

GROCERY HEADQUARTERS

Making headway with housewares

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Grocers that dedicate legitimate time and effort to the housewares category will likely reap the rewards.

Slow and steady paid off for the tortoise against the hare. Perhaps the same will hold true for grocery retailers when competing for sales with other retail channels in the housewares category.



Traditionally, grocers have taken a “wait and see” approach to merchandising and marketing housewares products, allowing competitor channels to capture the lion’s share of sales. That may be changing.

The signs are certainly there. So is the opportunity. Perry Reynolds, vice president, marketing and trade development for the International Housewares Association, based in Rosemont, Ill., says that grocery retailer attendance at the recent International Home + Housewares Show was up from last year.

“Those retailers we spoke to were candid about the challenges and enthusiastic about the growth opportunities,” says Reynolds.

In a category that is as vast and as broad as housewares, it can be easy for retailers to lose direction on what products they are offering consumers, say industry observers. While what a particular store carries is often determined by where that store is located and time of the year, there are some housewares categories that are generally considered “safe bets.”

“Cookware, cooking tools, serveware, glassware, cutlery and bakeware are all naturals in a supermarket environment,” says Reynolds. “Barware is an excellent add-on sale. Cleaning and home organization also have great tie-ins to other categories that consumers are in the supermarket to buy.”

Bradshaw International is capitalizing on the natural synergy between food and cooking gadgets and tools with its line of Good Cook Touch products. New for this year, Bradshaw has added accents of color to its existing products as well as developed more tools and gadgets to add to the collection including a cast ice cream scoop, horizontal Y-shaped julienne peeler, citrus zester and instant read meat thermometer.

“Housewares are convenience purchases in the grocery world, usually purchased on impulse,” says Scott Bradshaw, senior vice president of sales for Rancho Cucamonga, Calif.-based Bradshaw. “The impulse lessens as the price points go up, so gadgets and tools are always going to be more impulse oriented whereas bakeware and cookware are more planned purchases.”

Bradshaw has also entered into cake decorating with its Sweet Creations line. “Our goal is not just getting into the market, but actually redefining it,” says Bradshaw. “We’ve invented baking products and accessories to accommodate the booming ‘baked goods as gifts’ trend. The idea is to create the tools that make the art of decorating fun.” Products include cupcake corers, cake pop molds and cookie cutters among others.

On the cleaning products side there are two diverse trends driving sales, says Steve Throssel, CEO of Whink Products, based in El Dora, Iowa.

“On one hand people are trying to become more green and environmentally conscious,” he says. “At the same time they are trying to save money and get the job done quickly. The two aren’t necessarily at odds with each other—but they are a little bit.”

Whink meets the needs of both camps. The company continues to develop products using what Throssel calls “high-tech chemical formulations” that use less water and are generally less expensive. Then when the green movement gained steam, Throssel felt it was important to be a part of that too, “not necessarily for the money, but because it was the right thing to do.”

Whink also makes its own bottles and delivery system. Its newest bottle, in which its newest product—Uniform Wash is available—is the 22-ounce squeeze bottle. The bottle is wider at the bottom and very difficult to tip over, says Throssel.

While new products may not have the same impact in the housewares section as they do in the center store, a hot product can generate significant sales for a retailer. Take the recently introduced coolgearcan by Cool Gear International. Hank Roth, executive vice president for the Plymouth, Mass.-based company, expects the coolgearcan to be the biggest launch the company has ever had based on the millions of units sold in its first 60 days of availability. He adds, however, that while some grocery accounts have been more aggressive than others, the majority will likely not start selling the coolgearcan until next Spring.

It is that hesitation that must be removed. Roth says the opportunity is there for grocers, but they cannot just sit back, they have to grab it. “The grocery channel can do better by being more aggressive in terms of trends and newness. They tend to follow, not lead, and they do not really feature anything that is taking off in terms of new opportunity,” he adds.

Observers say there is also an opportunity for retailers to create a dedicated housewares area. “Retailers have to look to make statements, with whatever they feel the leading categories are within housewares,” says Roth. “It can be whatever is hot at the moment, but they have to make a statement to feature them.”

He uses hydration products as an example. Products in the hydration category usually can be found on endcaps or within a floor display strewn throughout the store. “So if a customer bumps into it they may buy it, but it is a hit or miss kind of thing. Retailers should give hydration products a home. Those that have, have done great with them,” he says.

The sweet smell of success

Home fragrance is another category that can do well with dedicated space and candles have become a major category for grocers, say observers. Candles also have the unique ability to “self-merchandise,” meaning unlike most other home fragrance products, specifically, and housewares items in general, candles can be easily sampled by simply removing the lid and smelling them—relatively important for a fragrance product.

The ability to “sample” candles and connecting consumers with the right fragrance can be pretty powerful. Retailers should be on the lookout for new fragrances that have the ability to keep existing consumers as well as the opportunity to attract new ones.

“Home fragrance is scent driven,” says Lori Miller Burns, director of marketing for Marietta, Ga.-based Arylessence. “Developing new winning fragrances is the fastest, most effective way to compete for the

consumer to say 'yes' to a new product. Retailers can effectively re-activate the air freshener category by developing new winning fragrances and new fragrance combinations that consumers love.”

Of course candles come in multiple forms. Some of the top sellers, particularly at grocery include glass filled scented candles, wax melts/cubes and unscented tealights, say observers.

Relative to other channels, grocery is currently enjoying strong performance in the candle category, says Mark Cunningham, vice president, sales and marketing for Candle-lite, a Lancaster Colony Co., based in Cincinnati. “Grocers have the ability to turn their shoppers’ visits into candle sales with regular promotions, off-shelf features and seasonal promotions.”

He adds that because of the wide array of candle products available, grocers face a challenge when it comes to product assortment. “Candle-lite offers a product line that addresses quality and value in everyday trends and collections. Grocers that provide adequate space, an optimized product assortment and regular promotions will have positive results with the candle category,” say Cunningham.

New products in Candle-lite’s line include Aroma Melts, a flameless fragranced wax in a glass cup in which the melted wax pool stays contained in the cup, requiring no clean up and the Illuminate candle collection, featuring photographic artwork that glows when lit to accent the design.

Whether a grocer is selling candles, water bottles or gardening gloves, the strategy remains to have the right items at the right price at the right time. Usually seasonal items fit that bill, says Adam Marlatt, vice president of sales—grocery and drug, for Rome, Ga.-based Big Time Products.

“When it comes to housewares the strongest channels are always the ones that are the most functional for the consumer,” he says. “Seasonal items are the hot point. No matter what the season is, the right offering of seasonal items in grocery is key. From grills to coolers to garden gloves to work gloves, the success comes from the merchandise and availability in store.”

Source: <http://www.groceryheadquarters.com/2013/08/making-headway-with-housewares/>