

Walmart fast tracks

small store plan

Wal-Mart Stores has said, it will accelerate its plan for opening small stores in the United States, doubling its initial forecast. The company is expanding its previous estimate from October, and now expects to add approximately 270 to 300 small stores during the fiscal year, doubling the earlier expectation of 120 to 150 stores. Walmart U.S. will continue its plan to open approximately 115 new supercenters this year.

"Customers' needs and expectations are changing. They want to shop when they want and how they want, and we are transforming



our business to meet their expectations," said Bill Simon, Walmart U.S. president and ceo. "Customers appreciate the broad assortment of our supercenters for their stock-up trips as well as our small store formats for fill-in trips."

The small store fleet delivered positive comp sales and traffic increases each quarter. Comp sales for Neighborhood Market stores grew approximately 4 percent for fiscal year 2014.

Walmart currently operates 346 Neighborhood Markets and 20 Walmart Express stores. The Express units have performed well and are being expanded beyond the initial three-market pilot. As a result of its more aggressive plan, Walmart U.S. projects to end fiscal year 2015 with net retail square footage growth of approximately 21 to 23 million square feet across all formats, versus its original projection of approximately 19 to 21 million square feet.

In total, across supercenter and small store formats, Walmart U.S. plans to open 385 to 415 units in fiscal 2015, adding to the more than 4,200 stores currently open. ■

Source: *Home & Textiles Today*

Men become head household shoppers

involved with household duties, impact brand choices

Men are beginning to take the lead as the head shopper in the house. Today's man has a bigger impact on everything from brand choices—even what food goes in the refrigerator—according to a recent study by Defy Media. Defy Media's second annual Acumen Report: Brand New Man surveyed more than 2,000 men, ages 18-49, and found that more are becoming the "household helpers." The study found that as men are becoming more involved with household duties, they are also taking on more of the shopping, including what brands are being used in the house.

The study, conducted by Hunter Qualitative Research, found that more than 65 percent of respondents said they now hold primary shopping responsibility for several household product categories. Luckily, 67 percent enjoy shopping for these products, and nearly 63 percent are also open to choosing new brands.

Nearly 54 percent of the men surveyed admit to shopping for groceries and household supplies more often than their spouses, while 50 percent said that their spouses do not tell them what brands to buy. Nearly 70 percent said they are also willing to sacrifice career advancement for more time with family. When it comes to brand awareness, nearly 40 percent of men become aware of a brand through advertising; YouTube captures the attention of 24 percent, and nearly 28 percent find new brands via social media. In-store, more men are not afraid to ask direction when it comes to choosing the right product. Of those surveyed, 32 percent have no problem asking store employees for guidance; nearly half even look to friends or family, while nearly a quarter of respondents get information via a mobile device while in store. Additionally, nearly 26 percent of men reference online reviews to research new brands, more than 35-49-year-olds (21 percent use online reviews).



Locally-made also has an impact on what men are buying. Nearly half of respondents said they make purchases based on the brand's story or history or if it was made locally, while nearly 57 percent would stop purchasing from a company that did something offensive or illegal. ■

Source: *Gifts and Decoratives*

Exports of US hardwoods to India

reach USD 7.33 million in 2013

Total exports of U.S. hardwoods reached USD 7.33 million for the year 2013, according to a statement issued by the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC), the leading international trade association for the American hardwood industry. This total includes the value of shipments of American hardwood logs, lumber (sawn timber), veneers, plywood and flooring and represents an increase of 8 percent over the previous year.

The statistics, which have been released by the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), show that shipments of American hardwood logs accounted for 31% or USD 2.28 million of the USD 7.33 million total exported to India last year. This equated to 5,609 cubic meters and marked a 24% rise in value and a 47% rise in volume over 2012. The bulk of the volume of logs shipped was made up by tulipwood, which was recently embraced by Indian plywood manufacturers as an alternative face veneer peeler species to traditional species from Myanmar, such as gurjan (also traded as keruing). With effect from April 1, 2014, the Government of Myanmar is looking to impose a total ban on the export of raw timber (round logs). The impact of this ban is also likely to be felt very deeply by Indian importers and users of natural forest teak, who will be forced to import processed lumber from Myanmar (when available) or plantation teak and alternatives.

Said Roderick Wiles, AHEC Director for Africa, Middle East, South Asia and Oceania, "the EUTR, which came into effect in 2013, is expected to have a significant impact given that Indian products listed under the EUTR have an annual export value of around USD 1.3 billion. Significantly, the EC Guidance on EUTR has approved the Seneca Creek Risk Assessment of U.S. hardwoods as the basis for EUTR conformance. As such, we are positive of increased demand for American hardwoods in India, not just because of the consistency in availability, quality and grade, and wide range of colours, grains and textures but also on account of the sustainability and legality of U.S. hardwoods."

U.S. hardwood lumber exports to India reached a total value of USD 2.12 million last year, marking an increase of 7 percent on 2012. This equated to a volume of 2,667 cubic meters. Of this total, the main species shipped was hickory, which was destined for India's large tool and tool handle industry. However, increases were also seen in the volumes of other species shipped, such as white oak, walnut, maple and ash, which would have been used in furniture, doors, interior joinery and flooring. In hardwood veneers, some USD 1.30 million worth were shipped directly to India from the United States last year, marking a 19% decrease on 2012. However, this does not take into account American hardwood veneers shipped to India from Europe or Asia. Significant quantities of hardwood veneer logs are shipped from the United States to Europe and the Far East every year and much of the veneer production is destined for markets outside those regions, including India. ■

Source: American hardwood

Proposed US Tax Reform

gets support from NRF

The National Retail Federation (NRF) of USA is supporting latest proposed tax reform, as the move may help strengthen the economy and get more Americans to work. The proposed legislation would lower the current top corporate tax rate from 35 percent to 25 percent in return for eliminating a wide range of tax deductions and credits. Additionally, the congressional Joint Committee on Taxation project that this would also help improve the GDP by \$3.4 trillion over 10 years, create 1.8 million jobs, boost the median take-home income of a family of four by \$1,300 annually and increase consumer spending by 2.1 percent.

"This plan would give our nation the simpler, fairer tax system that we desperately need, but it's about far more

than just tax reform," said Matthew Shay, president and CEO, NRF. "This is the foundation for job creation,

increased take-home pay and business growth that would restore the prosperity that has slipped away for far too many American families."

A Congressional Budget Office report found that increasing the federal minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour from the current \$7.25 would cost the nation 500,000 jobs. "A minimum wage increase would boost income but cost jobs while tax reform boosts income and jobs at the same time," said Shay. "You don't have to be an economist to see which is the better choice."

Shay added, "This is good for the economy, and what's good for the economy is good for retail. Consumers with money in their pockets buy more, and the products they buy mean even more jobs, not just in stores but in virtually every sector as the ripple effect spreads out. Moves like this—not government-ordered wage hikes and other mandates that erect barriers to job creation—are the way to get America back on track. ■

Source: Gifts and Decoratives



CPSC takes closer look into third party testing

looks to reducing redundant costs

The U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) will begin collecting data to help the agency better determine which material types will not have to undergo routine testing for the six banned phthalates and/or heavy metals listed in the ASTM F963 Standard Consumer Safety Specification for Toy Safety.

The CPSC workshop, which will be held on April 3, will help the agency in its efforts to reduce redundant third party testing costs. The Toy Industry Association (TIA) will also participate in the workshop and submit additional written comments on behalf of the toy industry.



In determining which materials will make the cut, the CPSC will gather international production information on the materials used in children's products (past and present) as well as cost-savings data and technical information on a variety of issues.

"This workshop is an important opportunity for TIA and the toy industry to continue to provide the CPSC with data and test results that support our position that certain materials found in toys are so unlikely to contain restricted materials that they should not require routine testing - although they must continue to comply with the relevant requirements," stated Ed Desmond, TIA vice president of external affairs. ■

Source: *Playthings*

Toy Industry Association predicts supersized, retro and customization among toy trends

During the hustle and bustle of this year's American International Toy Fair, the Toy Industry Association took some time to announce six of the top toy trends for 2014. On the list: supersized and classic toys, RC, STEAM, zombies and monsters, retro and customization. Larger-sized toys are becoming increasingly common in just about every category, from plush and play sets to RCs and building toys, says the TIA, and help engage kids in imaginative role-play activities and also work as affordable gifts for special occasions. The category includes: dollhouses; inflatable toys; cars, trucks and trains; plush; and baby doll carriages, cribs and other role-play accessories.

In the remote-controlled category, it's all about vehicles for various ages and at various price points. Older kids have more options with RC helicopters and vehicles that launch projectiles, while more animal-themed and licensed RC toys work for younger children to help promote activity and imagination.

Educational toys, games and crafts that teach kids STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math) subjects are big for kids of all ages,



according to the TIA. These toys may incorporate storytelling and other artistic components into science, engineering and building toys to better engage kids in learning - everything from hands-on science kits and innovative tech toys or arts and crafts that introduce kids to these new concepts and skills at an early age fall into this category.

Inspired by the popularity of creatures on TV, movies and video games, more kids are falling in love with monsters, zombies and other creepy creature play. More ghoulish action figures and dolls with relatable characters and back-stories are not as scary for the younger set, while older boys and girls like more gross-out toys. This category includes: classic toys with a zombie twist, gothic-style fashion dolls and accessories; detailed figures for older collectors; and trivia games for fans of popular movies and TV shows, like *The Walking Dead*.

Retro is new-again! More classic toys and games are ready to launch in 2014 - some even bring back some memories for parents and grandparents and include: re-releases of retro toys, low-tech or back-to-basics toys or old-school family games. Do-it-yourself play continues to grow in action figure and arts and crafts and across several other play categories. These toys encourage kids to use their imagination and express themselves through personalization. Whether kids are building with classic blocks, designing their own dolls, playing in virtual worlds, or 'mashing up' play patterns, toymakers are giving them more freedom than ever to play exactly how they want. Best of all, these value-packed playthings come at a variety of price points - manufacturers are seeing a great selection of both splurge-worthy items and very affordable toys to fit any budget. ■ Source: *Playthings*