Home Improvement
E-commerce plays bigger role

Online sales of home improvement products that span everything from plumbing and hardware to storage and décor, have grown 41 percent in the 12 months ending March 2017, reports The NPD Group, a leading global information company. The e-commerce home improvement market reached $10.9 billion in sales for the year, according to NPD's receipt mining service, Checkout TrackingSM.

With the exception of outdoor living, online sales of each major segment of the home improvement market grew in the 12 months ending March 2017, and almost every category tracked within those segments experienced double-digit online dollar growth. The fastest growing categories last year were plumbing pipes and fittings, light bulbs, and ceiling fans, and the categories with the largest online sales gains were home décor, light fixtures and lamps, and area rugs.

"The pace at which e-commerce is gaining acceptance among home improvement consumers emphasises the need to understand how consumers are utilising online and in-store shopping options, and how to make them work together," said Joe Derochowski, executive director and home industry analyst at NPD. "Marketers can capture the replenishment of commodity products, like light bulbs and air filters, by offering online convenience, but there are also opportunities to benefit from consumer showrooming for bigger ticket items,

like bathtubs and vanities, with the in-store experience." NPD's Checkout Tracking E-commerce information illustrates that the online sales growth reaches across a variety of home improvement categories and consumer age groups. Millennials are a driving force behind this online growth, with the younger segment growing at the fastest pace, and the older portion accounting for the largest share of dollar gains. However, Gen X and the Baby Boomer generation are also very active in online home improvement spending, representing almost two-thirds of industry sales for the year. e-commerce will continue to gain importance for the home improvement industry. The current demographic changes are driving increases in the number of people entering life stages that are important to home improvement categories, from first-time home-buyers to downsizing empty-nesters, the industry is in a prime position to help consumers today and develop new shopping habits that will last for decades to come. ■ *Source : NPD*

Target launches Cloud Island
New exclusive baby brand

Target has launched a new exclusive Baby brand - Cloud Island with a line of nearly 500 items including everything from nursery décor and bedding to bath and layette products. The nursery collection features more than 70 different prints and the bath line includes 14 patterns of its own. The collection features several versatile themes that can be found across the entire assortment.

Safety is a top priority so the line's hang tags and in-store displays features reminders about safe sleep practices and details about where users can find more information about Consumer Product Safety Commission guidelines. And products like bedding, changing pads and play mats are Standard 100 by OEKO-Tex certified, meaning they're free of more than 300 potentially harmful substances.

"Target has seen incredible strength in our Kids business with the launch of Pillowfort and Cat & Jack, and we've heard from guests that they're also looking for stylish and affordable options for babies and younger children," said Mark Tritton, executive vice president and chief merchandising officer, Target. "We worked with our guests to design Cloud Island just for them. This guest-focused approach is one of Target's key differentiators, and Cloud Island is one of many new exclusive brands to come." ■ *Source : Target Corporate*

Top wedding trends reflect home design directions

Nod to mid-century design among design staple

This year's weddings are being marked by bold colour pairings; natural, earthy tones; and a new twist on the farm-to-table trend, especially in USA.

The best wedding designs should capture both today's trends and remain timeless as albums are shared and passed down through generations. This year's wedding trends offer new twists on classic styles, such as adding bold accent colours, adopting a natural organic theme, and incorporating a mix of textures and materials - a nod to mid-century design which has become a design staple. Leading among them are :

• **Colour Makes a Comeback**. Splashes of bold colour and bright pairings are all the rage in weddings this year as couples choose wedding colors to impress. Grey and white continue to be the neutral base, with shades of blue, green, purple and pink layered for maximum effect.

• **Weddings Go Au Natural**. With Greenery as the Pantone Color of the Year, earthy vibes are popular across event design, including weddings, and the au natural theme is one of the biggest of the year, Cort said.

• **Modern Meets Industrial**. Rustic, farm-to-table trends are sticking around, with a twist. Designers and marketers are seeing the same rustic woods and greenery this year, now paired with marble and metallics for a more refined look. The designs feel more modern, and eclectic. The mixture of materials, including black metal with natural woods and shiny metallics create a surprisingly sophisticated urban vibe that is more accessible to today's Millennial couples. ■ *Source : HFN*

Traditional toys make a comeback

Nostalgia and imagination among influencing factors

Nostalgia factor - A whole new generation of grandparents is cropping up among baby boomers. Aged between 53 and 71 years old, many in this demographic grew up with toys made of natural materials and want to pass this experience on to their grandchildren. They also want to give their grandkids the best of everything, and are more willing to invest in high-quality toys.

Sparking imaginations - Traditional toys often require kids to develop a more active imagination. It's easy to stare at an iPad or use a toy packed with bells and whistles (sometimes literally), but wooden play sets give kids a break from screen time and let them explore different ways of playing. Things like building blocks, train sets and dollhouses can also assist in developing fine motor and problem solving skills.

Fit right in - For design-savvy parents, traditional toys (particularly those in neutral or pastel shades) fit right in with the Scandi trend that has been going strong for years now. It's becoming increasingly popular for nurseries and kids' rooms to get the designer décor treatment, and parents are searching for toys that are fun, functional and look great on Instagram.

Heirloom potential - Unlike plastic playthings, which might easily lose a lever or snap in half, wooden toys are extremely durable. While they can be more of an investment up front, they generally provide years, if not decades, of play time. Traditional toys also make great family heirlooms and can be passed along from child to child.

Environmentally (and kid) friendly - No one loves the idea of children, and especially babies, playing with toys that contain potentially harmful chemicals, particularly plasticisers. Plus, as many consumers are environmentally conscious, it makes sense parents would seek out eco-alternatives for their children. The key to buying sustainable and safe toys is finding a supplier that uses renewable and environmentally friendly materials. Rubberwood, for example, is harvested from established plantation trees after they stop producing laxtex, and new trees are usually planted in their place. Organically farmed cotton is also less damaging to the environment than traditional fabrics.

Ways to learn - Demand for traditional toys is also supported by a greater emphasis on the educational value of toys. This includes items that encourage the development of basic skills such as hand-eye coordination and introduce phonetics, maths and reading skills. Fun children's activity books or kits for building and making things encourage kids to think and create from an early age. ■ *Source : Playthings*