



THERE WAS OPTIMISM AT THE RECENT **INTERNATIONAL HOME + HOUSEWARES SHOW**, AS VENDORS SAY THE HOUSEWARES CATEGORY IS PERFORMING WELL, PARTICULARLY AT GROCERY.

Housewarming party

BY Seth Mendelson

“**W**E ARE ACTING AS IF THERE IS NO RECESSION and as if consumers are ready to start buying again.” Those were the words of a vice president of marketing for a major housewares company as he spoke on the floor of the annual International Home + Housewares Show, which was held last month in Chicago.

As this supplier noted, many vendors continue to introduce products, hoping that more bells and whistles will be enough to sustain the pace of growth in the housewares category. According to many of these manufacturers, housewares sales continue to climb at a rate of 3% to 5% and may actually be performing better at grocery stores, where lower price-points and greater need help to balance sales.

Here is a look at what some companies introduced at the three-day event held at McCormick Place.

Taking back space

ITW Space Bag is introducing a wide range of items to the market, all designed to make it easier for consumers to shop or store things. The San Diego-based company is introducing lavender-scented storage bags designed to keep bedding products, sweaters and jackets and other bulky items dry and clean in a limited amount of space. The item comes in jumbo and extra-large sizes and in combo and single packs. The company is also promoting its Space Bag To Go line, including a travel laundry bag, toiletry bag, shoe bag and a travel bag suitcase.



The company’s Eco line features a shopping bag in a pouch, folding trolley and cart items. “These products help the retailer meet the needs of the eco-conscious consumer,” said Betty Jameson-Dunn, the director of marketing for the company.

ITW Space Bag is also unveiling a line of pop-up shelves, featuring several SKUs of instant shelf organizer products with price-points ranging from \$14.95 to \$29.95. “The home storage category is growing by about 5% a year and we see an opportunity there,” said Jameson-Dunn.

DKB's new tools

Diethelm Keller Brands (DKB) is introducing a number of tools designed to make it easier for consumers to peel and eat fruit. Included in the new entries is a strawberry huller (\$3.99 suggested retail price), a cherry pitter (\$9.99), an avocado tool (\$5.99), a citrus/kiwi tool (\$3.99) and a melon slicer (\$4.99).



"We really think these products work well with grocery because of their cross-merchandising opportunities," said Timothy Yee, director of marketing for the Irvine, Calif.-based company.



Light priced right

Officials at Candle-lite want to offer quality candle products at price-points that will satisfy everyone. The Cincinnati-based company is introducing Essential Elements, a line of soy and wax blended candles that are derived from essential oils. According to Mark Cunningham, vice president of sales and marketing, there are nine fragrances in the line in five different forms that "speak to a spa theme in home décor." Prices range from \$7.99 to \$12.99.



The products feature clean-burning candles

with a crackling sound.

The Landscape line is designed to be bright with fragrances inspired by nature, Cunningham said. A 7-ounce jar has a suggested retail price of \$7.99. The Ember Wick line is designed to use colors to set a mood in the home through the use of rich tones. A 13.5-ounce jar has a suggested retail price of \$12.99. "This is definitely a discretionary category," Cunningham said. "But I think we offer tremendous value and create affordable luxury."

Candle-lite is also introducing Revere House, a premium line of highly scented, two-wick candles. The product is available in 12 colors and fragrances and has a suggested retail price of \$15.

Mizco offers iPhone accessories

Sam Mizrahi, the executive vice president at Mizco, is pretty upfront that he can help grocery stores gain a niche in the growing iPhone business, without selling the phone. He said that his Avenel, N.J.-based company offers more than 120 different accessories for iPhones and nearly two dozen are perfect for the grocery store.



Those products include a power charger, home charger, silicone covers, ear buds and screen protectors, all priced at about \$9.99 and offering as much as 50% profit margins to retailers.

"We want to tell grocers that the iPhone category is not a niche category any longer," Mizrahi said.

Providing backup

Bradshaw International is ready to back its products to help sales at retail. The Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.-based company plans a number of sales programs, merchandising and promotional vehicles in all of its categories.

Bradshaw will be running programs for their roasters, value cookware, bakeware, kitchen gadgets, food storage, meat thermometers and back-to-school items, as well as for its licensed brands Bialetti and Betty Crocker.

Bradshaw is also introducing a number of new items. They include:

*Over The Top Liquid Measuring Cups— These measuring cups come in ¼ cup, 1 cup, 2 cup and a three-pack set and retail for between \$1.99 and \$12.99.



*Bag Clips— With three multi-use sizes, these soft grip clips combine an organically shaped, black exterior with bold interior colors. A magnetic back completes the perfect marriage of form and function. Price-points range from \$3.99 to \$5.99.

*Soap Filled Cleaning Brush System— This best-selling handle and brush combination comes in three head styles for all cleaning needs around the kitchen. A non-slip handle has been specifically designed for wet tasks and a no-leak mechanism prevents mess. Retail ranges from \$3.99 to \$5.99.

Pretty cool



Cool Gear International is looking to help consumers keep their food cold. The Plymouth, Mass.-based company is unveiling the EZ-Freeze & Lock food storage line. The 12 SKUs in the line are leak proof. They retail for between \$7 and \$10. "As a core product, these items

are designed to meet the consumer needs in terms of freshness," said Hank Roth, the company's executive vice president.

The company is also highlighting its line of EZ-Freeze filtration bottles. The five SKUs in the line come in 12-, 24-, 32- and 64-ounce sizes as well as a promotional line of 24-ounce bottles.

More healthy steps

With healthy eating still top of mind with consumers, Carrollton, Texas-based Jokari has expanded its successful Healthy Steps line with nine new items at the show.

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They include a pasta server, which can measure portions of both cooked pasta and pasta sauce; a fish turner, which has a spring-loaded, double-blade design to keep fillets intact while turning; a nut bowl and scoop, to portion out single servings of nuts; a chicken

tool to skin and debone chicken; and a dressing cruet, which includes recipes of healthy dressings on the bottle, as well as measurement lines for consumers who want to make their own.

“We continued to focus on portion control

items, as portion control appears to be a hot button,” said Cindy Pruitt, vice president, sales, Jokari. “Then we explored kitchen tools that related to healthy foods, such as fish and chicken.”

The new items will hit stores later this summer and will range from \$2.99 to \$7.99.



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Butler did it

Butler Home Products had one of the largest booths in the North building at McCormick Center and the company needed every inch.

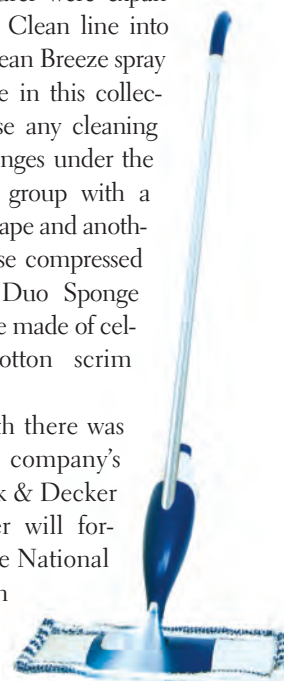
The Marlborough, Mass.-based company had one of the largest volumes of product introductions at the show. New for the cleaning-products manufacturer were expansions in its Love 2 Clean line into brooms; the Mr. Clean Breeze spray mop, a new feature in this collection, which can use any cleaning agent; a line of sponges under the Dawn brand, one group with a patented triangle shape and another group of cellulose compressed sponges; and the Duo Sponge Cloth, with one side made of cellulose with a cotton scrim embedded inside.

Within the booth there was a preview of the company's new licensed Black & Decker line, which Butler will formally launch at the National Hardware Show in Las Vegas in May.

This collection consists of mops, push brooms, wet mops, scrub brushes, window cleaners and dust pans.

Noting the high level of recognition for the Black & Decker brand, Michael Silverman, Butler's senior vice president of marketing, said, “This license is a natural because Black & Decker is in every room of the house.”

Butler also used the show to unveil its new Butler Ultra brand. Silverman described this grouping an up-market line, comparable to the Mr. Clean and Dawn collections but branded as Butler.



SodaStream Creates a Bubbly Buzz

If Housewares Show attendees thought this year's SodaStream booth at McCormick Place was bigger than last year, they were right.

SodaStream president Daniel Bimbaum says

the much-talked-about company's exhibition space at the 2011 version of the show was six times the size of last year's—perfectly reflecting the company's rapid growth since the last show.

The company, which went public last year, has created quite a buzz with its home carbona-

tion system. With fewer bottles and cans to recycle than regular soda, and SodaStream's sodamix which contains no high-fructose corn syrup, SodaStream says its “a smarter way to enjoy soda.”

“The product has a wonderful consumer appeal,” Bimbaum says. “It addresses key environmental and health benefits for today's consumer.” Bimbaum adds that retailers get an added boost from repeat customers that return to the stores to purchase SodaStream flavorings.

New at the Housewares Show for SodaStream was Fizz, a home soda maker that features a digital screen to so users can set and monitor how much carbonation is being used. The new unit comes in a variety of colors including red, green, blue, black white and pink.



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Product Specialties Cleans Up

Product Specialties unveiled a variety of products at its third Housewares Show. The Whitney, Ontario-based company emphasized the versatility of its new motion-activated SoapSense liquid soap dispenser by filling the unit with hand sanitizer at the show.

Housewares attendees sampled the free germ-killing liquid-while experiencing the hands-free operation of SoapSense-throughout the event, says Product Specialties general manager Martin Kehoe.

The company also garnered attention for its Dolci-branded Hot Air Theater-Style Popcorn Maker. The unit features a retro theater design with marquee, and a “keep warm” function. Product Specialties also introduced a large line of wine accessories including corkscrews and numerous decanter and aerator sets under the Final Touch brand. □

