

EPCH seeks Handicraft Units to be allowed to operate in Craft Clusters

The Government of India extended the lockdown till May 3, 2020 to break the chain of spreading of corona virus, issued guidelines for allowing certain activities to mitigate the hardship of public. These guidelines came into effect from 20th April 2020 and were operationalised by states / union territories and district administrations based on strict compliance to the existing guidelines on lock down measures.

The Government has offered some relief with respect to movement, loading, unloading of goods/cargo and inclusion of Courier services, informed Mr. Rakesh Kumar, Director General, EPCH. Mr. Ravi K. Passi, Chairman, EPCH said, while EPCH thanked the Government for allowing certain manufacturing and industrial units to operate in SEZ and EOU, Industrial estates and industrial township thus kickstarting the production and economic activity

in the country. However, the cottage sector has been completely left out. The Council has approached the Government to provide relief to handicrafts units operational in handicrafts clusters like Moradabad, Saharanpur, Agra, Firozabad, Narsapur, Jaipur, Jodhpur, etc. and also consider including them in the guidelines as a large number of artisans and craftpersons are engaged in production of handicrafts products of home, lifestyle, fashion, furniture and textiles exclusively for the overseas markets

These handicrafts units are registered with District Industries Centre (DIC) and have the valid RCMC of the Export Promotion Council for Handicrafts and their inclusion would certainly help handicrafts sector which is one of the employment generating, foreign exchange earning sector of the Indian economy, elaborated Mr. Rakesh Kumar. ■

Working and Schooling from Home Prompts Sales Growth for Productivity Tools

With many workers and students transitioning to work and study at home, office supplies and tech hardware have become household essentials in their own right in the US. Over the last five weeks, their office supplies and technology industries have seen retail sales lifts in a number of segments as consumers seek to be productive, connected, and organised remotely, according to The NPD Group.

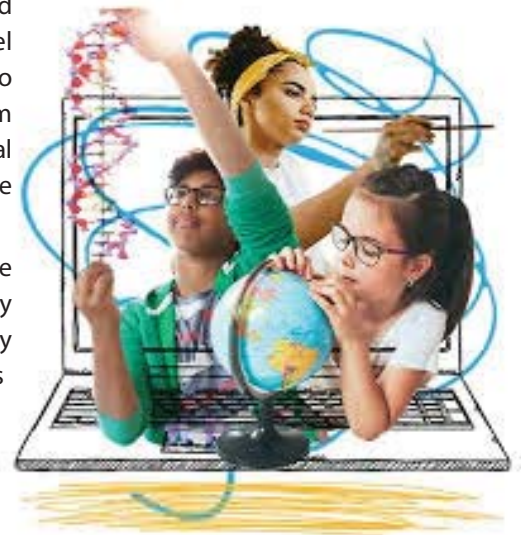
Categories tied to home office solutions, organisation, and school from home saw double and triple-digit dollar sales increases at retail in the five weeks ending April 4. Furthermore, while back-to-school is the "holiday season" for the office supplies industry, the current circumstances have prompted an off-season, springtime surge in traditional supplies purchases. Additional essentials including traditional pens and filing and storage products experienced strong growth in the first two weeks of March, coinciding with companies and schools beginning their shift to at-home operations, followed by sales softening and declines in the proceeding weeks.

All of the dynamics at play have created a need for more supplies than usual, and magnified pre-pandemic trends pertaining to sustainable and digital solutions. Office supplies is seeing a boost in SMART notebook sales as sustainability becomes more top-of-mind for consumers and appeal grows for reusable and eco-friendly options. In addition, the union of traditional supplies and technology means that for the longer term, manufacturers best positioned for the future are those adapting to create a

complete and balanced model for consumers to easily travel from physical to digital under one umbrella.

In response to this new reality facing many Americans today, the technology market has pivoted its focus to at-home productivity and is seeing historic sales in selected hardware and accessory categories. Although growth is beginning to level off, in the dash to equip their homes for distance connections consumers paid more attention, and allocated more funds, to getting their new home office setup right, likely anticipating that this environment would extend for quite a while.

As traditional supplies and technology converge to boost productivity at home, the topic of broadband also comes into play as meeting rooms and classrooms have had no choice but to go virtual. ■ *Source: NPD*



Report: Home décor among shoppers' focus post COVID-19 lockdowns

ICSC survey finds consumers expect US economy to improve

Most consumers will shop bricks stores for home décor items two months after COVID-19 lockdowns lift - maybe sooner. According to the International Council of Shopping Centers' newly released Engines Insights report, 77% of the 1,004 consumers surveyed April 10-12 said they would feel comfortable returning to physical stores within this timeline to shop for home decor as well as clothing and electronics. Other retail channels, by

consumer ranking, include: 74%: Open-air shopping centers; 71%: Restaurants, bars or other eating venues; 60%: Malls; 56%: Personal service businesses, like spas, hair/nail or tanning salons, massage parlors, etc.; 54%: Other leisure/entertainment complexes (excluding movie theaters); 50%: Gyms/fitness centers; 50%: Movie theaters; 49%: Hotels or tourist sites/attractions.

ICSC also questioned shoppers about their outlooks for the US economy in the 12 months ahead. Half said they are optimistic; 34% said they expect a decline. Seventy-two percent said they support the federal government's Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act.

An even larger number (88%) report being hopeful they will receive the CARES Act stimulus checks. Of this group: almost half (49%) said they plan to spend some of those funds on groceries and other household essentials; 35% will cover housing costs like mortgages, rents and utilities, 35% will save it; 28% will pay off credit card debt or other loans; and 14% plan to buy other goods or non-essential merchandise. More than half (62%) ranked small businesses as 8 or higher on a 10-point scale as being a top priority to receive federal economic assistance. ■

Source: Home Textiles Today



Consumers anticipate long-term spending shifts from pandemic

Research finds less spending ahead for Holiday 2020

The latest update from Core Research(US) finds consumers will continue to avoid public spaces and will continue to budget conservatively even after COVID-19 lockdowns ease. The survey also suggests this year's holiday season may not be particularly robust. More than half of the US consumers surveyed (54%) said they will spend less on Holiday 2020 because of the economic impact of the pandemic, with 28% expecting to spend significantly less than they did last year.

Other takeaways from the report:

- **Cautious spending** : Consumers are watching their finances, with 21.3% of all respondents saying they expect to shop less after stay-at-home restrictions ease – up by a little under three percentage points week over week.
- **The shift to e-Commerce will stick** : When asked which behaviors they will retain from the crisis period, 27.8% said their



will make more of their retail purchases online, up approximately five percentage points week over week.

■ **Still wary of public spaces** : Two-thirds of

respondents told Coresight that they expect to continue avoiding some kinds of public places or change some travel arrangements after lockdowns end. "Shoppers may perceive off-mall centers such as open-air centers as safer – and these types of centers are also likely to benefit from the preponderance of nondiscretionary retailers such as supermarkets, versus the discretionary focus of enclosed malls," the research firm concluded. "However, all retail formats must be prepared for shopper caution even once businesses reopen." ■ Source: Home Textiles Today

USTR announces additional China tariff exclusions to include wood frame glass door cabinets, outdoor fire pits

The office of the US Trade Representative has announced tariff exclusions for a few additional residential furniture items, including outdoor tables with built-in fire pits. Announced in late March, the exclusions include:

- ❑ Cabinets of wood with glass fronts, each measuring at least 208 cm, but not more than 234 cm in height; at least 86 cm but no more than 128 cm in width and at least 40 cm but not more than 49 cm in depth. (otherwise described in statistical reporting number 9403.60.8081)
- ❑ Cabinets of wood with glass fronts, each measuring at least 91, but not more than 117 cm in height; at least 165 cm but no more than 216 cm in width and at least 38 cm but not more than 59 cm in depth. (otherwise described in statistical reporting number 9403.60.8081).
- ❑ Outdoor tables of artificial stone, each measuring no more than 93 cm by 93 cm by 63 cm, with a built-in gas-burning fire pit (described in statistical reporting number 9403.89.6015).

These are among the \$200 billion in goods that were assigned 10% tariffs in September 2018, which subsequently rose to 25% in May 2019. To qualify for exclusion, applicants had to show that the product was available only from China and whether not it

was available in the US or another country. In arguing for exclusions, many applicants said the items were not only no longer made in the US but were also extremely difficult to source from other countries. Applicants also had to show that the imposition of tariffs would cause severe economic harm to their companies or other U.S. interests. Also of interest to the USTR was whether the product was considered strategically important to "Made in China 2025 or other Chinese industrial programs."



The exclusions are retroactive to Sept. 24, 2018, and run through Aug. 7, 2020, meaning that companies can receive a refund for any tariffs paid thus far. While some of these goods may continue to be sourced in China, others have already moved to countries like Vietnam and Malaysia to avoid the tariffs. Thus, it is unlikely that they will move back to China right away, particularly as COVID-19 travel restrictions limit where people can travel around the globe. Perhaps more important to some wood resources is retroactively retrieving any tariffs paid up to this point on these and other categories that have received exclusions thus far. ■ *Source: Home Furniture Today*

Soft home spending will rebound before apparel or travel : BBB More private label coming in early 2021



Bed Bath & Beyond is looking for soft home sales to pick up once discretionary spending returns.

During the multi-nameplate retail company's call to review fourth quarter results, President & CEO Mark Tritton said the company's current sales mix is "very fluid" as consumers across the country stay at home to mitigate the spread of COVID-19. "Clearly people are leaning into cleaning, into kitchen, into baking, into home care, and so this is a great time for us," he said. The textile business has not been as strong, he added, though the company expects the category to rebound once consumers start thinking about refreshing their homes.

"People have been staring at the same four walls for a month or two now," said Tritton, "I think the idea of refreshing your bathroom, your bedroom, your kitchen - that's going to be pivotal in terms of some of the engagement and how customers return into the market more than maybe an apparel purchase or definitely a travel purchase."

The retailer plans to address gaps in its opening price point assortment as well as the way it communicates value to customers. It plans to launch several new house brands in spring 2021. The effort targets key rooms, categories and lifetime occasions where the company already has strengths as well as those where it believes it can capture more share. "We believe that people will want to celebrate their home, reinforce it, refresh it, invite friends for smaller moments and entertaining," said Tritton. ■ *Source: Home Textiles Today*

Trends & shifts as a result of Covid-19

Major events like the Covid-19 pandemic won't cause current mega trends to disappear, but there will be a number of shifts in consumer attitudes and behaviours to watch for, says Kate Usher, trend consultant for Trend Bible, UK. "There is no rulebook for the life of a trend. They are as elusive and fluid as the human beings who circulate them," says Usher, whose UK-based global firm specialises in predicting the future of life.

However, mega trends such as sustainability and urbanisation rarely disappear in the face of unpredictable events such as the Covid-19 pandemic. These trends are major shifts and will be around for at least 10 years if not more. However, how we respond to these mega trends day-to-day and year-to-year is subject to the specific scenario we find ourselves in and where

our priorities lie. For example, sustainability, which has resulted in more ethical purchases in recent years. During the pandemic some of these consumers will opt for cheaper and less eco-friendly options due to economic concerns. That does not mean, however, that the trend will not return stronger than ever once the crisis is over. It's a temporary blip. Another trend that is expected to slow down during and after the crisis is the quest for convenience. Householders are rediscovering the value in doing things more slowly, more deliberately and more thoroughly during lockdown.

Sales of flour are going through the roof as consumers turn to baking as a therapeutic domestic task, and many are actually finding enjoyment and stress relief in washing the dishes.

Convenience is no longer the goal; in fact, the more inconvenient options hold more appeal. This shift has major implications for homewares brands, and Usher recommends they think short-term and focus on the next three to six months ahead.

"How can (you) support and connect with customers through the pandemic? This might not be about selling products but building connections with people. During time of uncertainty, the brands that resonate with our need for comfort, security and authenticity will be the ones we turn back to once we have the ability to do so." Moving to 2021, Usher identified four key trends or drivers of change.



- ❑ **Homebodies:** Before the current pandemic, there had been a significant increase in the number of people socialising and entertaining at home. JOMO (Joy of Missing Out), which celebrates life's ordinary moments, is an increasingly popular antidote to FOMO (Fear of Missing Out), which fuelled being part of big social gatherings, travel and flashy experiences on social media for years. This will certainly continue post-crisis as people seek to reconnect with small groups of people in real life.
- ❑ **Express Yourself:** Many fashion brands are moving into the home interiors market, which has made personalising your home more accessible than ever before. There's a big shift from wanting to blend in to 'look at me. As a result,

bolder colour is becoming increasingly popular for homes and housewares.

- ❑ **Conscious Choices:** Many consumers will continue to look for ways to reduce their environmental footprint. Glass jars will become even more popular as a durable storage option, but also for their ability to seal in food freshness and reduce food waste.
- ❑ **Purified Home:** The 'Joy of Clean and Tidy' trend will only increase as consumers seek to regain some control in their busy and chaotic lives. She predicts many will take preventative measures to improve indoor air quality and minimise toxicity through environmentally friendly textiles, surfaces and cleaning products. ■ *Source: Home Textiles Today*

Retail stores starting to reopen after COVID-19 outbreak

As states across the US begin to relax stay-at-home guidelines, several home furnishings retailers have announced updates to their reopening plans.

❑ **Bassett Galleries** : Bassett announced the reopening of 20 of its 66 company-owned Bassett Home Furnishings stores, following the temporary COVID-19-related closures announced March 23. Bassett said additional stores will reopen in the coming weeks as permitted and based on applicable local and state guidelines.

❑ **Ethan Allen** : Ethan Allen will begin reopening its Design Centers on May 1 in some states and has begun increasing manufacturing operations. It has been more than five weeks since the company temporarily closed its retail design centers and some of its manufacturing operations.

❑ **Havertys** : The retailer will begin a phased reopening of its stores on May 1, but it will be doing so with a reduced workforce. The Top 100 company said it is resuming distribution and delivery operations. It expects to reopen 108 of its 120 stores initially and will reopen the remaining locations by mid-May.

❑ **HOM Furniture** : The retailer said it tested the waters by opening stores April 3 in Sioux Falls, S.D., and Fargo, N.D. Neither state has stay-at-home orders. The company decided that allowing 12,000 square feet per customer was extremely safe. That means about eight customers would be allowed in a 100,000-square-foot store at one time.

❑ **La-Z-Boy** : Over the past week, based on various applicable state guidelines, the company opened several retail locations across the U.S. on a reduced schedule and expects to open additional stores in the coming weeks. Regional distribution

centers remain operational to deliver in-process orders.

❑ **Mattress Firm** : With more than 2,500 stores across the country, the retailer is monitoring local orders to determine next steps. In some areas, the stores have either remained open or have newly-reopened and are making necessary accommodations to ensure they are following all guidelines set forth by the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) and the local government.

❑ **Sleep Number** : Minneapolis-based Sleep Number was one of the first home-furnishings stores to reopen after receiving guidance from that state on March 27. Of more than 600 total



stores nationwide, 44 of them opened last week. The company said it's slowly opening in markets where such action complies with mandates of individual jurisdictions. Stores also have fewer staff members and shorter hours.

❑ **Slumberland** : The retailer started opening stores on April 22 with eight stores in Minnesota that are now open with plans to slowly expand the rollout. ■ *Source: Home Furniture Today*