter voltage of 5 V or less. At the heart of the plasma transistor is a micro-cavity plasma, an

electronic-photonic device in which an electrically charged gas (a plasma) is contained within a microscopic cavity. Power is supplied by two electrodes at voltages of up to 200 V. Electrons are injected into a thin boundary layer that surrounds the plasma, which increases the flow of electrons through the plasma and improves plasma conductivity and light emission.

**PRINTER SALES DOWN.**

The 2008 combined printer, copier, and multifunctional equipment market in Europe, the Middle East, and Asia (EMEA) totaled 48.2 million units, which represents a decline of 8.4 percent compared to 2007, according to a report from Gartner, Stamford, Conn., an industry analysis firm. Researchers pointed to falling sales of consumer devices, down 9 percent in 2008, and the number of businesses that delayed product upgrades or cancelled investment in new equipment. Most vendors suffered losses in 2008. Hewlett-Packard remained the market leader in the overall EMEA printer, copier, and MFP market, but sales were down almost 11 percent. Samsung Electronics posted the highest year-on-year market growth with a 16.3 percent increase in 2008, which helped it maintain second position in that market.

**PC SALES NOSEDIVE.**

The PC industry will experience its sharpest unit decline in history, with PC shipments totaling 257 million units in 2009, an 11.9 percent decline from 2008, according to Gartner, Stamford, Conn. Previously, PC units experienced their worst decline in 2001 when unit shipments contracted 3.2 percent. Both emerging and mature markets are forecast to suffer unprecedented market slowdowns. Up to this point, emerging markets collectively recorded their lowest growth in 2002, 11.1 percent. Mature markets recorded their lowest growth in 2001, negative 7.9 percent.

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