

Connected Home & Houseware

internet connected slow cooker could be future

The Connected Home has potential in housewares for the future. As the Internet of Things becomes more tangible for consumers and more and more household products become “smart” the potential is huge for the housewares industry, a panel of manufacturers, consumer editors and technology experts told an audience at the 2014 International Home + Housewares Show, which took place from March 15-18 at Chicago. But housewares manufacturers will need to be smart, as well, about introducing those “smart” housewares products to consumers.

The panelists agreed that the growing Internet of Things trend will provide tangible benefits to their end consumers. For example, The crockpot is all about making dinner on the consumer’s time. It enables the busy consumer to them to adjust the time and temperature of their food on their terms. The consumer is ready for this innovation, I think. An internet connected slow cooker won’t be viewed as such by the consumer. Instead, they will look at as something that fulfills their needs. That’s how internet connected products will need to be marketed. These products should solve a problem that consumers don’t even know that they have.

Beyond crockpots, there’s been interest from consumers in an internet connected refrigerator. If a door is left open and the refrigerator can send an alert to the homeowner, that would be a great application. Also, everyone hates it when their refrigerator breaks down, they have to wait for customer service or a part to be delivered, so if a refrigerator could do diagnostics and tell you what’s wrong with it, that would be a great time saver. It would solve a problem. Ultimately people should feel that they can’t live without their internet connected refrigerator. That’s how it will succeed.



Is 2014 the year the connected home goes mainstream? While all of the panelists agreed upon the potential, they also noted that several hurdles would need to first be overcome. Behaviors are changing so rapidly and this is an opportunity to deliver on consumer benefits. The kitchen is the next logical place where things should happen. There are a lot of opportunities for us to redefine the categories. But the appliance can’t be smart for the smart’s sake; it has to have a purpose.

Manufacturers need to have very specific insight into how consumers are using a product.

Research has shown that 70 percent of consumers want smart products and 30 percent think the kitchen should be the smartest room in the home, but consumers are wary because of the cost factor, so one has to have a value proposition. Also, there is still a small percentage of consumers that don’t want too much technology. One hurdle that has been overcome is that many housewares, like microwaves and coffee makers, are programmable and have been for a while. But the truth is that people haven’t used those programmable features. So while “smart” appliances have potential, there will need to be a better user interface so people will use them. The simple factor of the appliance will make people embrace them.

NRF opposes increase in federal minimum wage

The National Retail Federation, USA has come out against the increase in the federal minimum wage, calling Senate legislation aimed at increasing the federal minimum wage by 40% “an anti-job tax that would lead to higher labor costs for employers and fewer opportunities for young and entry-level workers.” NRF will include votes on the minimum wage as in its annual voting scorecard used to measure legislative support for the retail industry’s public policy priorities.

NRF believes that this is the “least opportune moment” to mandate a federal wage increase on employers with small and large businesses alike already confronting the myriad workforce challenges associated with the implementation of the Affordable Care Act. ■
Source : Home & Textiles

Another concern is data security. If an Internet-connected appliance sends data to a homeowner, is that data secure? Some consumers are pulling back on giving out their personal information and have concerns about privacy, so that will be a challenge. Manufacturers will have to build trust with consumers on privacy issues.

Still, the potential for internet-connected housewares is huge. The engagement of smart appliances will be quicker as a result of how we are living our life tethered to our smart phones. There will be some consumers that will come along faster, and others will take longer. But this is a great time for this industry. ■

Source : Tableware International

Luxury now defined by craftsmanship

for Chinese consumers

While high earning Chinese consumers are known for their love of luxury items and the status they can confer, new research from Mintel reveals there is a new characteristic these consumers are looking for – craftsmanship, that was claimed by 64% of urban Chinese consumers as the word most defining luxury – ahead of ‘expensive’ at 58% and ‘status’ at 53%.



Furthermore, 71% of those with household income over RMB 25,000 per month define luxury as craftsmanship, a full

10% more than those with household income between RMB 20,000 and 25,000 per month (61%). In addition, a massive 94% agreed that they identify luxury brands as those providing craftsmanship in production and design.

It's no secret that Chinese consumers are becoming more mature in their outlook towards luxury goods. They show the true extent to which this attitude has penetrated the market, in addition to clarifying what a 'mature' attitude to luxury looks like in China. Though status is still important to the Chinese luxury consumer, the trend toward luxury consumption for one's own enjoyment is clear. Conversely, 48% of consumers with household income over RMB 25,000 per month say status is a consideration when they purchase luxury goods. This figure rises to 53% at incomes between RMB 20,000 and 25,000 per month.

In addition, 46% of urban Chinese consumers with monthly household income above RMB 20,000 noted extravagance as being central to the definition of a luxury good, whereas this number rose to 51% of those with monthly household incomes between RMB 18,000 and 19,000, and again to 53% of those with monthly household incomes of between RMB 12,000 and 18,000. ■

Source: Mintel

Consumer confidence index rises at highest level since 2008

The Consumer Confidence Index rose modestly in March to 82.3, its highest level since 2008 and up 4 points from February, The Conference Board reported. It was the first time the index had been above 82 since June (1985=100). The research organization said the Present Situation Index edged down to 80.4 from 81.0, while the Expectations Index increased to 83.5 from 76.5. Results are based on a survey conducted for the group by Nielsen, with a cutoff date of March 14. "Consumer confidence improved in March, as expectations for the short-term outlook bounced back from February's decline," said Lynn Franco, director of economic indicators at The Conference Board. "While consumers were moderately more upbeat about future job prospects and the overall economy, they were less optimistic about income growth," she said. "The Present Situation index, which had been on an upward trend for the past four months, was relatively unchanged in March. Overall, consumers expect the economy to continue improving and believe it may even pick up a little steam in the months ahead."

Consumers' assessment of current conditions was little changed in March. Those claiming business conditions are "good" increased to 22.9% from 21.2%; however, those claiming business conditions are "bad" also rose, to 23.2% from 22.0%.

Consumers' appraisal of the labor market was relatively unchanged. Those claiming jobs are "plentiful" decreased marginally to 13.1% from 13.4%, while those saying jobs are "hard to get" increased slightly to 33.0% from 32.4%.

Consumers' expectations, which fell last month, rebounded in March. The percentage of consumers expecting business conditions to improve over the next six months increased to 18.1% from 17.3%, while those anticipating business conditions to worsen declined to 10.2% from 13.6%.

Consumers' outlook for the labor market was also moderately more optimistic. Those expecting more jobs in the months ahead edged up to 13.9% from 13.7%, while those expecting fewer jobs fell to 18.0% from 20.9%.



The proportion of consumers expecting their incomes to grow declined to 14.9 from 15.8%, but those anticipating a decline in their incomes also decreased, to 12.1% from 13.4%. ■ Source: Furniture Today