

Tomorrow's world

Jane Blakeborough director of market intelligence resource Trend Monitor, identifies emerging trends and assesses the impact they will have on the KBB industry

At Trend Monitor, we look beyond the latest design fads and colour trends to understand how factors like shifts in social behaviour, demographic changes and any technological developments will affect the way we use our homes now and in the future.

We have identified some key trends that we believe will have an impact on the UK home-improvement industry in 2016 and beyond. These trends focus on how brands can future-proof their products to ensure that they meet the demands of their target market – the UK homeowner.

Space-saving products

With more than 50% of the world's population now living in cities and this figure expecting to grow to 60% by 2030, never before have so many people been living in urban areas. This has led to intense pressure on urban spaces. According to the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA), we are now living in the smallest houses in western Europe with the average UK new-build being only 92% of the recommended minimum size for a home and only half the size of houses built in the 1920s.

This trend goes hand in hand with the hybrid-living movement, which recognises that homes can be dual-function and a place in which you can live comfortably and work efficiently. Digital technology has created a highly flexible virtual workforce, which allows workers to work anywhere, anytime and on any device and very often this means from their home space.

Of course, the master of hybrid living is Ikea. Visit any of its retail outlets and you'll see a whole culture built on space-saving ideas and multifunctional spaces. And now UK designers and architects are beginning to react to the requirement for innovative ways of living in smaller spaces.

Customisation

Individualism is recognised as a global megatrend and refers to consumers' growing desire to be recognised as having 'personal needs' rather than being part of the mass market.

Today's consumer increasingly welcomes personalised products and services in their aspiration to be treated as an individual. Brands are actively seeking out ways that allow their customers to personalise a product or service and make it bespoke to their individual needs and requirements.

Offering customers the opportunity to design some of the core elements of a product will become a powerful differentiating factor. In turn this will balance the power back to the brands, as customers will aspire to be considered valuable enough to gain preferential access.

Technology will play a major role in this trend, especially with the advent of the 3D printer, which has the potential to create a more efficient business model for bespoke design and personalised products. A pioneer of this trend is American Standard Brands, which has already launched the first ready-for-market, fully working taps created with a 3D printer. This maybe a step too far for many KBB manufacturers, but offering customisation in terms of bespoke handles, finishes, colour matches and made-to-measure products is something all KBB brands should consider for 2016.

Waterless washing

The millennial consumer has high expectations in terms of social and environmental issues and looks beyond just the financial cost of their purchase. Having grown up in an increasingly politically active and connected world, they understand the effect the products they purchase have on the environment.

Within the KBB industry, concerns about the fact that the energy needed to wash a garment is six times that needed to make it in the first place, has led to Xeros, a design company based at Leeds university to look at developments in technology



that allows for (almost) 'waterless washing'.

During the wash cycle, more than a million tiny polymer beads are added to the load along with a cup of water and a few drop of Xeros's special detergent. The dirt is absorbed into the centre of the beads, where it remains trapped.

The machines require less than 20% of the water used in normal washing machines and use just 50% of the electricity. The beads also resist dye transfer between colours and whites, so fewer wash cycles are needed.

Currently, the technology is only available for hotels and laundrettes, but the company plans to create a household version in the near future.

Self-cleaning products

Self-cleaning surfaces and materials have been applied to different facets of building and home improvement for a number of years, externally and also internally.

Until now, self-cleaning surfaces have been touted for their convenience factor, but they also have a positive environmental impact.

A self-cleaning surface doesn't require the use of the environmentally harmful cleaning agents or chemicals – something that's ecologically beneficial on a number of levels and it also results in less water being used for cleaning.

Japanese company Toto is a good example of a brand which has used technology to revolutionise the way toilets are cleaned. Its Washlet toilet uses a UV light, along with a self-cleaning surface and antibacterial electrolysed water, to clean and remove germs and bacteria from the bowl. Something other toilet manufacturers have been very quick to copy.