

New Cook in the Kitchen

Technology Brings More Options to the Housewares Department

Gadgets are a fundamental piece of the hardware industry. Adults can get the same sense of wonderment as children with a new toy when they get their hands on the latest piece of technology. Kitchen tools can bring much of the same excitement as more common categories such as power tools. They can save time, increase safety in the kitchen and add great diversity to the housewares department.

One area that has more than its share of gadgets is small kitchen appliances. Kitchen appliances have become as sophisticated as the most modern power tool, and consumers are looking for these products in growing numbers. Retailers have expanded their housewares and kitchen appliances departments with a goal toward achieving a one-stop shop for the budding home cook. Making kitchen gadgets a standout area of your business can highlight how advanced a kitchen department can be.

From spiralizers to pressure cookers, kitchen accessories run the gamut of designs, purposes and price points. *Hardware Retailing* spoke to two retailers who have expanded their kitchen appliances department beyond pots and pans to find out what consumers are looking for and how independent home improvement retailers can make the most of this key department.

Kitchen Plus More is a 2,500-square-foot location offering hardware categories along with upscale kitchen appliances and decorative items. The Long Island City, New York, business is part of a larger retail operation that also includes grocery stores, owner Ovidiu Teja says.

Prescott True Value, located in Prescott, Arizona, built its kitchen offerings in a community that was undersupplied, manager Suzanne Springer says. The 30,000-square-foot location devotes over 4,000 square feet of its salesfloor to kitchen appliances and gadgets, incorporating these items into a broader housewares and gift area that allows for a diverse product selection.

To see how some of these kitchen items work, check out TheRedT.com/chef-chad, where *Hardware Retailing* editor Chad Husted demonstrates a few of his favorite cooking techniques.

Elevating the Kitchen

While small kitchen appliances and cooking tools are familiar sights in many independent hardware retail businesses, high-technology devices like electric pressure cookers toe a line that allows them to be looked at similarly to high-end power tools or innovative hardware products.



Along with kitchen appliances and gadgets, the housewares department at Prescott True Value includes high-end and unique items for a diverse selection.



The time-honored method of stocking good, better and best selections can also work in housewares in addition to more common categories. **Kitchen Plus More** also stocks a wide variety of decorating items and high-quality cooking gadgets.

The added technology in some items, such as multicookers, which can be used to cook anything from rice to stews, can elevate mundane cooking products to technological marvels that inspire the same kind of following that turns power tool departments into destinations for enthusiasts.

Cooking shows on TV and the expansion of the culture of cooking for fun has grown the market for more advanced cooking products. For hardware retailers, stocking kitchen items, and gadgets in particular, can bring non-DIY customers or those less inclined to take on a home improvement project into a store.

At **Kitchen Plus More**, Teja has built his business around the concept of keeping his product selection high-end and treating his

hardware and kitchen-supply business similarly to his grocery store locations. Wide aisles, bright and welcoming environments and upscale selections have helped the business become a noted destination for home cooks and party hosts looking for the next hot item.

These kinds of products include electric pressure cookers and top-flight toaster ovens capable of air frying, baking and toasting, as well as quality cookware-like pots, utensils and linens. A common advantage of newer appliances is the ability to cook multiple types of food or use multiple types of cooking in one product. For example, a toaster oven now can go from making a simple piece of toast to frying up a full meal of fish and chips, if it has the ability to air fry.

In hardware, retailers are often quick to seek out how to make a store a one-stop shop. The same attitude needs to be applied to kitchen appliances to find success in that category, Teja says.

“From preparing meals, to serving them, to cleaning up after and storing food and cookware properly, we have everything a homeowner needs,” Teja says. “Once we took the approach of stocking items that not only accomplished a goal, but looked good doing it, we were able to make ourselves known in the local cooking community.”

When deciding on what kinds of kitchen gadgets to devote money and space to, Teja looks at how technology has updated some tried-and-true kitchen tools while also offering more options than ever before. Some of the most popular products are designed to turn a tedious chore, like mincing garlic or peeling ginger, into an easy, simple and more enjoyable task.

Teja cites one popular product, a kale peeler that is specifically designed to strip the leafy parts of the popular plant while leaving the discarded stems, as a product that makes a chore more efficient. **Kitchen Plus More** stocks a variety of peelers and small gadgets that allow a customer to personalize their own cooking experience.

“Customers are looking for these kinds of specific items, so if you don’t have what they’re expecting from you, they’ll leave,” Teja says. “It’s no different than when you look at your hardware selection. Does every customer need three types of pliers? Probably not, but you need to be prepared for the customer to have a variety of similar products to choose from, or it will lead to poor customer satisfaction.”

Having a solid product selection isn’t the only way retailers can develop a following for home cooks. At **Prescott True Value**, kitchen gadgets like spiralizers and stovetop popcorn poppers show the store is well stocked in tools, which grows interest in other niche areas like gourmet foods and an expanded gift department.



The housewares category allows retailers to get creative both with their product variety and their merchandising tactics.

7 Key Kitchen Gadgets

Small kitchen appliances have come a long way in recent years, adding new technology and making cooking techniques once reserved for the busy restaurant kitchen available for the home cook. Stocking these items, and being knowledgeable of their uses, can enhance any housewares department and draw in a new demographic of customer. In the next few pages, take a closer look at some of the hottest kitchen gadgets on the market and see how you can incorporate these items into your housewares department.



Sous Vide Cooker

These cookers heat a pot of water to a specific temperature and maintain that temperature, allowing food to be placed in plastic bags and submerged. The constant water temperature and circulation allows foods to be cooked to an exact temperature and not beyond.



Immersion Blender

The convenience of a smaller and more focused blending implement is best shown the many roles of an immersion blender. These items can crush ice, puree vegetables and emulsify a salad dressing all without bringing out a larger countertop blender. It’s also easy to store and clean.



Electric Pressure Cooker

This is one of the most useful tools in the modern kitchen. Most models can work as a pressure cooker, a rice cooker and a slow cooker while also being useful for canning. Available in multiple sizes, electric pressure cookers can make any home cook look like a five-star chef.

“We’ve really looked at our kitchen area, and gadgets in particular, like we would other high-end hardware items, like power tools,” Springer says. “It can be a small addition, like a waffle iron shaped like a cartoon character or a soda machine that allows customers to make customized soda flavors, that can catch a customer’s interest in something they would have passed over before. Then they’re exploring the store even further, and those add-on items come into play.”



The cooking market is always expanding with new takes on serving dishes as well as cooking tools. Explore niche markets to find the latest trend.

The Secret Recipe

Retailers are always seeking out industry resources to spot trends in the world of hardware, and it’s no different when focusing more closely on housewares and the next big thing in the culinary world. For Teja and Springer, the most important ways to stay on top of trends is not letting housewares items become stale, and discovering how to find unique products and new ways to display them.

Springer has always used co-op markets and other traditional hardware shows as her primary sources for updated hardware items, but attending niche markets tied to kitchen and gift products have been part of her strategy from the beginning, she says. This can include larger shows, such as the annual International Home and Housewares Show, and smaller regional trade shows can also be beneficial, she says.

“We’ve always been very proactive in choosing which markets to attend. Each one has a different focus, and by changing up your market schedule, you’re expanding your options and diversifying the products you carry,” she says. “It keeps a business from being predictable, and when you are talking gadgets and new technology, you want to be known to have some surprises.”

Another manner of staying on top of culinary trends is using online competition as a resource. Teja says he explores Amazon at least once a day to see what kinds of deals are being offered and how the company is marketing different items to its customers. This can pinpoint buying trends that can be implemented directly at Kitchen Plus More, he says.

Teja is looking to expand the online shopping availability at Kitchen Plus More, as well as offer free delivery to the area, but utilizing online portals is not just about mimicking their business methods.

“One area that stood out in our research was a trend toward green cleaning products,” Teja says. “We’d see those items being heavily marketed on



Kitchen items can range from specialty slicers like spiralizers to high-tech versions of more common items like pressure cookers and coffee pots. Prescott True Value has committed to expanding the variety found in its housewares department.

online deal sites, with an emphasis on companies producing items that saved on waste or used fewer chemicals. We developed our own strategy to emphasize those kinds of products. We see sites like Amazon as a resource, not an enemy.”

Given the proliferation of cooking shows and the overall growth of home improvement entertainment, finding inspiration in entertainment also helps. Teja points to YouTube videos and online reviews that can inform him on what kinds of gadgets are being used in home kitchens and how he can best market these items to customers.

However a retailer finds the next big gadget, expanding the kitchen goods sold and improving the technology level of kitchen appliances are options for independent retailers to explore.

“Expanding kitchen goods in a housewares department doesn’t just increase your abilities to offer fun gadgets; it also allows for greater creativity in your store,” Springer says. “Customers can expect different things from a store. You’ve created an expectation for diverse products. You’ll have customers coming in just to see what new item you’ve found for them.”



Vacuum Sealer

Sealing food can be useful both for long-term storage and in cooking methods like sous vide cooking. Food can be placed in specially designed bags, and the vacuum sealer pumps all of the air out of the bag and forms a tight seal around the food. This prevents freezer burn and can also enhance flavor.



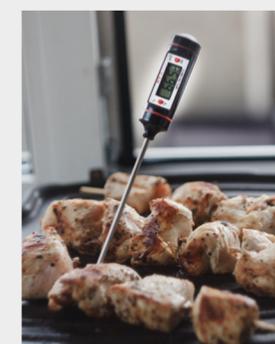
Air Fryer

These appliances heat a tray or basket to very high temperatures in a short amount of time while circulating air constantly. This develops a similar texture and taste to food that has been cooked in oil, but without the unhealthy results of deep frying.



Spiralizer

These slicing implements allow cooks to replicate the texture of pasta but replace dough with vegetables. Spiralizers come in many shapes and sizes, from versions that attach to standing mixers to handheld, and can slice vegetables into slices like lasagna or into strips like spaghetti.



Bluetooth Thermometer

Whether you’re cooking a roast in your oven or grilling steaks in the backyard, having a meat probe is one of the best ways to cook protein just right. It only makes sense to have a thermometer that can buzz your when your steak gets to that perfect medium-rare temperature.