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Architects Of The New Normal

These Six Leaders Are Drafting Blueprints
For The Post-COVID Retailing Rebuild

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2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS



Architects Of The New Normal

These Six Leaders Are Drafting Blueprints
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VOLUME 32 NO. 9 MAY 18, 2020

INSIDE



Kitchen Electrics

Small electrics getting social to engage homebound consumers. **Page 10**

“The cookware and cooking tools that we work with can be reflective of our design sense, our cooking prowess, and whether or not we’re socially conscious.”

—Matt Cavallaro,
Nest Homeware

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Cook & Bake

Bread baking is on the rise.

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Tabletop's lifestyle focus key to reinspire consumers.

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2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS



Six Leaders Drafting Plans For Post-COVID Retail Rebuild

By MIKE DUFF
Executive Editor

NEW YORK— The world is changing quickly and decisively under the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic, but, while that is a circumstance

generating concern, it also means that some companies will discover they are better positioned to gain from the situation than others.

Six retail companies that are likely to enter the post-coronavirus universe even stronger are Walmart, Target, Costco,

Amazon, Home Depot and Kroger.

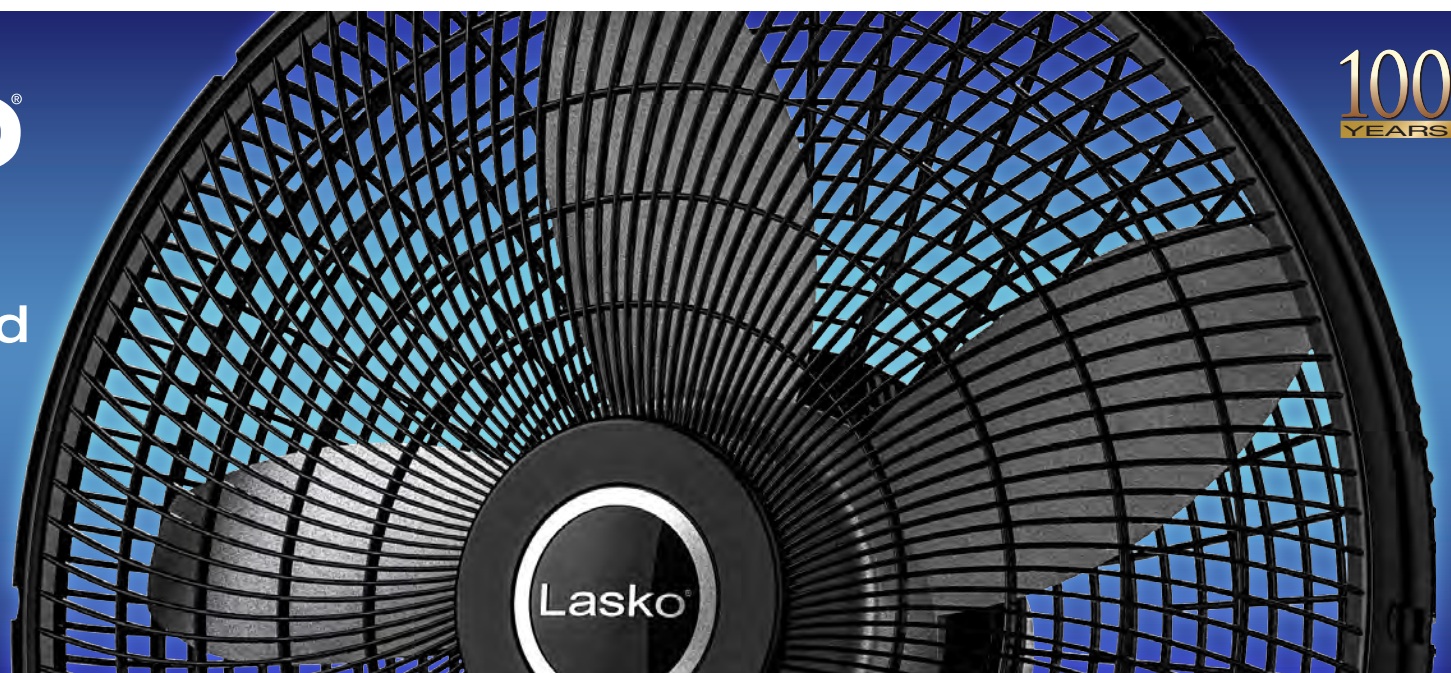
The reasons why are several, and not just because they are big retailers that have enormous resources and capabilities, although that plays a substantive role. The truth is not all retailers will survive the COVID-19 outbreak even if they limp ahead for a time after the market begins to get back to something like normal, and that, in itself, will create opportunity for stronger companies to build sales and market share.

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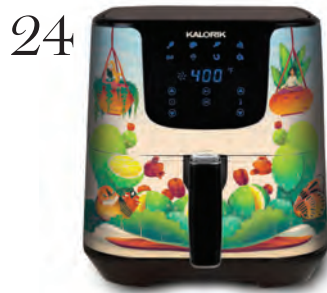
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Galanz has created
social media content to
engage consumers.



Small Electrics Getting Social To Engage Homebound Consumers

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ
Contributing Editor

NEW YORK— Call it a social media blitz: Small appliance manufacturers have been experimenting with innovative ways to engage consumers for several years now, but the global pandemic has ratcheted up the intensity of these efforts to new heights.

Getting the marketing message out has been a challenge due to widespread store closures, along with the near-total cancellation of special

events and programs. But vendors are addressing this challenge with creative marketing options, including expanding social media platforms, providing recipes and innovative food preparation ideas, and increasing emphasis on consumer-generated content.

While it is certainly true that some appliance manufacturers already have fairly robust consumer engagement programs in place, many companies that have not necessarily done this in the past are developing or ramping up plans to interact with consumers directly.

Most suppliers said they intend to continue these efforts as stay-at-home restrictions begin to ease, in order to drive traffic into stores and to continue their growth with e-commerce outlets.

“Galanz has made social media content for Facebook and Instagram to include content from product launches, cooking tips, and sharing user-generated content,” said David Geyer, director of marketing and brand management, Galanz Americas. “Because consumers are home, the major shift is that they are more engaged than ever with social media. We are trying to continue the conversation more and develop richer content. We have also spent a significant amount of time improving e-commerce content on all our retailer pages.”

Gourmia is focusing on social media and direct marketing, including Facebook and email. “People want to cook at home right now, and we believe this trend will continue even as we start to move into the next phase,” said Gourmia founder, Heshy Biegeleisen. “We have our own chef on staff, developing recipes and sharing them with our customers, who are looking for new and interesting foods to eat at home.”

Made By Gather founder and CEO Shae Hong said the company has seen across-the-board increases in its social media metrics. “Our organic impressions have grown 50% and our profile views are up 61% as compared to the four weeks pre-quarantine,” he noted.

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‘Stay At Home’ Grows Sales For Personal Care

By DONNA BOYLE SCHWARTZ
Contributing Editor

NEW YORK— Technological advancements paired with a greater need to undertake grooming at home during the COVID-19 pandemic are fueling sales in the personal care category.

Innovative inventions, including the development of smart personal care tools, are driving consumer interest in men’s and women’s grooming appliances, hair care, facial and skin care products. At the same time, the current stay-at-home restrictions are causing more demand for personal grooming items, since consumers are unable to visit conventional salons, barbershops

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The New Measure Of A Retail Champion

THE NEED TO pivot suddenly has marked much of the business world's response to the COVID-19 crisis.

HOMEWORLD BUSINESS[®] is no exception. Our team has had to reset much of an editorial plan that was mapped out in advance of a coronavirus pandemic that shut down wide stretches of the retail landscape while reprioritizing consumer behavior virtually overnight.

Essential Standing

As such, we have adapted our long-running Retailer Of The Year edition to showcase six retail leaders whose vision and dexterity have reinforced their essential standing during the crisis.

Amazon. Walmart. Target. Costco. Home Depot. Kroger.

We call these architects of the new normal "Retail Champions." It is not a congratulatory bestowment in the usual sense. The designation signifies how well-positioned they are to lead the post-COVID rebuild of what should be a dramatically realigned retail landscape... and how they are cementing new standards and practices that could apply to most retail businesses.

• Amazon is leveraging increased transactions with homebound consumers to advance already sophisticat-



ed data analysis and marketing.

• Walmart's pick-up and home delivery programs reminded consumers why it is a vital resource in their communities.

• Target's move into cities and dense suburbs with smaller stores—bolstered by its acquisition of

store-to-home, same-day delivery system Shipt—elevated it into a critical shopping destination beyond its traditional store base.

• Costco gained more consideration and stronger positioning as a community stalwart by deploying a mounting e-commerce platform to fill in where the stores can't.

• Home Depot underscored its DIY leadership, enabling consumers to escape by immersing themselves in home and garden projects.

• Kroger's loyalty system, online expansion and pending Ocado robotic e-commerce fulfillment operation is introducing more consumers to the full menu of services under its Restock Kroger initiative.

The special Retail Champions report also examines other key retailers across all channels that could emerge as strong supporting players in the recovery; as well as previously thriv-

ing off-price operators suddenly confronted by unforeseen challenges.

Visionary Actions

HomeWorld's Retail Champion selections might surprise few. All have been allowed to operate at full strength during the crisis, a significant advantage that embellishes their market clout while providing an active canvas on which to test and implement new methods that could further secure their long-term dominance.

Less obvious are the details not just in how these vast retailers have pivoted so adroitly during the crisis, but also in how visionary actions well before the COVID-19 outbreak increased their resistance to such sudden and profound upheaval.

The true measure of a retail champion has changed virtually overnight.

For these six retailers. For every retailer.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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Retail Rebuild

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More specifically, advantage may derive from existing efforts to leverage omnichannel positioning, as with Walmart’s expansion of curbside pickup and to-consumer delivery. For its part, Target’s acquisition of delivery service Shipt looks especially fortuitous now.

In some cases, advantage can emerge as an extension of existing trends, as with Home Depot’s getting a chance to build on developments generally affecting the home center/hardware store channel since Millennials started buying, remodeling and renovating homes. The same developments have boosted Costco, too, given the generation’s needs now that it is settling down and having children.

In other cases, it has to do with technology, as in Amazon’s ability to shift priorities to address the most compelling needs of its customers in a crisis situation or Kroger’s enhanced ability to track and analyze customer behavior in a situation where more of its recent initiatives, including expansion of delivery, are getting tested just as it is about to trial a

significant new partnership with convenience grocer Ocado.

The major companies spotlighted as HOMEWORLD BUSINESS® Retail Champions will be at the forefront as the retail industry emerges from the COVID-19 crisis based on the multiple advantages they can leverage. Still, it’s important to also consider that the coronavirus-impacted marketplace has the odd attribute of turning up a negative for every positive it produces and a positive for every negative.

So, Amazon customers may appreciate its ability to address everyday needs they might otherwise have a hard time satisfying at local stores at a time of temporary shortages, but it also has faced a degree of criticism for not being able to deliver other purchased products in a timely manner, especially to Prime customers. Indeed, Amazon has found itself in something of an unwelcome spotlight given its prominence in the market response to the COVID-19 pandemic, a challenge it has met with increasingly dynamic operational measures and more prominent messaging regarding steps taken to protect customers and employees. Amazon’s response has required complex adjustments to its entire business, and, if that’s true of most companies who continue functioning through consumer stay-at-home requirements, Amazon has faced at least as comprehensive a series of challenges as any retailer.

In a first quarter conference call, Amazon CFO Brian Olsavsky pointed out that the company had a range of issues to confront even as more consumers turned to it as an available shopping resource during domestic confinement.

“While customer demand remains high, the incremental revenue we are seeing on many of the lower ASP essential products is basically coming at cost,” he said. “We’ve invested more than \$600 million in COVID-related costs in Q1, and expect these costs could grow to \$4 billion or more in Q2. These include productivity headwinds in our facilities as we provide for social



Home Depot has ramped up its social distancing measures in stores to address safety concerns.

distancing and allow for the ramp up of new employees.”

Not only that, but retailers face a market in recession, whether of short- or long-term duration. Neil Stern, a partner in the consulting firm McMillon Doolittle, noted that the shift from short-term coronavirus-generated changes, with an initial emphasis on basic provisions, to the middle term of consumers moving from pantry stocking to purchasing products that make living at home more pleasant, has been happening under the cloud of recession and unemployment. In some cases, unemployment will be short-term as furloughed employees await the return-to-work call or longer term as jobs disappear along with businesses that don’t survive the coronavirus-related downturn. Although government intervention, such as enhanced unemployment benefits, may mitigate

the effects of economic dislocation, eventually the fallout from a massive leap in joblessness is going to tell.

Stern asserted that government intervention, whether additional unemployment aid or the broader consumer stimulus, won’t necessarily send consumers on a spending spree.

Coresight Research, which has been closely monitoring the COVID-19 pandemic since it initially emerged in China, pointed out that many consumers are concerned enough about their personal prospects to restrain spending. In a Coresight survey conducted on April, 29, it indicated that one in nine residents in the U.S. has lost a job and that 42% are worried about losing their job or part of their income versus 39.2% a week earlier.

However, that doesn’t necessarily mean that consumers will altogether hunker down. Even as coronavirus effects on work and home hit, product

categories beyond absolute essential, ones that helped consumers make the most of their new stay-at-home reality, took off, including home office products and small kitchen appliances. Already, some evidence suggests that apparel and shoes, product categories that had been weak going into the COVID-19 crisis and tanked as it hit, have rebounded at least somewhat. David Sykes, the head of U.S. for Klarna, which offers a payment app and has been monitoring sales shifts among its seven million U.S. users in detail, said that Millennials and Gen Xers had shifted to more apparel and shoe shopping as coronavirus purchasing shifted out of the pantry-filling stage.

Even amidst the coronavirus crisis, a range of retailers pointed to significant gains. Among online-centric retailers, for example, Retail Champion pick Amazon could trumpet gains associated with coronavirus movement restriction, but so did Wayfair, which could point to a range of product categories that had taken off for it from the point where consumer stay-at-home orders proliferated; and Overstock.com, which enjoyed an April year-over-year sales increase of 120% year over year with home furnishings leading, CEO Jonathan Johnson reported. Online retail has provided the best first indication of just how



Amazon has boosted its fulfillment center safety measures for employees.

the COVID-19 outbreak is changing consumer shopping habits.

"There is going to be a sea change in consumer behavior," Stern said, "first brought about by necessity."

Stern said that retailers that had curbside pickup capabilities had an early and obvious advantage in the coronavirus crisis but others have potential strengths that may be less immediately visible including those with strong private label programs, a big advantage in the last recognized calamity confronting the U.S., the Great Recession. Strong private label performers such as Aldi, newcomer Lidl and outside of the deep-discount grocery segment Costco, may have a leg up on the marketplace as it's evolving today. Some advantages will play out behind the scenes, as retailers who have superior data collection and analytics capabilities gain insights into the unfolding behavior of existing and, frequently, new customers they can apply in operations and marketing.

In many cases, the COVID-19 crisis will prompt new thinking and approaches to the market but, as was the case in the recession 12 years ago, the situation will often act as a catalyst accelerating development and acceptance of existing products and services. Retailers who entered into the coronavirus crisis with an edge in those operations that have enabled them to deliver the goods consumers demand effectively and in initiatives such as curbside pickup and delivery

that have helped them to cope with lockdowns as well as the muscle to maximize their execution despite the challenges thrown at them by a roiled marketplace will become even more powerful in the emerging environment.

"I don't see how you get around it," Stern said. "Part of this thing is: retailers that withstand the short-term effects are going to have to have the capital to change with the customer and deal with the massive advantages of an Amazon or Walmart."

Coresight Research cautioned that, even as some parts of the U.S. began rolling back movement and shopping restrictions, reopening of discretionary retail is still at the mercy of the coronavirus and government officials dealing with it. Stores will need to minimize or greatly reduce the risk to employees and customers to thrive, but it remains unclear what measures are effective. Not only that but, consumers won't immediately recover from the impact of COVID-19 on their lives.

Coresight posited a subsequent steady-state level of retail engagement that will likely remain below the spending levels of 2019 and extend for some time as consumers deal with their access to stores and their confidence in safety while shopping, even as retailers cope with potential labor problems in the topsy-turvy coronavirus-upended world as government aid to the unemployed has caused some staffers to resist returning to work as long as the enhanced benefits last. **HWB**

Other Retailers Gain Foothold In Shifting Marketplace

By MIKE DUFF
Executive Editor

NEW YORK— When Kroger published its "Sharing What We've Learned: A Blueprint for Businesses" to help business create safe working environments in the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. was simultaneously realizing how great an effect the coronavirus was having on life in the country and beginning to look forward to the end of movement and shopping restrictions that made them radically reconsider how they might purchase everything from food to durable goods such as major appliances.

Kroger, the largest supermarket operator in the U.S. and one that has been deeply involved in responding to market change before and during the coronavirus outbreak, is one of the companies with the resources and momentum to come out of the coronavirus crisis in a stronger relative position than when it started. With the blueprint, the company wanted to spur consideration about how to get the economy and the retail marketplace going again. In looking ahead to what some characterize as the new normal, Kroger recognized it has a leadership role to play. However, a lot of companies, because of the channels they are in or because of certain individual attributes, should find themselves stronger in the post-crisis world, and they aren't just the declared Retail Champions.

Wayfair, for one, finds itself in demand, with net revenues in the first quarter reaching \$2.33 billion, up 20% year over year. In a conference call, co-founder, co-chairman and CEO Niraj Shah said consumers responding to changing conditions as winter turned to spring drove Wayfair sales gains in home furnishings and housewares.

The competitive landscape changed, he said, "as many physical retail stores closed temporarily, leading customers to move increasingly towards shopping

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Walmart has instituted a wide range of safety measures for customers and associates.



Amazon Strengthens Supply Network As E-Commerce Surges

SEATTLE— Amazon is likely to come out of the COVID-19 pandemic with the most gained as consumers become more reliant on online shopping, the channel it leads, but the company also has been, in many ways, the most challenged retailer in the U.S. as a tidal wave of sales has threatened to overwhelm its systems and its high profile has made it a target of scrutiny.

Amazon's recently released first quarter revenues reached \$75.45 billion with product sales totaling \$41.84 billion. But profits slipped year over year, with operating expenses up substantially. In comments on the results, CEO Jeff Bezos warned shareholders about how it is approaching the current market, saying, "You may want to take a seat, because we're not thinking small. Under normal circumstances, in this coming Q2, we'd expect to make some \$4 billion or more in operating profit. But these aren't normal circumstances. Instead, we expect to spend the entirety of that \$4 billion, and perhaps a bit more, on COVID-related expenses getting products to customers and keeping employees safe."

Rohan Thambrahalli, president and founder of Amazon consultancy UpstartWorks, said some critical assessments of Amazon and how it has operated in the coronavirus-plagued market haven't been altogether fair. For example, the company has drawn criticism for being slow to address health and safety issues in its distribution centers, although it had been rolling out and enhancing efforts to establish employee practices and sanitation procedures. Yet, if it was slow, Thambrahalli said, it was because executives were especially focused on protecting consumers shopping on its 3P marketplace.

"Early on, they were too worried about

price gouging," he said.

Amazon got some kudos as it shifted to the supply of essential supplies as authorities urged then required consumers to self isolate at home. However, because it stopped accepting many items into its own fulfillment system, some in-demand products sold out of existing inventory, disappointing both shoppers and vendors.

Thambrahalli said Amazon had upset some 1P partners who had developed their entire business around the company's fulfillment platform. It was hard for Amazon-centric companies to watch marketwide sales in the product categories where they operate multiply dramatically and see their own revenues plummet because they couldn't move more product into the Amazon fulfillment system. Amazon eventually began allowing demand to influence its formula for determining what might be defined as essential needs, even earlier than it originally conceived.

However, frustration has encouraged some suppliers to look at new platforms they can join, including Walmart.com, and launching or expanding direct to consumer operations, Thambrahalli said. Amazon has been trying to encourage many vendors to move operations out of the 1P system as the company has focused its own auspices on critical brands, and, in the crisis, it actively encouraged vendors that could to initiate or expand their own shipping efforts. Still, Thambrahalli said, how the disruption will play out longer term is difficult to forecast.

Going back to a holiday season about four years ago when Amazon couldn't push enough product through its massive fulfillment center network to satisfy demand, said John Ghiorso, CEO and

founder of Amazon consulting firm Orca Pacific, the company started diversifying its supply chain using various vendor qualification and shipping programs to maintain the customer experience but to avoid creating a bottleneck in the product flow through to customers.

Coronavirus-spurred demand has further demonstrated to Amazon that it has to add more means to move goods to customers, particularly given the impossibility of getting Prime members product in anywhere near the two days they expect in the recent rush.

"I think this is just going to accelerate that," Ghiorso said. "They were worried about the system breaking long term. All of a sudden the volume has tripled over a two-month period. It broke. They're working on keeping up and fixing it but, all of the sudden, if someone is paying for a Prime membership, and, instead of two days, they get the product in 30 days, it's not working the way it's supposed to. The reason it's not working is too much volume, even as is, going through their fulfillment network. I see that as a big long-term change."

Thambrahalli said the fulfillment headaches Amazon experienced as demand from self-quarantined consumers swelled became more severe as Amazon enhanced safety procedures, a process that slowed fulfillment center workflow.

Amazon has tried to find innovative ways to address burgeoning demand.

"We expect to spend the entirety of that \$4 billion on COVID-related expenses getting products to customers and keeping employees safe."

—Jeff Bezos, Amazon

Amazon has emphasized the safety procedures put in place in its fulfillment centers.

For instance, on the consumer facing side, the company requested that new Amazon Fresh and Whole Foods Market delivery and pickup customers sign on for an invitation to use the services. In that way, Amazon could release delivery windows and let customers know when the next slot might be available. The company also changed its algorithm as regards the BuyBox on its site, a promotional element Amazon generally wins itself. In effect, Amazon set things up so 3P marketplace sellers that could ship the product faster than it would have a better chance of claiming the box, said Chad Zottoli, business manager at Orca Pacific.

With all the challenges it has faced, Amazon should still find itself in a strong position when the coronavirus pandemic fades. Ghiorso said that, beyond this period of social distancing, soft store and strong online sales, effective COVID-19 vaccine or treatments will create a new phase in the current market development characterized by permanent changes in consumer behavior. By then, given that e-commerce will have been a go-to consumer resource for a long span, changed habits will favor channel leader Amazon enormously.

"We're going to see, we believe due to some previous data trends we've looked at, a huge amount of stickiness in terms of a shift from brick and mortar to e-commerce," Ghiorso said.

Still, Amazon faces another challenge. As the coronavirus crisis proceeded, Amazon's high profile encouraged renewed discussion about whether the company should face antitrust scrutiny, including consideration of a subpoena for CEO Jeff Bezos to appear before a U.S. House of Representatives panel on the subject. **HWB**

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Costco's safety measures include limiting the number of people in store.

Costco's Value Message Resonates With Consumers

ISSAQUAH, WA— The COVID-19 pandemic in the U.S. drove consumers to Costco as a place to stock up on food and household essentials, but images of consumers driving wagon loads of groceries, paper towels and other necessary products out of its warehouse clubs don't provide the whole picture.

Consumers dealing with the ensuing crisis got a reminder about the value of the Costco membership and its place as a go-to community institution. Costco, though, engages people in more ways than they realize, including through its often underrated digital operation, which has been growing at a higher rate than e-commerce overall.

That being said, Costco in its entirety, has been thoroughly caught up in the coronavirus state of affairs.

Consumers began stocking up as stay-at-home guidance and regulations loomed, and Costco booked March net sales of \$15.49 billion, up 11.7% year over year, with U.S. comparable store sales up 12.1% and e-commerce comps

up 49.8% for the month. In an early April conference call, Costco detailed traffic patterns that gained through the middle of March then declined as it shut down some ancillary businesses and some main-floor product categories deemed non-essential, as well as limiting the number of customers allowed in stores to help ensure social distancing. Softlines, including home furnishings and housewares, took a hit, with comps down in the mid-20% range, as Costco's food and sundries business comped up in the mid-30% range and fresh food gained in the mid-20% range. However, the big softlines declines came in the luggage, jewelry and apparel segments.

Market research firm 1010data in its COVID-19 retail impact report published in late March stated that March 12 was the single highest sales day for Costco in its dataset going back through 2010, adding that the average Costco customer had spent 20% more year over year in the first half of March.

In the company's second quarter conference call on March 5, CFO Richard Galanti noted that rub off sales seemed to accompany the rush to Costco clubs with patio furniture, for one, selling "extremely well." If patio furniture sales per customer were down a bit, the volume of traffic made up for it. Patio furniture is an indication that at least some consumers purchasing in response to coronavirus concerns already are using Costco as a shopping resource in ways they didn't intend and that is likely to continue as existing and new members interact with the store.

According to foot traffic tracker Placer.ai, Costco enjoyed a 19.1% increase in shopper visits during the first week of March and 31.7% gain in the month's second week before falling below previous year's numbers as restrictions to consumer movement and

shopper density on sales floors began to kick in. Costco traffic also felt the effects of its relative concentration of stores on the east and west coasts, which suffered a higher than average volume of coronavirus illnesses. The dent in store traffic led to generally anemic April comparable sales, down 0.5% overall and flat in the U.S., but e-commerce comps jumped 87.7%.

Ethan Chernofsky, vp/marketing at Placer.ai, said that Costco is a retailer that can operate successful initiatives because it has a clear sense of its own identity and how to deliver a gratifying shopping experience that meets or exceeds the customer expectation.

"People have to walk out of the store glad they did," he said. "At Costco, people always buy more than expected at tremendous value."

The early increase in store traffic gave Costco the opportunity to promote its online operation, which has enjoyed great gains of late. Costco actually has a fair assortment of grocery and household needs available online as well as other product categories that have been in high demand for consumers dealing with work and play issues at home, including patio and office furniture.

As May opened, Costco launched an online "Home Savings Event," featuring patio but also living room, bedroom and dining furniture, promoted at the head of its online landing page right next to a banner for a sale on do-it-yourself products, another category that heated up as stay-at-home requirements expanded. Other promotions, revolving across the top of the landing page, involved kitchen basics/major appliances, which have seen success as part of what has been broadly defined as a domestic comfort category established as consumers quarantine themselves at home.

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"At Costco, people always buy more than expected at tremendous value."

—Ethan Chernofsky,
Placer.ai



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Signage and store employees reflect Home Depot's health and safety measures.

Home Depot Maintaining Momentum As Recovery Hub

ATLANTA— Home Depot has experienced some tailwinds through the buffets of the COVID-19 pandemic, as experienced by the home center/hardware channel, that should position it to maintain momentum through the next stages of recovery from the crisis.

After gaining designation as essential businesses, home centers/hardware stores remained open as the crisis descended despite other retail shutdowns. The designation turned out to be a double benefit as consumers who couldn't get household essentials and cleaning products from their typical sources turned to Home Depot and other retailers who they otherwise would tap for DIY products. Then consumers started shopping for items to help with lawn and garden and minor home repair projects as they sought a good way to occupy their time while subject to stay-at-home requirements.

To deal with the coronavirus-impacted retail environment, Home Depot institutes customer and employee health safety measures and cancelled all of its spring promotions to avoid driving too much foot traffic to stores. At the same time, it adapted some services including to-vehicle delivery of products as well as the experience of helping consumers deal with extreme events such as hurricanes to better serve the range of customers during the COVID-19

outbreak. Home Depot spokesperson, Christina Cornell, said the company had seen "increased demand for curbside pickup and delivery, and we've expanded curbside pickup to the majority of our stores nationwide."

She added, "As an essential retailer, we know the communities we serve look to us to provide vital products, which is why we're committed to keeping stores open just as we always do during times of crisis and natural disaster. If you have a plumbing leak, or if your hot water heater goes out, home improvement stores become incredibly important to find urgent repair needs. Plus, a lot of pros depend on us to continue serving their customers. Our stores and supply chain teams have done a phenomenal job pivoting and adapting to increased demand in certain product categories."

Although prospects for Home Depot are positive, Matt Zielenski, an analyst with The Freedonia Group, a division of MarketResearch.com, said DIY retailers benefited from extra foot traffic where allowable as consumer movement restrictions spread. At that point, Home Depot has to manage in a suddenly altered store environment.

He added, "That has led to harder hit areas— like Michigan and New York— to restrict in-person sales of lawn and garden products so that those and other

product groupings that are considered nonessential are closed to in-person shopping. We expect this trend to play out, to some degree, as more consumers become economically anxious and unwilling to spend on all but the most important repairs. However, as the weather continues to improve, we expect sales in the garden category to pick up, albeit with greater emphasis on delivered products or curbside pickup."

Home centers/hardware stores continue to enjoy an opportunity to expand their customer base. As some regions of the U.S. continue to experience broad consumer movement restrictions, Zielenski said, when DIY retailers get consumers to shop the store or shop it more often, "those customers are more likely to pick up other items like accessories for their grill or items to entertain their children, and maybe even plan future projects."

The movement of Millennials into more suburban locations over the past couple of years as they begin raising families has provided Home Depot with the chance to position itself as a solutions center where new homeowners can not only purchase needed products but also learn about home repair and renovation through personal interaction with staff or through online presentations.

"Just being available to help customers solve problems in this crisis period will help build loyalty in the future," Zielenski said. "New homeowners are probably feeling pretty on their own right now. This is where retailers can step in. While physical distancing guidelines are restricting their ability to offer in-person classes, even having online instructional videos for common projects, including consumer education on selecting products needed for sea-

"As an essential retailer, we know the communities we serve look to us to provide vital products."

—Christina Cornell,
The Home Depot

sonal outdoor projects, will help."

Just how much traction Home Depot can pick up with consumers in the coronavirus-hobbled marketplace is hard to estimate, Josh Winters, a Euromonitor analyst, noted. Yet, by communicating the support it can offer to consumers who are looking to save money doing their own home renovations, Home Depot can leverage the current market conditions to build a relationship with the next generation of core customers. Home Depot is in a position to make ground with "younger people wanting to do renovations, wanting to do DIY, and seeking out that expertise," Winters said.

One question that looms over Home Depot's prospects is whether or not the current recessionary economic environment will set it back. Two schools of thought emerge, one that consumers will pull back their spending on domestic projects, the other that economic worries will make consumers take on more home repairs themselves. Many consumers who visited Home Depot during their household confinements now understand that it is a broader product purveyor.

Although Euromonitor does predict that the second quarter will begin a gradual deceleration of home center/hardware store channel sales, the market research firm also noted small home projects should keep consumers involved with the channel as it turns positive in the relative short term.

Euromonitor suggested that the coronavirus crisis could prompt major home centers including Home Depot to reconsider what it characterized as an underused online operation. The company recently launched television advertising for furniture, a product category it hasn't emphasized in some time. Considering that furniture is an online business for Home Depot, that reconsideration may be in progress. **HWB**





Kroger has introduced a range of safety measures for employees and consumers.

Community Key To Kroger's Blueprint For Business

CINCINNATI— Kroger is entering a new phase in its development influenced by the coronavirus crisis but with deeper roots and a definite vision of a future when the company will have more ways to engage consumers.

As it has dealt with the COVID-19 pandemic, Kroger issued the report “Sharing What We’ve Learned: A Blueprint for Businesses,” detailing what it has learned about keeping employees and customers safe. Rodney McMullen, Kroger’s chairman and CEO, positioned it by asserting, “Our stores are the centers of our communities.”

The blueprint includes best practices for maintaining a safe retail environment as well as ideas about how companies can deal with issues regarding people, sourcing, manufacturing, supply chain and communications, but central to it is Kroger’s basic vision of itself as a key community resource, an idea that has become a strategic cornerstone.

In 2017, the company instituted a strategy it calls Restock Kroger to build on its foremost role as a traditional local supermarket operator into an omnichannel retailer that can serve consumers.

The coronavirus outbreak gives Kroger the chance to accelerate initiatives that can speed it to the ultimate goal. The company has been investing in technology that has advanced its ability

to gather data and manage consumer relationships. It acquired Dunnhumby USA as a wholly owned offshoot of the British research firm that helped Tesco establish its renowned loyalty program. In both cases, the program generates data subject to sophisticated analysis, allowing the retailer to customize propositions for consumers. Other Kroger technology has helped the company handle developments. For example, the company operates a system that tracks traffic into stores, which has helped Kroger maintain social distancing but also provides additional data it can review under any conditions.

Online shoppers already can choose delivery and pickup options on Kroger’s landing page. As such, Kroger already had resources available for consumers to use as movement restrictions and social distancing disturbed their shopping habits. As consumers take advantage of new services, the company not only gets a sales boost but also reams of new data it can apply in the next phase of its Restock Kroger strategy, which includes the employment of under construction Ocado fulfillment centers.

Curbside pickup and delivery services have limitations when established sources are involved, especially stores, where consumers and employees shop the same space, and attached labor costs and functional inefficiencies

weigh. Beyond that, they don’t address an issue Kroger faces moving forward with its omnichannel strategy.

Ethan Chernofsky, vp/marketing at Placer.ai, pointed out that traffic patterns and analysis demonstrates that Kroger stores don’t draw as do competitors perceived as having added value, such as Wegmans.

“That’s Kroger’s challenge,” he said. “It’s seen as a community grocer. That’s where they’ve struggled. They don’t have the value-added appeal.”

However, Chernofsky said, the COVID-19 pandemic has elevated the stature of the neighborhood supermarket as a lifeline for essential needs. It may convert some consumers who have been shopping more in other grocery formats into more enthusiastic customers of Kroger’s several banners. Perhaps more importantly to long-term strategy, Kroger can accumulate and draw data from consumers shopping and, as many consumers try its services, including pickup and delivery, for the first time, develop vital insights.

Kroger is advancing its partnership with Ocado, an online-only grocer that developed a fulfillment and delivery system in the United Kingdom using technology including automated fulfillment centers and artificial intelligence delivery routing. Recently, Ocado has been partnering with specific food retailers by essentially setting up those partners in its business. In the U.S., that’s Kroger.

Thomas Brereton, retail analyst for market research firm GlobalData, said the U.K. market has seen a significant expansion of grocery delivery in urban areas. Ocado has an urban focus, and so is operating in a competitive market segment by leveraging a specific approach to the consumer. In the U.K., he said Ocado filled “a gap in the already developing arena. It has targeted younger, affluent shoppers.”

Ocado has emerged as an important

“Our stores are the centers of our communities.”

—Rodney McMullen,
Kroger

British food and grocery segment presence. Brereton pointed out, “Ocado continues to grow fast and have a strongly positive growth outlook. It sits within a high growth market, and is expanding to new U.K. regions, so growth will likely remain double-digit for the foreseeable future.”

Not only does its success suggest that its Ocado partnership will give Kroger a lift in the delivery arena, but the positioning and expertise as a specialist in urban geographies could prove complementary to the advantages the U.S. retailer brings in serving primarily suburban and exurban communities.

“Ocado’s greatest strength lies in its fulfillment automation and data collection,” Brereton said. “Greater initial investment in tech allows it to keep long-term employee costs low compared to rivals and provides capital for other, more adventurous exploratory routes.”

In April, Ocado launched its other partnership in North America, with Sobeys in Canada. In reviewing that development, Brereton observed that the opening of one of Ocado’s automation-heavy customer fulfillment centers in Canada provided timely, as it prepared to open as coronavirus-related demand swelled. He noted that 29.2% of global consumers now spend more time shopping for food online. As the market has evolved, Ocado’s automated fulfillment center provides solutions to delivery challenges, allowing the partner quick access to accelerating online demand. A view on Sobeys integration of Ocado systems should offer some insight into Kroger prospects. **HWB**



Target's Omnichannel Efforts Positioned For Continued Growth

MINNEAPOLIS— Target has enjoyed success over the past couple of decades as it became a true national mid-market omnichannel retailer, and even if it has struggled at times through that period, the company may have gotten itself in just the right position to meet the challenges of the COVID-19 outbreak and post-pandemic environment.

Target troubles included a quickly abandoned initiative in Canada and a fresh food and grocery expansion that taxed its store model, which occasioned a change in management that brought former Sam's Club runner Brian Cornell in as CEO. He quickly refocused the company's approach to store-level merchandising and reconfigured the omnichannel element to leverage the store network with buy-online-pick-up-in store operations that included front-of-the-sales-floor desks for easy product retrieval. Target already had been developing formats for urban locations that, besides in-store sales, boosted its ability to entice city dwellers into purchasing online and picking up a range of online merchandise at those dedicated desks.

Then, in what now can be considered a coup, Target acquired the subscription same-day delivery company Shipt, which has been busy delivering for it and other retailers, including the supermarkets and drug stores the operation has signed up. Shipt CEO Kelly Caruso, in early April noted that the operation had set out to add 70,000 shoppers to an employee-base that picks up products in stores for delivery to consumers ordering the goods. She added that, by April's end, Shipt planned to double the number of shoppers it employed, which will leave Target with a more robust delivery subsidiary as more normal market conditions return.

Target's flight into and beyond the coronavirus crisis began in February, when it began to feel the effects of the pandemic in stores. Comparable sales began to gather steam. Target enjoyed a 3.8% comp advance for the month, with gains across multiple categories.

In mid-March, traffic and sales surged, while category mix became heavily concentrated in the essentials and food and beverage segments. Sales trends moderated later in the month with shelter in place instructions becoming more prevalent. At that point, according to Target, in-store sales weakened even as digital sales accelerated dramatically. For the month in total, comparable sales increased in the low double digits, reflecting mid-single digit growth in stores and more than 100% gains in Target's digital channels. Across the company's merchandise assortment, March comparable sales increased about 40% in both essentials and food and beverage, Target maintained, and by about 20% in hardlines. For the month, comparable sales declined in the low single digits in home and more than 30% in apparel.

Late March sales trends improved beginning April



Target has been expanding its Shipt delivery services.

“While we expect our short-term profitability to be affected by COVID-19, we expect to have the financial capacity to emerge from this crisis in a position of strength.”

—Michael Fiddelke, Target

15. In the month up to about April 22, comparable sales increased more than 5%, with store comps down in the mid-teens but digital comps up more than 275%. At that point, core category comps had grown more than 12% in both essentials and food and beverage, better than 30% in hardlines and in the high teens across home segments.

In terms of store visits, things were picking up again. According to store traffic tracker Placer.ai, Target enjoyed more store visits in the second week of April versus the one before turning around a trend that had begun in early March, even if the gain was only 1%. A week later though, Target gained more momentum with foot traffic up 19.4%.

At the same time, a shift to lower margin categories had a negative effect on bottom line performance, but Target saw positives in the circumstances.

“While we expect our short-term profitability to be affected by COVID-19, we expect to have the financial capacity to emerge from this crisis in a position of strength,” said Target evp and CFO Michael Fiddelke. “Having established an even stronger bond with our guests during this unprecedented time, we expect to have a compelling long-term opportunity to grow profitably and gain additional market share in the years ahead.”

By April 24, as part of the Reuters Events seminar “COVID19: Supply and Demand Management,” Alexander Wheeler, Target senior director, food supply chain, said the company has had success shifting operations toward digital and fulfillment, and is looking to define recovery parameters. March was a turning point, Wheeler said, particularly in major cities hit early with stay at home orders.

Still, Target was fortunate in its Shipt acquisition, Wheeler said, which helped the company keep moving volume as business across retail shifted online. The question at April's end became: How does the company pivot from responding to the near-term demands and start to get a footing on medium term adjustments? Target demonstrated to itself that it has built in the flexibility to quickly shift its online operations and fulfillment, he said. In store, the company quickly realigned schedules and assignments, transitioning, in one example, employees in the Starbucks operation into the main retail business, maximizing applied labor. Wheeler said that the Target experience responding to the coronavirus crisis put it in a better position to act as market conditions shift from a lockdown phase to what comes next.

Morgan Stanley analyst Simeon Gutman recently reduced his earnings per share estimate on Target, but the negative outlook was not exactly bleak.

“We temper our assumptions for both sales and margins in 2020, with gross margin pressure the main headwind to Target's near-term earnings power,” he indicated in a research note. “We model a meaningful improvement in 2021 as the economic backdrop normalizes.”

He asserted that a category mix shift away from lower-margin categories is likely as part of the e-commerce mix shift reverse. But he expects a higher level of permanent e-commerce penetration to occur, which suggests that Target's omnichannel strategy should gain traction out of the coronavirus crisis. **HWB**

One-Stop Shopping Appeal Vital To Walmart Market Advantage

BENTONVILLE, AR— It would be tough to find a retailer better suited to dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic as it has rolled across the U.S. than Walmart, and the retailer is almost certainly going to come out of the crisis stronger and more capable.

With the overwhelming majority of U.S. consumers living within 10 miles of a Walmart, the company is accessible with one-stop shopping appeal at a time when authorities are asking people to limit outside excursions, plus, in or through a growing proportion of its locations, available services include curbside pickup of groceries, pick up desks and towers, and delivery. Walmart has one of the most robust omnichannel operations going, providing another way for consumers to get vital products, whether important for day to day needs or to thrive in domestic confinement.

Walmart had another leg up as the reality of the COVID-19 outbreak took hold, its experience in China, where it operates hundreds of stores. At the 2020 UBS Global Consumer & Retail Conference in early March, Brett Biggs, Walmart's CFO, said that, in China, Walmart saw consumers buying more online during that country's coronavirus outbreak among other changes in behavior, so the company had some sense of what to expect in the U.S.

"Having an e-commerce business, having online grocery able to serve customers in really different ways, customers and associates knowing that we're caring for their safety, is important from a trust standpoint," he said.

As the coronavirus pandemic hit the U.S., Walmart's presence as a resource for absolute necessities helped to make

the retailer a convenient place where consumers could go for products that might make stay-at-home requirements more bearable.

As shelter in place guidelines and restrictions began to hit more communities in March, Walmart saw a surge in specific categories. By mid-April, clear patterns emerged. Not surprisingly, network connectivity and streaming devices registered dramatic sales gains, as did desks and office chairs, folding tables and TV trays.

Consumers spending additional time at home are, naturally, preparing more food at home, and often trying to make mealtimes more fun. Outdoor cooking items such as charcoal, wood pellets and grills grew in popularity, but so did indoor cooking appliances and microwaves. Bread makers saw a sales resurgence as many consumers became more determined to address their own particular preferences and, for families, initiate a potentially participatory activity. Products that could extend the shelf life of food gained, with in-demand products including freezers, plastic storage, vacuum seal machines and accessories, and canning supplies and accessories advancing.

Besides cooking, homebound consumers turned to domestic projects, boosting sales of interior paint and seeds. With many personal service providers having closed shop, sales of trimmers, hair coloring, nail care products, pet grooming items benefited, as did exercise, activity and gaming products.

COVID-19 has affected Walmart in any number of ways, including one close to home. The company decided to hold its 2020 annual shareholders' meeting on June 3 in a virtual meeting format, thus marking a profound change to a core part of the company's corporate culture.

Still, because the retailer has been pursuing so many initiatives that have turned out to suit the market as upended by the coronavirus, the developing situation has effectively become a catalyst helping to drive shoppers to try more of Walmart services faster than they otherwise might. Of course, online grocery has been a critical driver behind much new consumer behavior as experienced at Walmart.

According to Coresight Research,



Walmart has implemented social distancing in its stores, limiting the number of customers in the store.



Safety measures at Walmart include plexiglass shields at checkout.

"Having an e-commerce business, having online grocery able to serve customers in really different ways, is important from a trust standpoint."

—Brett Biggs,
Walmart

the proportion of Walmart shoppers who purchase some, much or all of their groceries online surpassed 40% in a 2020 March survey compared to about a third in a study conducted a year earlier. Today, 52.3% of online grocery shoppers say they purchase from Walmart, up about 15% from last year and only about 10 points shy of the Amazon number. No other major online grocery seller had anything like a 15-point gain and Amazon came in flat year over year.

Walmart continues to bring more convenient options to consumers. In a service it rushed in getting to the COVID-19 marketplace, Walmart has begun rolling out Express Delivery, a new service that delivers from the store to customer doors in less than two hours. Walmart accelerated the development of the service, testing Express Delivery in 100 stores beginning in mid-April. Walmart set a goal of expanding the service to about 1,000 stores by early May and to almost 2,000 total stores over the following weeks. Express Delivery customers can order from more than 160,000 items from Walmart's food, consumables and general merchandise assortment including groceries, household items and electronics. And, like Walmart pickup

and existing delivery services, it will be a no-contact means of interacting.

In early May, Walmart CEO Doug McMillon stated that, even before the coronavirus crisis, Walmart's online pickup and delivery operations were enjoying significant gains that accelerated as social distancing became the norm in spring. He added that people who have embraced new Walmart services in that period are likely to view them as just another part of what's normal in a post-coronavirus crisis world.

Daniel Keyes, research analyst at Business Insider Intelligence, said he expects Walmart to continue advancing its major omnichannel initiatives and enhance its methods of reaching out to consumers by applying lessons it has learned overseas in some operations that are very different than those it runs across the U.S., and by looking at fulfillment automation and use of dark stores to distribute groceries and other merchandise. In the U.S., Walmart can be Walmart in new ways, focusing on the big middle of the market as it leverages its distribution and technical abilities to push others toward extremes of the marketplace it doesn't covet.

"Walmart can reach just about all consumers," Keyes said. "It can't serve them all, but it can serve huge groups." **HWB**

KitchenAid launched its #MakeItTogether social media campaign to highlight comfort cooking at home.

Galanz noted that more consumers are purchasing through online retail channels.

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Kalorik Marks Milestone With New Partnerships

MIAMI GARDENS, FL— Kalorik is marking its 90th anniversary this year with a host of fresh and innovative products, licensing and marketing programs, including a new licensing agreement with “Mad Hungry” television personality and cookbook author Lucinda Scala Quinn; a new limited edition air fryer illustrated by French artist Luiza Laffitte; and a new line of “rapid” appliances developed in partnership with the technology firm Strix.

“We are very excited about this new collection with Mad Hungry and Lucinda Scala Quinn, because we are known for offering differentiated products and we feel this fits in well with our brand philosophy,” said Kim Misrahi, brand and marketing manager, Kalorik. “The Mad Hungry brand is based around a love of cooking, a love of family, and Lucinda teaching her three sons to cook. It has a very authentic quality that really resonates with consumers.”

Formerly food director for Martha Stewart Living, Lucinda Scala Quinn created her own version of the spurtle, a traditional Scottish porridge stirring stick that she describes as being “not quite a spoon, not quite a spatula.” Her version of the spurtle sold more than 5 million units on QVC, the company said.

Kalorik launched its Mad Hungry Spurtle set with an As Seen On TV infomercial on May 11. The products will roll out to general retail distribution online and in stores this summer.

The set includes an Original Spurtle, a Slotted Spurtle, a Medium Spurtle and a Skinny Spurtle, retailing for \$19.99. Accessories include a Spurtle Rest and an Offset Spurtle, selling for \$12.99 each. The initial set is made of acacia wood; versions made from bamboo, cherry, olivewood and silicone are in development. A variety of finishes will be available on the different woods and retails will range up to



Kalorik partnered with Strix to develop a Rapid line of appliances, including a kettle that boils water faster.

\$29.99 depending on the material and finish.

“This is one tool that does it all,” Misrahi said. “We will be promoting this extensively through social media and supporting our retail distribution with special in-store displays and marketing materials.”

Kalorik also turned to social media to develop a special limited edition air fryer to commemorate the company’s 90th anniversary.

“We celebrated Kalorik’s 90th anniversary by partnering with a talented French illustrator artist Luiza Laffitte and four social media influencers to create four spectacular designs based on what inspires each influencer,” Misrahi noted. “Fans and followers were invited to vote for their favorite design. The winning design is being printed on our top-selling 5.3-quart Air Fryer Pro— it is a bright, beautiful design inspired by the trend towards healthy living.”

The social media contest generated 1.3 million total impressions and reached 800,000 consumers, according to Misrahi. The special limited edition unit retails for \$149. Kalorik will donate \$10 from every limited edition air fryer sold to Feed My Starving Children, enough to provide 40 healthy, nutritious meals for hungry children in need.

Kalorik also is continuing its emphasis on innovation and technology. Earlier this year, the company launched the Maxx Air Fryer Oven, a 26-quart unit that uses “innovative Turbo Maxx technology to cook 25% to 30% faster than leading air fryer ovens, and with the unique ability to sear and grill,” Misrahi noted. “Consumers are looking for more convenience, speed and multi-functionality in cooking options. This one countertop oven combines the features of 10 appliances in one: air fryer, roaster, broiler, rotisserie, dehydrator, oven, toaster, pizza oven and slow cook-

Kalorik teamed with artist Luiza Laffitte for its 90th anniversary special edition air fryer.



Kalorik’s Rapid two-slice toaster is designed to toast 50% faster.

er.” The Maxx Air Fryer Oven retails for \$199.99.

Kalorik also is spotlighting technology in its new Rapid line of appliances, developed in partnership with Strix, a leading supplier of appliance controls. “We’ve engineered a new Rapid line of appliances, creating a toaster that toasts 50% faster and a kettle that boils water 20% faster,” Misrahi explained. “Strix is known for superior engineering, and these two units bring that engineering into products that people use every day.”

The Rapid boil electric kettle boasts 1,750 watts and retails for \$29.99. The two-slice toaster is a 350-watt unit and sells for \$39.99.

“Many consumers are looking for compact appliances, and say they don’t want a conventional four-slice toaster because it takes up too much counter space,” Misrahi said. “Because our toaster works 50% faster, they don’t need a four-slice unit.”

“Our mission always has been to listen to the consumer and develop products that best meet their needs,” she added. “Today’s consumers are looking for products that fit into their changing lifestyles, and we are using groundbreaking technologies to make cooking faster, easier and healthier.” **HWB**

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The Ultimate
Air Fryer Oven



2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS

E-Commerce

continued from page 22

Made By Gather founder and CEO Shae Hong pointed out, “Research tells us that

consumers expect to continue cooking at home more often post-crisis. That said, retailers with a broad product offering that includes both general merchandise and grocery are likely well-positioned to gain share in kitchen electrics.”

Madeline Frank, sales and marketing coordinator for Metal Ware Corp./Nesco, said, “Our retail partners with e-commerce sites have been doing very well; we’ve seen significant growth in sales.” Many suppliers said Amazon

has been one of the biggest beneficiaries of this trend. “Amazon has become critically-important to many consumers, especially during this crisis,” one manufacturer said. Several suppliers said Walmart is leading the integra-

tion of e-commerce and in-store. Its buy online, pick up in store policies have been successful. Walmart has taken steps during the crisis to bring even more consumers to its stores, including opening COVID-19 screening centers in its parking lots. “They are the one retailer doing everything really, really well during this crisis,” said one vendor.

The stay-at-home restrictions actually have benefited kitchen electrics, causing spiking sales.

Peter Weedfald, Sharp svp/sales and marketing, noted, “There are a few things I would look for among those retailers who plan to succeed through this crisis: First, expose, aim, and ignite your product, brand, and messaging advantage versus the number one market leader’s position. Second, focus resources to work smartly. Third, recognize and act upon uncontested product areas, differentiation and channel opportunities. And fourth, own your radius trading area, period. Retailers should set up daily delivery service within a five-mile radius of each store location to best serve their current customers, find new customers, and build instant competitive advantage in their localized market. If you profit your customers during this crisis, they will profit you for years to come.”



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More consumers are cooking at home during the pandemic, noted Made By Gather.

*In sales amount within the category of rice cookers with a retail value of \$100 or more (February 2018 U.S. Small Domestic Appliance & Housewares Point-of-Sale Report by NPD Group, Inc.)

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Cook & Bake

Bread Baking On The Rise

BY EMILY CAPPIELLO
Contributing Editor

NEW YORK— As consumers are spending more time at home during this time of social distancing, many are looking to the comforts of the kitchen to provide some normalcy. Others are delving into home cooking and baking projects that they never felt they had the time for before now. However, none have become more popular than baking bread. Yeast and flour have been in short supply around the country, while social media pages have been inundated with photos of homemade baguettes, sourdoughs and challahs.

“As options for freshly baked bread has lessened, consumers have engaged in baking bread and many other sweet and savory treats. We believe that as consumers’ lifestyles have shifted, it has presented them with an opportunity to engage/re-engage with home cooking and baking. We also feel that it makes consumers feel good about preparing homemade bread for their families,” said Steve Campise, kitchenware division president, Lifetime Brands.



Lifetime Brands' Chicago Metallic non-stick perforated baguette pan.

In turn, the trend has helped grow the cookware and bakeware products that allow these consumers to achieve their ideal baked product, according to vendors.

Tara Steffen, vp/marketing, Emile Henry USA, has seen a rise in sales of the company’s 4.2-quart ceramic Dutch oven, which was what Jim Lahey’s no-knead bread recipe uses, as well as its bread clothes. John White, business director of Robinson Home Products, noted that he seen a bump

in non-stick carbon steel loaf pans because of the demand for home-baked bread. Bradshaw Home’s Keri Anderson, senior product manager of bakeware, said not only are more traditional loaf pans gaining traction in the market, but complementary products that touch the bread category, like pizza pans and cake pans for pizza crusts and dinner rolls, are also in-demand.

The growth, Steffen explained, is due to the fact that many consumers are opting to use traditional cookware and bakeware for baking bread than turning to machines. She noted that since people have more time, they want to be fully engaged throughout the bread baking process, from kneading to observing the way the bread rises.

“Baking bread in a pan is more involved and more satisfying than baking in a machine. A baker can see and smell the bread rising and then baking in the oven. It is part of the bread making process to watch and anticipate the forthcoming bread. The process of baking bread in the oven in pans is more hands-on. The results are different, too,” she said.

John Bundy, director, USA Pan, explained that the company has seen growth across all of its bakeware lines, but particularly bread-based products. He believes that consumers are enjoying the hands-on factor when making

continued on page 34



Consumers are reengaging with baking bread and other treats. Shown: Lifetime's Chicago Metallic popover pan.

2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS

Nimble Retailers Adapting To New Challenges

NEW YORK— The coronavirus pandemic has caused the retail world to face unprecedented challenges in a climate that was already challenging. Retailers were just beginning to pivot into new, convenient and more novel consumer experiences as COVID-19 hit. The increased unemployment rate, fear of spending, supply chain disruption and quickly shifting consumer demands not only disrupted any progress made on those new initiatives but forced them to become nimble, which is not always easy for a large retailer.

Cookware and bakeware manufacturers have pointed to the mainstays, Amazon, Walmart, Target, Costco, Kroger and Home Depot as their retail champions of 2020, as they have become increasingly transparent, easy to work with and continued to move the supply chain along as quickly and easily as possible.

At the beginning of this pandemic, manufacturers that spoke to HomeWorld Business noted that they weren’t sure if these retail

continued on page 32



Target has been able to grow its cookware assortments in-store and online.

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GreenPan teamed with lifestyle brand Goop to offer an exclusive blush colored cookware line.

Lifestyle Outlets Raising Profile Of Cookware's Personal Style

NEW YORK— Not only have consumer shopping preferences shifted, but now purchasers are also looking to create a fuller lifestyle image of themselves through their purchases. While there has been a focus on home décor and furniture as part of this, there are a growing number of consumers that now want cookware and bakeware pieces that reflect their personal style. While some consumers still put functionality before design, others want what they cook on and in to be as cohesive as the rest of their homes, whether the product has an oven-to-table focus or not.

As this demand continues to grow, cookware and bakeware vendors have found ways to take advantage of this trend. This applies to both major vendors, smaller, craft manufacturers and even start-ups that have recognized the growth potential in this lifestyle sales channel, which has continued to see growth. From lifestyle website Goop to in-store merchandise at stores like Anthropologie and even as a component to mail-order Fab Fit Fun boxes, cookware is turning towards these new channels to capture sales and consumers.

"The products we buy are always

extensions of our interests, showing what's important to us. Lifestyle shops are all catering to people with specifically curated tastes and sensibilities, and a lot of that comes down to style and story. How do we want our lives to look to the rest of the world? What is the story we're telling ourselves about ourselves," said Matt Cavallaro, founder of cast iron cookware company Nest Homeware.

In recent years, there has been a return to cooking and baking at home, although there are three distinct consumer types to be marketed to— those who cook and bake to entertain; those who cook and bake as a hobby; and those who cook and bake out of convenience. However, it seems that no matter what the target is, the way people are feeding themselves and their families have become more than just meals.

"Cooking and eating have always been important at home, but dietary choices have become more a part of people's personal brands as well. Now more than ever, where, what, or how someone eats can be reflective of their interests, passions, and lifestyle, all the more so because we're all

making it so visible to our social circles on Instagram. To that end, the cookware and cooking tools that we work with can be reflective of our design sense, our cooking prowess, and whether or not we're socially conscious," said Cavallaro, who stocks his wares alongside women's clothing at Anthropologie and on the store's website.

He said the brands have been working together since 2016 in a dropship capacity. Cavallaro noted that Anthropologie took the time to discuss the handcrafted nature of the cookware and have been an advocate in communicating that story to consumers.

"Being included in Anthropologie's offering gives loyal customers faith in what they're purchasing from us. If they trust Anthropologie, they can trust us too. Consumers are more aware, and more interested these days, in where and how their products are made. The fact that Anthropologie is aligning their brand with companies like ours that have very specific values and fit with their visual look, is great for them, and great for us," he said.

Additionally, he said that being able to offer Nest Homeware in a store dedicated to women's clothing and accessories allows potential consumers the ability to picture cookware and bakeware pieces in their homes and how it fits into all aspects of the lifestyle they are shaping.

"Having a visually cohesive, aspirational offering of products gives customers plenty to reference and return to when thinking about what they want their homes to feel like. Cookware is totally a part of that. Lifestyle shops are great at recognizing the eclectic nature of their customers' interests and assembling offerings of different brands that reflect those interests," he said.

Deeb Lati, sales and marketing specialist at Phantom Chef, said he feels consumer behavior has shifted since influencers started becoming mainstream. This made consumers reflect on their own personal brands or how they portray themselves not only on social media but in real life as well.

"Cookware has been a mundane commodity that consumers have always used out of necessity and not really caring about the way it looks or the style. Now, consumers and cooks all over the world can look to cookware to provide their basic commodity in an elevated, styled way that fits into their lifestyle and decor," he said.

Recently, Phantom Cookware, which manufactures a line of colored non-stick cookware, entered into a partnership with a company that ships consumers a curated box of goods from lifestyle editors. The box is distributed seasonally and includes a mix of beauty, wellness, fashion, fitness, home, or tech items. Lati explained that being included in a lifestyle box will not only give him more exposure, but will allow Phantom Chef to incorporate more easily into the personal brands that have become so important to consumers.

"Most online sites or boxes will not

continued on page 32

Nest Homeware has seen success with lifestyle retailer Anthropologie.



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Consumers have been replacing cookware and bakeware products, vendors said.

2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS

Nimble Retailers

continued from page 28

channels would be able to see sales and keep the supply chain moving, as many missed major order deadlines and began requesting to readjust payment terms. However, as things settled and strategic plans were put into place, these retailers were able to right the ship to the best of their ability.

According to vendors, Amazon has the largest breath of assortment in cookware and bakeware categories, and they struggled to keep up during this time. The company shut down ordering and prioritized essential items for several weeks, but eventually started ordering and filling the depleted inventories.

"Niche housewares items have been very successful, and the consumer has been replacing cookware, bakeware and kitchen gadgets," a vendor said.

Target, meanwhile, continued to ensure its target audience didn't get lost in the shuffle and confusion of the pandemic, catering to their

needs as much as they could. This, said vendors, will allow the retailer to carry its consumer loyalty beyond the crisis. While their selection is not as large as Amazon or Walmart, vendors anticipate that during this time, they have widened their scope as some manufacturers were squeezed, which can help them in the long run.

"I think this assortment fits the Target customer well and if online continues to broaden in product assortment, they will only capture more market share," noted a vendor.

Those that begin implementing expansive omnichannel programs, like order online and pick-up in store, will continue to weather this storm a bit easier than others, said sources, because of their ability for minimal interaction as well as convenience. Although, this is also hindered by demand, as consumers are overwhelming the system. This, too, has plagued home delivery, especially via Amazon, as shipping times for non-essential items have decreased.

Kroger has been especially praised by manufacturers during the COVID-19 pandemic, as it has not only made a commitment to its customers to have products in-stock, but it has also unveiled a "hero bonus" for its employees. The chain responded quickly to consumer demand through sharp analysis of purchases, and was able to get ahead of the curve.

Cookware and bakeware does have a unique advantage as far as sales go, said manufacturers, as many consumers have been under social distancing orders and have been cooking at home more often. Manufacturers have noted a jump in sales, especially from these retailers, as people are upgrading or replacing their cookware.



Omnichannel retailers have captured cookware sales, vendors said.

Lifestyle Outlets

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only sell one category. Consumers may find themselves browsing and coming across cookware they didn't think they needed, but now undeniably want or aspire to have in their kitchens. It's all a domino effect. We subconsciously are building our own personal brand. That is also reflected in cookware purchases," he said.

GreenPan, a subsidiary of The Cookware Company, has developed a partnership with Goop, a wellness and lifestyle company founded by actress Gwyneth Paltrow. The main focus of Goop has been editorial, as the brand highlights articles about everything from travel to the next blockbuster book for summer. However, it began curating an online store that is reflective of the brand's mission.

At the end of 2019, GreenPan launched a partnership with Goop in which it would offer an exclusive color of its Padova cookware, Blush, as well as unique configurations that would not be found anywhere else. Now, the company has grown its offerings with the online lifestyle brand as its consumers visualize those products in their home. GreenPan continues to offer its Padova cookware in blush, as well as in light blue as Goop exclusives, both as full sets and exclusive fry pan configurations. However, as a reflection of how the cookware has made a mark on Goop's audience, the brand has made a number

of stainless steel and other non-stick options available to its consumers.

According to vendors, there will be growth for cookware and bakeware companies in this lifestyle retail channel. This will be a combination of consumers wanting to obtain a lifestyle that may previously had been aspirational; a return to the kitchen, the heart of the home; and the continued photo- and video-driven sharing that takes place via social media outlets.

"Cooking is a part of people's personal brands, and it's exciting because there are so many ways to cook food. There's room for every consumer and every company to share in this movement because everyone is different. I think that lifestyle shops of every kind recognize that and will be bringing in their appropriate cookware partners to serve their customers over time," said Cavallaro.

Phantom Chef's Lati said he feels people will be more critical of their housewares, now that many have been forced to spend more time at home, and will be looking to make upgrades in the coming months.

"Throughout this whole pandemic, many people are turning to home cooking. As much as they will be checking out how their kitchens look, they will be analyzing what kind of pots and pans they are using as well. Whether the ones they had are old, outdated, or doesn't match their personal style, cookware is seeing a revolution in today's market," he said. **HWB**





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Robinson Home has seen a rise in baking among consumers. Shown: Studio Cuisine bakeware.



USA Pan reports growth in its bread-based products, such as mini loaf pans.

Bread Baking

continued from page 28

bread, while using more traditional methods allows for versatility in more than one way.

“When using a bread machine, loaves will typically be more rounded than having straight tight corners that are achieved in a pan. It’s easier to deviate from instructions and take liberties with ingredients when using a pan. Also, multiple recipes can be tried at the same time when using multiple pans,” he said.

Bradshaw’s Anderson noted that traditional cookware and bakeware pieces are more affordable than bread-making machines, allowing consumers that may be financially compromised by the pandemic a way to still bake bread at home without a hefty investment. While social

stay-at-home-orders have been the reason behind the bread boom, vendors are confident that this trend will stick when the pandemic is over, especially now that many home cooks and bakers are less intimidated by the process.

“We believe the current trend may slow slightly, but consumers are gaining greater comfort and confidence with more frequent practice. Whether a beginner baker or seasoned baking professional, many have engaged in the art of home baking and are providing high quality results for their family members to enjoy,” Lifetime’s Campise said.

Added Steffen, “Our new bread baking customers have said they have always wanted to try bread baking but didn’t have the time or the patience or the know-how. Now that they have jumped in and have become bread bakers, we think they will continue baking bread. They might not bake as often but they now know the joy of creating homemade bread.” **HWB**

Emile Henry noted that consumers are using traditional pieces to bake bread, such as its bread cloches.



Bread Accessories Heat Up

NEW YORK— In addition to the cookware and bakeware needed for bread baking, there is another component that has also seen increased sales during the coronavirus pandemic— brotform bread rising baskets.

“We have seen an unbelievable surge in brotform demand since the pandemic started,” said Mark Harris, evp/sales for Frieling USA.

According to the company, brotforms bread rising baskets are designed to help bread bakers yield a better rise, a crunchy ribbed crust, and more in-depth texture, echoing European-style breads. The baskets are made from natural cane and are available in round, rectangular, oval and baguette styles.

“It’s all about the process,” explained Harris, noting that brotforms help the dough rise to the occasion. “The brotform controls the proofing process for the dough and is a key component in creating the perfect crust. It’s a combination of the natural gaps in the banneton coils and the banneton metering the evaporation process.”

The company recently added brotform liners to its assortment as well, another product that has been seeing a pique in interest from consumers.

According to the company, the 100% cotton liner cradles the dough inside the brotform, preventing it from sticking during the second rise. Made in Poland, the liner is completely seamless, preventing a seam line on the finished loaf, while allowing for easy release, said Frieling.

The cotton liners are machine washable and easy to clean and can be used when serving bread in the brotform, keeping it clean when serving. They are available in seven sizes and styles, including round, oval, loaf and half baguette. The suggested retail prices for the liners range from \$11.95 to \$15.95.

As for if this trend will continue moving forward, Harris explained that he believes it will, based on the fact that many people are no longer afraid to take risks in the kitchen.

“We think that many of the things consumers are being forced to do right now will expand their comfort zone so that many of these tasks will be part of their standard routine in the future,” said Harris.



Frieling offers a range of brotform bread rising baskets.

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Oxo Shapes New Kitchenware For Range Of Food Prep Tasks

BY LAUREN DeBELLIS
Senior Editor

NEW YORK— Oxo has expanded its kitchenware assortment, adding new kitchen tools to help consumers prep, cook and serve their meals in more efficient ways.

This season, the company will roll out a new assortment of polished kitchen utensils. The new assortment

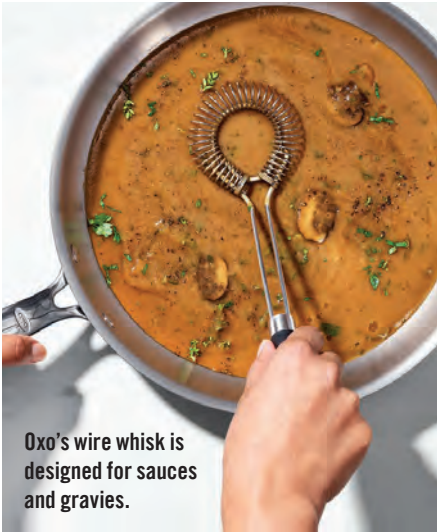
is made of stainless steel with a soft, comfortable non-slip handle. The polished line includes a carving fork, turner, slotted spoon and steel spoon. The company will also debut a new assortment of silicone utensils, designed with flexible edges designed to get food out of pans and bowls.

Oxo's assortment of new kitchen tools also includes a wired potato masher that has a rounded shape for improved mashing, and a cushioned non-slip handle for a comfortable grip.

Meanwhile, the new Oxo meat tenderizer also has a comfortable non-slip handle and the tenderizer is dual sided to include a texturized surface and a smooth surface.

The brand's new mini tongs are designed for smaller serving situations, such as for serving appetizers, charcuterie boards, as well as taking ingredients out of jars. The tongs are made of brushed stainless steel and lock for storage.

For fruit prep, Oxo has developed the mango slicer with scoop. The new 3-in-1 tool slices, pits and scoops



Oxo's wire whisk is designed for sauces and gravies.

mangos. The kitchen tool features a serrated blade that is designed to cut into mangos but is safe to the touch. The new tool also features a unique scoop that is designed to easily remove mango from the skin. It also features a soft non-slip handle.

Oxo's latest additions to its grater collection includes the Etched Ginger & Garlic grater, which has an etched stainless steel surface that is designed to create ginger or garlic paste. The high, sharp teeth is also helpful for grating fresh turmeric and horseradish. The grater comes with a cover that scrapes and catches all of the ingredients. It also features a non-slip grip handle.

The company has also introduced a new bi-directional stainless steel grater. It has a non-slip foot and is designed to grate ingredients such as

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Oxo is rolling out a new line of polished kitchen utensils.

2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS

Retail Leaders' Online Focus Key For Kitchenware

NEW YORK— Home cooking— and baking— have become an increasingly important activity as consumers continue to remain at home amid safety concerns surrounding the coronavirus. Whether the recipes they are tackling are basic or more advanced, the kitchenware necessary to assist with prep and food storage remain a priority purchase for many at retail, most of which has pivoted to online shopping.

"As consumers stock up on groceries to last more than a week, they are cooking meals and freezing them to stretch out each meal's 'shelf life.' This has resulted in an increased need for food storage containers in all sizes," said Riley Wells, senior product manager, Bradshaw Home.

As the retail champions HOMEWORLD BUSINESS® has cast a spotlight on amid the pandemic for their business efforts (Walmart, Target, Costco, Amazon, Home Depot and Kroger) have proven, consumers are still shopping at home and will respond to services, such as online shopping and curbside pickup.

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Wüsthof Positions Brand Message With Online Store

NORWALK, CT— Following its re-branding in 2019 that included a focus on its consumer outreach, Wüsthof has now launched its first e-commerce website store. The online store also emphasizes the company's refreshed brand identity, and signals the expanded retail debut of its Crafter cutlery line.

According to the company, while still available through the company's leading retail partners, Wüsthof's full product assortment can now be purchased at its new online destination: store. Wusthof.com.

"Our vision of Wüsthof selling direct to consumer was to create a way for our brand to more genuinely engage with our consumers. We believe consumers are looking to have direct relationships with the brands that they trust and we want to make that happen," said Adam Fischer, vp/marketing, Wüsthof USA.

In addition, he said that with the website, the brand wanted to create an easy-to-navigate platform that serves as a tool to help customers find exactly what they need to enhance their cooking experience no matter if they are

cooking at home or professionally.

The new website features include a Knife Finder, which helps the shopper identify the best knife for his or her specific needs. Shoppers can also choose to browse by product type as well by product line, selecting from any of eight collections, and the company is offering free shipping and returns on orders over \$89.

With the new website, the company has also expanded the availability of its Crafter line of cutlery, previously sold exclusively at Williams Sonoma.

The Crafter line celebrates the spirit of old-world craftsmanship with brass rivets and rich smoked oak handles, forged from a single blank of steel for balance and durability, the company said.

The assortment includes the following knife styles: paring; serrated utility; utility; six- and eight-inch cook's; hollow edge santoku; serrated bread; and a 10-inch super slicer. The line also features a set of four steak knives and a seven-piece knife set with wood block.

As for the timing of the launch, Fischer said that the current state of retail certainly was a driving factor in the decision to sell direct.

"The marketplace is constantly changing and consumer desires and expectations are changing too," he said. **HWB**

Wusthof has debuted its e-commerce shop and extended the availability of its Crafter cutlery line (below).



Oxo's insulated mixing bowls are available in three sizes.

Oxo

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hard cheeses, zucchini, carrots, chocolate, citrus and coconut.

The new Oxo sauce & gravy whisk is designed to whisk gravy, roux and sauces. It has a handle design that provides a comfortable grip and is made of durable stainless steel wires to mix ingredients thoroughly. The angled head and long handle enables consumers to reach into edges of pans.

Additional food prep introductions include a 5-quart colander, which features non-slip handles to provide comfort while straining large amounts of food. The wave-shaped base provides optimal water flow and stability, as well as elongated holes for efficient draining.

New prep bowls include a set of stainless steel insulated mixing bowls. Included in the colored set is a 1.5-quart bowl in oyster, 3-quart bowl in seltzer and 5-quart bowl in peppercorn colors. Each bowl features insulation that is designed to protect ingredients and hands depending on temperature changes.

Each of the bowls also features a non-slip base to stabilize the bowls while in use. The bowls nest for compact storage. A similar set of bowls in white is also available.

The company will also be adding to its assortment of non-electric coffee and tea makers and accessories.

The new French Press with GroundsLifter has an 8-cup capacity, and is ideal for making coffee for two or more people. The stainless steel housing protects the glass carafe, while the carafe keeps coffee hot. It also features soft, non-slip grips on the handle and

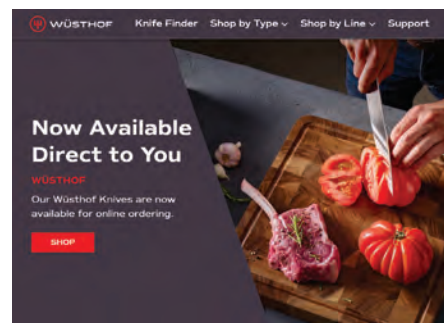
a stainless steel and silicone GroundsLifter for quick cleaning of coffee grounds. The new French press also includes a fine mesh stainless steel filter.

The new Oxo Tea Steeper with Mug-Top Dispensing is a 20-ounce non-electric tea maker. It is said to give tea space to bloom for maximum flavor extraction.

The mug-top dispensing starts straining tea as soon as the steeper is placed on a mug. It features a silicone handle that is designed to stay cool to the touch. The etched stainless steel filter keeps fine leaf particles contained. It is also designed to provide consumers with leakproof brewing on the countertop that makes up to two cups of tea at a time. It also has an easy-clean design that twists apart.

Oxo will also showcase its stainless steel reusable straws that feature a flexible silicone tip and its new extendable straws, also made of stainless steel with a silicone tip that slides for compact storage. The straws are all available with brushes and in various sets. **HWB**

New mini tongs from Oxo are designed for appetizers or other smaller servings.





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Personal Care Sales Growing As Consumers Do More At Home

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and other specialty providers.

Increasing connectivity, personalization and functionality are the key developments in skin and facial care, according to vendors.

“On the horizon, we see the category morphing into more personalization and customization, creating a more personalized experience for the consumer,” said Karen Duskow, director, consumer products, for Kline Group, a global market intelligence firm. “The watchwords are customization and connectivity, connecting devices with apps and using artificial intelligence to analyze skin tone, skin type, skin condition, storing and sharing the skin care data, before and after shots— this is what is going to take the category to the next level.”

Pretika Corporation has been in front of the smart personal care revolution, and introduced its SonicDermabrasion Facial Brush and SonicLift Facial Toning Device, both using connected skin care technology earlier this year.

“We’ve been working on these types of technologies for five years,” said Thomas Nichols, Pretika president. “The connected skin care arena is becoming much more important and really represents the future of the business.”

Zadro Products is spotlighting a range of high-tech advancements in makeup and shaving mirrors, including Bluetooth connectivity, LED three-col-

or lighting and its fogless technology.

“Our core has been to create products that make our customer’s everyday lives easier,” said Liz Zadro, director, Zadro Products. “As technology and engineering advances, we will continue to bring smart, but more importantly meaningful, functionality into our products. We believe that using the latest technology in personal care and wellness products gives our customers a more valuable experience.”

Zadro’s newest products include the Melrose LED Variable Light Bluetooth Vanity Mirror that features Hollywood-style bulb LED three-color lighting in office, daylight and evening settings, built-in Bluetooth speakers and microphone for listening to music or answering phone calls, and Smart Dimmer touch control pad.

“The consumer’s comfort level of tech within various market categories is constantly changing, so it’s our job to stay on top of those boundaries and make sure the product offering in personal care and wellness hits the mark of being a value-add to their life,” Zadro noted.

Westinghouse personal care products have seen sales increases during the pandemic. “During the current crisis, people are buying personal grooming items because they are doing more at home,” said Sarah Strasser, director of licensing, Best Accessory Group. “They can’t go to a salon for a facial, so they

are purchasing items like our facial brushes, or pore cleansers. They can’t go out and get a pedicure, so they are buying our callus removers.”

Similarly, Westinghouse men’s grooming products such as shavers and hair clippers are selling well, said Michael Cohen, vp/sales and division head, Best Accessory Group, noting multi-product sets are selling the best. “We offer a total body grooming collection, which allows us to offer sets encompassing various product configurations. These sets are proving to be extremely successful right now,” he said.

Wahl hair clippers and beard trimmers have been selling out during the crisis, according to Steven Yde, vp/Wahl. “The pandemic revealed the basic need for grooming and the psychological need to have some control in your life during a crisis,” he said. “Hair clippers are one of the essentials during the pandemic; if you walk into any store today, there is a good chance you will not find one clipper in the store. America is literally out of stock on clippers. Beard trimmers followed a week behind clippers and are likewise out of stock nearly everywhere.”

“Household penetration of hair clippers has increased during this pandemic, and while most will go back to barbers when this is over, some will continue to cut at home,” Yde added. “Even a 3% increase in penetration is worth over a half a million clippers per year, so the mid-term and long-term business looks solid. Likewise in beard trimmers, with people having the time to let their facial hair grow in, we expect growth as well.” **HWB**

Wahl said that its trimmers and clippers have been selling out during the pandemic.



Zadro’s new Melrose LED Bluetooth vanity mirror with smart control pad.



Pretika has advanced its smart SonicDermabrasion facial brush.



2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS

Sharp’s and other air cleaners have shown sales growth.



Comfort, Personal Care Categories Registering Online

NEW YORK— The global pandemic has not necessarily been bad for all businesses. Industry executives said sales in some categories, most notably personal grooming, air purifiers and humidifiers, have surged.

Online sales of personal care items have been bolstered by consumers sharing their experiences with the products on social media. Sales of home environment products have gotten a boost from social media discussions on the benefits of using air purifiers and humidifiers to improve indoor air quality.

In general, there has been a growing shift in sales of comfort, wellness and beauty products, suppliers said. “Direct sales are becoming a huge channel; we are also seeing a growing shift to online, away from brick and mortar,” one executive said. “This is because many of the products require explanation and education, which can happen more easily online.”

Online marketing definitely lends itself well to products that require an explanation, according to Sharp Home Electronics svp/sales and marketing, Peter Weedfald, who

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Tabletop's Lifestyle Focus Key To Reinspire Consumers

BY LAUREN DEBELLIS
Senior Editor

NEW YORK— While the tabletop industry is seeing a return to positive sales after weeks of slowdown as Americans sheltered at home, the challenge of recapturing consumer interest at retail— both online and in-store— remains as the country begins to reopen.

Many in the industry are brainstorming creative ways to appeal to consumers, often teaming up with one another to share their ideas.

Darbie Angell, founder/designer of the Darbie Angell line of tableware and accessories, and Deborah Shearer, founder and CEO of marketing/merchandising firm, Table + Dine, and designer behind the Table + Dine by Altoona Designs collection of paper placemats, are one such team of creatives shaping the industry as it takes its next steps.



Darbie Angell and Deborah Shearer's "Thankful" theme brings new interest to the table.

The two often team up to create lifestyle campaigns that showcase how consumers can use creative stylist tips, in order to elevate tablescapes at home. The collaborations are then often shared with both of their social media followers, consumers and retail partners alike in a way to inspire consumers as they seek out their next tabletop purchase, which for Millennials, is mostly conducted online.

This trend underscores the importance of bringing engaging, dynamic and inspirational content to consumers in a way that inspires them and helps them envision how they will use products they do purchase, to enhance their

home life, which Shearer said retailers should keep in mind moving forward.

"Stores may be opening on a limited basis, in some areas of the country, however, purchases will most likely still be online. Now is the time retailers should be ramping up their online presence, marketing and content initiatives for 'at home' and easy entertaining," she said.

Angell and Shearer work together to bring appealing, interactive and aspirational content to consumers in order to help them navigate purchasing decisions, be it for gifts or themselves.

"Deborah and I have been collaborating on tablescapes for the past five years, and have gotten such a great response on our techniques for setting tables that bring a cozy and welcoming feel to family and friends dining together," said Angell. "We love layering a table to make it feel more cozy, such as stacking bowls on top of one another to bring depth, or simply using a dinner plate, mug, and salad plate to make a quick dessert tower. There are so many tips and tricks that can elevate the table inside and out," she said.

One of their endeavors included styling a table featuring Angell's blue and white Watercolor dinner set topping each setting with a placecard adorned with the word "Thankful," written in calligraphy. The simple sentiment, said Angell, is something that can be done quickly yet brings new

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2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS

Tabletop Retailers Embrace New Opportunities

NEW YORK— As the country continues to remain safe at home, gathering around the table for meals, family game night or virtual cocktail hours seems to be a new normal consumers have embraced. And with the table becoming a more important part of a consumer's daily lives, the tableware accessories they place upon it have, too.

In the early weeks of the coronavirus pandemic, dinnerware, flatware, glassware and serveware may not have been top of mind as consumers scrambled to cook meals in bigger batches and set their home routines. However, due in part perhaps from celebrating Easter, Mother's Day or other important milestones such as birthdays and anniversaries or a daily cocktail hour at home, the tabletop category has picked up momentum.

"Tabletop is a category that originally started out slow the first few weeks, but has definitely rebounded. Retailers that are still open and operating are seeing 50% to 60% higher volumes than projected in



Darbie Angell and Deborah Shearer collaborate on tablescapes, such as this champagne and cupcake station.



Add silverware flair

Silverware can add sophistication to your place setting. Create interest with unique colors, materials or stamped patterns.

Target has appealed to consumers at home with tabletop tips and presentations.

dinnerware, drinkware, cookware and storage. Of particular interest has been the martini “quarantine” spike,” said Tena Hall, vp/consumer goods sales, Arc Americas.

As consumers have increased their cocktail and wine consumption, vendors reported that retailers have leveraged this trend and it has helped boost sales of glassware and companion pieces such as snack bowls, serving trays and similar accessories designed to enhance the overall cocktail hour at-home experience.

“Specific to retail, the rise of Internet-based selling has resulted in significant increases in glassware. Our retail partners with web platforms have been very creative in appealing to us as consumers while at home. We have also seen venues such as grocery that sell general merchandise show positive signs for in-store sales,” said Kevin Wellendorf, vp/sales and marketing, Bormioli Luigi Corporation.

He pointed out that from the Luigi Bormioli side of the business, it has seen an increase in online sales of stemware and tumblers. In addition, its Thermic range of beverageware designed for hot beverages has seen an uptick in sales, as well as its storage and preserving collections from the Bormioli Rocco business, all pointing to consumers seeking out products to support their comfort needs at home.

Mads Ryder, CEO, Lenox, agreed with this shift to, and increase in, online sales and has also seen a steady order flow to support it. In addition, he said the company is forecasting for a positive rebound as stores begin to reopen, and bridal registries start to open up as well.

Registries, he said, have all but stalled amid the crisis as weddings have been postponed due to social distancing regulations, Ryder said.

“As far as we have followed,

bridal is being postponed. We have customers that are bridal dominate and we believe it will see a catch up on that as weddings begin to take place once again,” he said.

In addition to bridal registries opening up again, Ryder said tabletop in general has the potential to see a boost in the coming months as consumers continue to embrace the

time spent home with family and perhaps close friends and continue to enjoy the return to basics many have embraced.

“Staying home has taught

continued on page 45

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Riedel Shapes Wine Lineup As Consumption Rises

EDISON, NJ— When it comes to wine consumption in the U.S., there’s no doubt it continues to be on the rise, especially as consumers seek out new ways to enjoy imbibing in the home.

According to recent data from Niel-

sen, combined U.S. dollar sales of wine from the company’s retail measurement were almost \$2.5 billion, an increase of nearly 30% versus one year prior.

Consumers are enjoying favorite wines, tasting new ones and seeking out

glassware that enhances the experience. Varietal-specific wine glasses in particular are in demand to support exploring new selections.

To support this trend, Riedel recently started shipping its new Winewings glassware assortment, designed to provide new shape wine tasting.

“As we continue to adjust to our new normal, we encourage consumers to find comfort and solace in the things they enjoy the most, such as unwinding with their favorite bottle of wine and the right glassware to enhance that varietal. Riedel is very proud to introduce new collections to our portfolio, especially Riedel Winewings, which take the enjoyment of wine to new heights through inventive shapes and sizes,” said Maximilian Riedel, CEO, Riedel.

Inspired by the wings of an airplane, Riedel Winewings debuts a sculptural expression of varietal specificity, in which the bowl is pushed upward to create a wider, flat-bottomed base, said the company. This shape creates the largest in-glass surface area and aeration space in any of Riedel’s collections.

The new Riedel Winewings reimagines varietal-specific shapes for: Cabernet Sauvignon, Pinot Noir/ Nebbiolo, Syrah/Shiraz, Riesling, Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc and Champagne. Each glass has a \$35 suggested retail price.

Another new glassware piece from Riedel is its High Performance Champagne flute. The company said this shape fuses hand-blown stems with Riedel’s machine-made optically blown champagne-specific bowls. The glass stands at a taller than typical 12.8 inches with stems in clear crystal, red and black. Each

stem has a suggested retail price of \$99.

The new Riedel Max is said to be inspired by the delicate long-stemmed roses that grow near the company’s headquarters in the Austrian Alps and debuts the highest stems in Riedel’s machine-made collections. Each stem is topped with a diamond-shaped bowl for Cabernet, Riesling and Champagne. The glasses have a suggested retail price of \$39.90 each.

For consumers interested in decanting their wine, Riedel introduced the Cornetto Confetti decanter, an update of the Cornetto decanter, originally introduced in 2004. The new decanter features hand-blown bands of color pulled throughout the decanter in vibrant hues of orange and green. It has a suggested retail price of \$299.

For those imbibing in cocktails, Riedel’s new Sunshine assortment is made of pressed crystal and features striated designs. Offerings include tumblers, highballs, beer, all-purpose and coupe glasses. Each style comes in a set of two with a suggested retail price of \$34.90 each. **HWB**



TOP LEFT: Riedel shapes the Winewing’s bowl to create more surface area and aeration.

LEFT: The High Performance Champagne flute stands at 12.8-inches tall.

BELOW: The company has updated the Cornetto Confetti decanter.



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SUSTAINABLY IN STYLE SINCE 2009



Lifestyle

continued from page 42

interest to what may be a table set for a regular weeknight meal.

"I think a pretty table ties in with comfort food. We're all trying to make our families feel as normal as we can, so we're going that extra mile wherever we can to create a warm and comforting space," said Shearer. "For me, changing up the dinnerware or adding linen napkins makes me feel good. Cooking and baking are definitely bringing us all comfort at this time and finding some relief sharing our creations on our social media channels. It sparks joy."

The collaborations have resulted in the two participating in Instagram Live sessions to continue their conversation about their creative ideas, applications of the ideas, as well as important business and retail trends to share with the industry.

The two are planning new collaborations, shifting their focus to outdoor dining ideas, as the warmer months approach. Angell and Shearer agree that outdoor dining, while always popular with consumers during spring and summer months, will have a heightened importance this year, as the country continues to remain cautiously at home.

Angell will support this trend with a new fashion-forward picnic and barbecue set that features melamine dishes and acrylic drinkware with lids, as well as a throw and floral paper napkins to round out the experiential set. In addition, Angell will also be introducing themed entertaining sets for taco night and ice cream sundaes.

"I wanted to make it as easy as possible for families with kids and also extend themes to our entertaining sets that encourage fun ways to come together during this time," she said. **HWB**

2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS

Tabletop Retailers

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people the importance of all elements at home, whether cooking, baking, as well as enjoying the space. We have seen consumers trying to make their homes nicer and with families cooking together more often, there is potential for tabletop to have importance in the coming months," he said.

However, the retail landscape has changed and while there are those such as Walmart, Target, Home Depot and others that HomeWorld Business spotlighted as retail champions amid the pandemic, there are others that are not as equipped to support their omnichannel needs.

"Some retailers have been operating fairly normally even with work from home implementations, while there are others that are struggling. From mass retailers to high-end specialty stores, any retailer that is able to manage DTC (direct-to-consumer) shipments are seeing spikes in this segment and many have increased needs and/or pulling future orders forward in order to keep up with sales trends," said Hall.

Retailers that are doing things right, she said, are those that are operating while managing social distancing and offering alternative options such as direct to consumer or curbside pickups.

Ryder noted that one of the biggest changes the company has witnessed, aside from an expected drop in orders across the board, is the increase

in drop shipment requests from its retailers to fulfill online orders, something that came up rather suddenly.

"We have stopped shipping to any of our brick-and-mortar partners, it was sudden, not months, just sudden. Right now, we only drop ship and we and our retail partners have had a big success with this tactic, however, it was challenging to figure out the mechanics," he said.

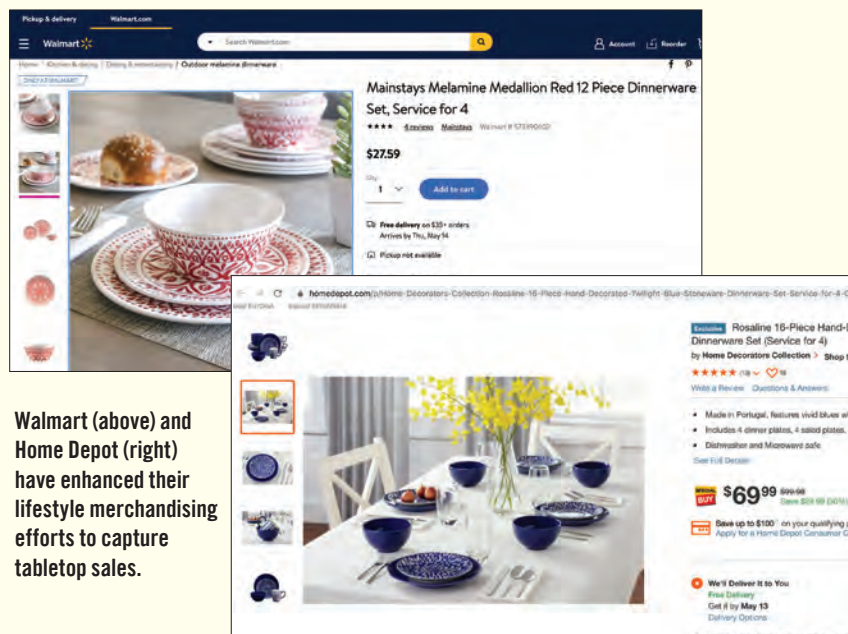
Ryder explained that due to drop shipping, product goes direct from the warehouse, Lenox's customers don't touch the products, therefore both parties need to work out fair terms and conditions when it came to payment terms.

As retail does open up, both Ryder and Hall agreed that most retailers seem to understand getting back to normal is going to be a process and many of the newer tactics such as an increased emphasis on ecommerce will remain in place through the third and fourth quarters.

"Implementation of social distancing and sanitization standards will continue and they will have to be prepared for that to continue for some time. E-commerce will most likely continue to be at higher levels than pre-COVID, although it will level out to some degree," said Hall.

Ryder said while time will tell as states begin to reopen, the best bet for retailers is to create different models to adapt to reopening.

"We also have to keep in mind there are many companies that have also spent a lot of time just fighting for survival, so for a lot of players on the vendor and retail side, it is all about being able to reopen," he said.



Walmart (above) and Home Depot (right) have enhanced their lifestyle merchandising efforts to capture tabletop sales.



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Furnish

Home & Workspace



South Shore's Crea collection includes task and home office furniture.

South Shore Highlights Home Workspace Collection

BY MIKE DUFF
Executive Editor

STE-CROIX, QUEBEC— Although it didn't get a chance to show them off at the cancelled Spring High Point Market, South Shore Furniture continues to point out new and notable furnishings that address a variety of developments in the marketplace.

South Shore designed the Crea collection to allow purchasers to develop their own workspaces, which isn't a bad thing at a time when many consumers are trying to update or even create home offices. In some cases, they are even setting up multiple offices when family members are working and/or homeschooling in the same household as they shelter from COVID-19. They are also looking for task-related furniture for hobby or sideline purposes as coronavirus-related movement restrictions give consumers time to consider needs as relates to those endeavors.

The intention with the Crea collection, South Shore stated, is to give consumers the ability to design task furniture to their needs, whether work, crafting, sewing or scrapbooking. The

Crea pedestal expanding craft table/desk incorporates a storage drawer over door-fronted shelf storage and a flap extension on the side that consumers can raise and fix to extend the work top. Other Crea task furniture includes a craft table with hutch, a craft table with baskets, a counter-height craft table and a sewing craft table, and the collection even extends to a kids storage cabinet with sliding doors.

The Balka collection offers a global style with a Bohemian touch and enhancements such as a printed rattan effect framed in a rustic oak finish on door fronts that are framed in white,

ultimately creating a two-tone effect. Although South Shore put an emphasis on style in the collection design, Balka items provide functionality as well, with adjustable shelves behind doors under three doors in the buffet piece, for instance.

The buffet is just one part of a collection that includes a one-door end table/nightstand, a TV stand/console and a two-drawer woven leather lounge chair that has an arcadia wood frame and comes in a black and an auburn finish.

The farmhouse look of the Hankel collection gives consumer a vintage but still light and bright choice in a line of products that includes a changing table with removable top. The Hankel collection also embraces the two-toned look with a rustic wood effect on drawer fronts, in a weathered oak finish, contrasted with a pure white finish on other surfaces. Hardware with a rough-hewn industrial styling completes the look. In addition, the removable nature of the top means the changing table converts, when it might be needed, into a double dresser. The six large dresser drawers all are operated on metal slides. The Hankel collection also includes a four-drawer chest in the weathered oak finish and rustic hardware.

To complement those pieces, the Hankel collection includes a complete metal bed including structure, headboard and footboard. South Shore noted that Hankel styling can complement a range of popular styles including cottage, rustic and modern. **HWB**



The South Shore Balka line features a printed rattan effect in a rustic oak finish.

2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS

Pandemic Driving Mass-Market Furniture Sales

NEW YORK— The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound effect on the mass-market furniture business, one that continues to drive unprecedented sales and, perhaps, a rosier future.

In early May, Wayfair co-founder, co-chairman and CEO Niraj Shah told a conference call audience that what started out as a rush on specific home product categories, with furniture conspicuous among them, had gathered steam.

He said that, in "mid- to late March, there were certain categories that accelerated first. And these are ones you associate with staying at home and working at home."

As many vendors have shared with HomeWorld Business and Shah confirmed, home office generated strong sales with outdoor, storage and organization and children's furniture adding to a revenue surge, along with several housewares categories. Still, he noted what has happened with the leading segments don't tell the whole story as Wayfair has experienced it.

"The concentration in growth is not anywhere specific," he said. "In fact, it is very broad-based."

Vendors also identified home office furniture as getting the big initial boost from consumers having to rearrange their lives to deal with stay at home requirements as they came down in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. As one put it, families that had one home office now often required more for two working parents and a couple of homeschooling kids.

Although home office remains hot, with e-commerce screaming, as one vendor described it, and store retailers stocking up, patio and transitional furniture has seen a spike in

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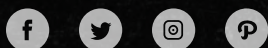
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Lamps Plus Positions Online Lighting Design Service

LOS ANGELES— The COVID-19 outbreak, as experienced by retailers, has meant trying to roll with what might seem like an endless barrage of punches but some, including Lamps Plus, have taken the occasion to try new initiatives, exploring what opportunity lay in the crisis.

Lamps Plus has launched a free online lighting design service to make it convenient for consumers to get expert advice at home. The service allows consumers to schedule an appointment and later receive one-to-one expert lighting advice via phone or text. Consumers contacting Lamps Plus from store areas get routed to employees of that location. The San Francisco/Bay Area store team handles all other questions. The initiative represents an opportunistic twist on omnichannel operations given the use of store employees to support online sales.

Dennis Swanson, Lamps Plus founder and CEO, said, “We’re able to leverage the expertise of our store employees through technology without requiring customers to leave their homes. This replicates the in-store experience but with a remote conversation. Also, we are able to benefit from store employees from our temporarily shuttered stores.”

Lamps Plus has developed its design service to address customer needs no matter their communications preference.

“The process is now all online via text, email and phone,” Swanson said. “Unlike store shoppers, our online customers usually spend more time considering different options until they find the lighting that works best for them. The online design services replicate the in-store experience. In-store, store associates

help customers browse the store display inventory and then help them with our numerous showroom computer kiosks to review other selections. This is a similar but different experience.”

Over the past few years, Lamps Plus has explored how it can interact with consumers in ways they find more convenient, hence the texting option which builds on an earlier-established service that lets consumers connect with store personnel using the mobile phone function.

“Texting continues to grow in popularity and use. We debuted store texting last year, and it made sense to enable our customers to connect with experts via text at their convenience,” Swanson said.

Rather than a specific target demographic, the design service is meant to address a need, given that consumers who are shopping for lighting at this point are doing so, in most cases, under directives to stay home.

“For most people, finding the lighting that fits both their preferences and their space can be an intimidating challenge,” he said. “This program is designed to help them through the process without ever having to leave their home.”

Lamps Plus has been training store employees to be facilitators in their interactions with consumers, enabling them to provide relevant advice and support. The training provided employees is something the company for application in store has become an asset Lamps Plus has used to build the design service.

“All employees are trained through our sales training team,” Swanson said. “The goal for every associate is to receive 100 hours of training to gain proprietary certified decorative lighting specialist training and American Lighting Association training.”

He identified the emphasis in the design service program as lighting, but Swanson added that it covers the full range of home furnishings that Lamps Plus offers. He said the design service is reaching shoppers at a time when confinement at home has made many consider their interior design.

“Lighting is the primary driver of our business, but

we also see success in furniture and decor,” he said. “After chandeliers and ceiling fans, which are on usual sales pace this season, we see success in items like outdoor lighting, fountains, mirrors and seating, among others.”

To market the design service, Lamps Plus has been promoting it on social media and near the top of its online homepage, with potential store marketing under consideration, Swanson noted, “so it’s a high priority. We may include signage in our stores after they open. In that case, our goal will be to initiate the conversation online, if the customer chooses, and then bring it into the store.”

As circumstances evolve back toward normal in the coming months, Lamps Plus will integrate the design service into its existing suite of customer support functions, which includes one that lets shoppers view products in a room, something that can complement shopper work with design service employees.

“The View in Room feature lets them visualize a lighting or home furnishings piece in their home before bringing it there,” Swanson said. “It’s among the tools we can use to help customers.”

He added that Lamps Plus is looking to introduce additional services that help customers and accustom them to engage with the features and tools on its e-commerce website.

Of course, any new service retailers provide in COVID-19 afflicted conditions has to survive the trials of a disrupted market and then must prove itself when movement and shopping restrictions phase out. At a time when retailers may regard any new initiatives as tentative, Swanson said Lamps Plus intends to provide its design service to customers for the foreseeable future. **HWB**



“We’re able to leverage the expertise of our store employees through technology without requiring customers to leave their homes.”

—Dennis Swanson,
Lamps Plus

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Mastercraft Addresses Trends In New Portable Lighting Styles

JONESBORO, AR— Mastercraft International has developed an array of new portable lighting products including three groups that address trends that favor glass, blue ceramic and carved/textured looks.

In the glass group, the MC 235 19.25-inch high table lamp has a segmented glass body in a light blue finish and under a light wood finish neck. The MC898 26.25-inch high table lamp has a cylindrical body in a moody blue finish and brushed brass base and neck. The MC865 24.375-inch high table lamp offers a relatively complex pattern though the glass body in a champagne colorway and a light wood base and neck look, while the round body of the 21-inch high MC897 table lamp comes in a moody blue bracketed by elements in a patina gold finish, and the tapering 20.5-inch tall MC864 table has an amber finish with a patina gold neck.

In the blue ceramic group, the MC182 21.25-inch high blue and white finish table lamp is wrapped in a floral pattern. Also in a blue and white finish, the MC872 18.25-inch high table lamp has a vine and flower pattern, while the MC892 22.5-inch high table lamp in a blue and cream finish has an all flower pattern. The blue ceramic group includes two tall table lamps, the

28.25-inch high MC670 metal and ceramic table lamp, with ceramic piece and ball mounted amid the long, slender body, and the MC266 29-inch high blue and textured table lamp, with its abstracted tropical frond look.

The carved/textured group includes the graduated-tone MC252 20-inch tall ceramic table lamp which comes in an ombre cream/russet finish. Its two ceramic companions are the 20-inch tall MC889 and the 24.75-inch tall MC216 transparent cream glaze table lamps. The group includes a pair of resin pieces as well, the MC147 26-inch high limed wood finish and the MC151 26-inch high brown wood/taupe wash finish table lamp. **HWB**

BELOW, FROM LEFT: Mastercraft's smokey segmented lamp with glass body.

A metal table lamp highlights a blue ceramic ball.

A carved/textured look is featured in a two-tone lamp style.



2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS

Mass-Market Furniture

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demand, as has bedroom and kids in general. Gaming furniture has seen a lift, too, as consumers make their home more entertaining. With demand for home office so high, at least some consumers may be turning to gaming desks as an alternative to the depleted traditional task-station choices they find even shopping online. All that being said, the vendors agreed with Shah that demand has become broad-based as consumers stuck at home rethink their living quarters.

In cases where vendors manufacture close to home, plants that have been closed in the coronavirus crisis have been reopening and throwing their weight into meeting market demand. The reopening of manufacturing facilities in the U.S. has been particularly important in the home office case as inventories have been deeply depleted. Complicating things, however, is the pressure demand is putting on carriers, which has created logistical challenges.

The rush to purchase furniture as COVID-19 began to change how consumers worked and relaxed may seem

like a singular situation, but the experience of everyday living is being reshaped and that's going to affect behavior for a long time into the future and probably permanently. Consumers who became more home-oriented in the Great Recession now are going through a new experience that is making the household even more central to their lives. The home will become a higher-priority concern. Consumers who already look at home as a place they can and should arrange and adjust in conformance with their evolving lifestyles are likely to revisit arrangements that circumstances compelled them to make.

In the report, Pre & Post COVID-19 Market Estimates— Office Furniture Market 2019-2023, market research company Technavio stated that the office furniture market is set to grow by \$22.32 billion during the 2019 to 2023 period, progressing at a CAGR of almost 6% during the forecast period.

However, and although the market right now is most heavily focused on the consequences of the coronavirus outbreak, no one issue will eclipse all others as consumers consider purchases. Technavio made the point that sustainability will continue to influence consumer decision making as the market moves through the COVID-19 pandemic.

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2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS

Costco

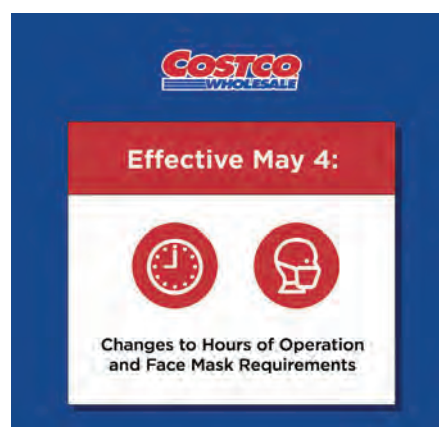
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The company's fiscal year doesn't follow the typical calendar, but to put Costco's e-commerce business in perspective, the company's comparable sales in the digital operation gained 28% its second quarter ended February 12 and including the holiday season. According to the Census Bureau, calendar fourth quarter e-commerce retail sales gained 16.7% from the period a year prior.

Of course, categories such as groceries have driven engagement with e-commerce in the COVID-19 pandemic. According to a Coresight Research mid-March survey of U.S. consumers, 34.7% of respondents had purchased groceries at Costco in the preceding 12 months and 7.9% of respondents had purchased groceries online from Costco, which ranks the company online sales as fourth behind Amazon, Walmart and Target. In 2020, up until mid-March, 14.3% of Costco shoppers who had bought groceries online in the preceding 12 months had purchased most or all of their groceries online and 24.2% had purchased at least some.

Costco continues to invest in its e-commerce business, and so on March 17, the company said it completed the acquisition of Innoval Solutions, which provides third-party end-to-end logistics solutions.

With greater consumer interest and a capability to drive more online sales in the coronavirus crisis, Costco is positioned to emerge stronger as the situation settles down to something closer to normal. As the company enters what will be a recessionary economic environment, Costco has the advantage of having one of the strongest private label programs in the U.S. As Neil Stern, senior partner in consultancy McMillion Doolittle pointed out, own brands gained greater consumer appreciation in the U.S. during and after the recession of 2008/9. **HWB**



Food storage has been a hot category during the pandemic, as shown here at Target.



2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS

Kitchenware

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Retailers have been able to support consumer demand via their omnichannel presence, as well as by helping their vendor partners navigate the rapidly changing shift.

"Brick and mortar stores that entered into this situation with a fully developed online presence are doing OK. Conversely, if they were not prepared they are most likely doing business but not to the level to where they can easily afford their brick and mortar store rent, assuming their store has been closed. The retailers that managed this situation correctly were able to quickly adapt to new consumer purchasing habits and they took virus safety precautions to heart," said Lance Hood, president, Progressive International.

Other vendors stated that retailers are still buying, albeit with a shift almost entirely online.

"If you didn't have a robust online presence prior to this then you are at a distinct disadvantage as the consumer is relying on the Internet more. All you have to do is read the headlines about Instacart needing to add 550,000 shoppers since March to understand people are reluctant to shop in person. I believe this will continue for the foreseeable future," one vendor said.

However, even as online sales have been robust, keeping inventory to meet demand has not come without

its challenges.

"Retailers are struggling to fulfill product related to new pandemic buying patterns of the American consumer. The consumer change in direction happened so quickly many of us, manufacturers and retailers alike, found ourselves caught off guard and running low on those products with accelerated sales," added Hood.

In addition, he noted that the buying pattern shifts occurred within a shortened 60 day manufacturing and shipping cycle, which include COVID-related China factory closures back in February and March, which led to providing vendors little to no time to plan and meet demand, assuming vendor logistics centers remained open and could still ship.

However, vendors that have been able to ship product remain positive that online sales will continue to provide the category a boost.

One vendor noted that its fourth quarter programs, typically set in December for the following year, are still in place, but modified down about 20% though, pointing to what the vendor forecasted to be a cautiously optimistic future.

"If I had one suggestion for retailers is forecast, watch and listen for POS data, spend the time to process that information and spend time developing purchasing plans with their key vendors. Most vendors and retailers are struggling, they need product that will sell and they cannot afford to be stuck with product when and if the new purchasing habits begin to shift back to what they were pre-COVID-19," said Hood.

2020 RETAIL CHAMPIONS

Comfort/Personal Care

continued from page 40

pointed to the company's Plasma-cluster Ion Technology Air Purifiers as an example. He noted, "These discussions are well suited to longer formats where information can be expressed, and social media not only carries a narrative but shared experiences as well."

Amazon was cited nearly universally by suppliers in the comfort, wellness and beauty categories as being the go-to retail source for appliances. "People are online more than ever before, and they are sharing their stories," said one supplier of personal care appliances.

Another supplier pointed out that Amazon has been keeping up with deliveries, even with its corporate policy of prioritizing essential goods. "Even though they stated early on in the crisis that they were putting their emphasis on delivery of essentials, regular deliveries have not suffered. Consumers are still getting their orders for appliances and home comfort items," one executive said.

Costco was cited for having one of the best email marketing campaigns. "Costco sends out email blasts every two days to its customers, and they respond," pointed out one appliance manufacturer.

Several suppliers said Walmart has done an excellent job of integrating its e-commerce and store operations. "Walmart stores have remained open, because they offer groceries, prescription drugs and other essential items," noted a personal care manufacturer. "They also have done a great job with 'buy online, pick up in store' programs. The combination of these things has ensured that they continue to do well during the pandemic, and positions them for further growth."

"Retailers with robust e-commerce integration are more effectively getting the message out to the consumer," the executive said. "Consumers are taking their cues from social media, and sharing stories about the products that they are using and the results they are getting. This is where the growth is going to come from in the future."

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Can the off-price retail channel rebound when stores reopen?



“It is likely that e-commerce adoption is going to spur change across a wide swath of categories.”

—Niraj Shah,
Wayfair

Retail Marketplace

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online across all categories, including home. This pickup in demand has continued to gain momentum. And in the U.S., the rollout of stimulus monies in mid-April served as an added accelerator of new and repeat customers coming to Wayfair.”

Shah maintained that changing shopper behaviors now will have lasting ramifications.

“We believe there are clearly definable long-term advantages accruing to Wayfair in this period,” he said. “It is likely that e-commerce adoption is going to spur change across a wide swath of categories. In our case, millions of new customers shopped at Wayfair over the last several weeks.”

Across the board, e-commerce-based retailers are looking at how they can serve consumers turning to them to cope with movement restrictions and store closures. eBay extended its efforts with small businesses as COVID-19 made its presence felt. It launched Up & Running, an accelerator program developed to help small retailers without an e-commerce presence start selling online. As it extended its free shipping program to make its offering even more attractive, Overstock saw April sales leap 120%, with home furnishings leading and, critically, new customer growth jumped 250% year over year.

Designed an essential business that needed to stay open, the home center/hardware store channel gained a sig-

nificant advantage in the market not just because in terms of sales but also in consumers coming through the door for household essentials including paper goods and cleaning who normally don’t shop the channel or who only show up for nails and lightbulbs.

Home Depot has benefited, with store traffic up 31.3% from the week of April 20 to 26, according to store traffic researcher Placer.ai. But the riches weren’t all swept up by the leader. Lowe’s traffic increased by 71.8% in the period as its overall store visits actually surpassed those of Home Depot’s for the first time since Placer began analyzing location data in January 2017. Ethan Chernofsky, Placer vp/marketing, noted that the gain occurred in a period of particularly aggressive Lowe’s marketing.

Of course, the supermarket channel is another that had the advantage of remaining open when other retailers shut down, which gave many companies a chance to introduce their expanding range of services to consumers who might not try them for years or at all. However, mass-market retailers that sell groceries are enjoying a lift as well, with the ability to fulfill online orders a key to building consumer relationships under difficult conditions.

In a Coresight Research study conducted in mid-March, and well before stay-at-home requirements were enforced in much of the country, 14.4% of U.S. respondents said they had started purchasing groceries online because of coronavirus and 34.9% said they are buying more groceries online because

of the health threat posed. In an interesting turn, 10.5% of respondents said they are buying online less because of coronavirus, but keep in mind Coresight conducted the survey before contactless pickup and delivery were widespread.

Office superstores might not have gained recognition for it but they’ve gotten a boost in the coronavirus-stricken environment. According to market researcher 1010data, growth of working from home in late winter spurred the first year over year of office supply store consumer spending growth in more than three years, up more than 20%.

Of course, store closings and consumer joblessness that the COVID-19 outbreak caused have been painful for

many retailers, with Neiman Marcus becoming the first of what many expected to be a number of bankruptcies among well-known retailers. Yet one retail channel that has been largely shut down is likely to reassert itself quickly when closed stores begin to open again: off-pricers. Riding high before coronavirus hit, the two largest and dominant companies in the sector, TJX and Ross, had to close stores. But, with healthy balance sheets and advantages waiting, including manufacturers that need to dump inventory and create buying opportunities for off-pricers, the channel is set to jump back strong after the COVID-19 crisis.

“It’s just a blip to them,” said Neil Stern, senior partner at consultancy McMillan Doolittle. **HWB**

Lowe’s has built up increased store traffic during the coronavirus pandemic.





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B U S I N E S S

To our valued readers:

It has been heartening to see so many companies and people in the home and housewares business step up to support relief efforts during this crisis.

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The HomeWorld Business team has been working from home with no interruption in the timely delivery of content vital to the industry's operation and planning as it prepares for recovery.

Each issue of HomeWorld Business informs important decisions with in-depth news and product coverage across key categories, retail analysis, special trend reports, market data, executive insights and commentary.

The HomeWorldBusiness.com website and e-newsletters serve up a constant stream of breaking industry and retailing news; exclusive interviews; video updates; webinars; stories on new product innovations; coverage of fast-evolving trends and shifting consumer and business behavior; and more.

And with many of our readers also working from home, we've made a digital version of the current print edition easier to access and view for free through a special link at the top of the HomeWorldBusiness.com home page.

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