



Connected wine cooler, oven and dishwasher in the Linea range by Smeg. All can be controlled remotely via a dedicated app – SmegConnect

Make the smart connection

The topic of connected appliances continues to divide opinion in the kitchen world but many manufacturers are getting on board with the concept and it seems as though the industry is headed in that direction. Francesca Seden plugs in to the latest trends and explores some of the challenges...

“The mid-market is not ready for smart appliances”, “connected appliances will be game-changers”, “connected appliances are gimmicky”, “consumers don’t make the most of smart appliances”, “more retailers should get behind smart appliances.”

These are just a small selection of the views from across the industry when it comes to this divisive topic. It’s certainly a subject that has had everyone talking. However, now it seems the industry is really moving towards a connected future, with many manufacturers now offering ranges with some sort of smart, connective functionality.

It is predicted that the total smart home market could be worth more than £225 billion by 2020 and, speaking at last year’s IFA Global Press Conference in Lisbon, GfK global director Natalia Andrievskaya commented that the biggest challenge for the industry is smart or connected appliances, but that manufacturers and retailers should really get behind the technology.

“When everything else is connected – your car, your mirror and your lighting,” she said, “the consumer will not think twice about going for a connected appliance. The problem is that the barriers to the smart home – the protocols and standards – will not be overcome immediately. The strong

pull will come in a couple of years.”

She added that the growth of electronic personal assistants such as Amazon’s Alexa could also help to speed up the adoption of smart appliances, and she was right. The anecdotal evidence is that because of voice control assistants, which are extremely popular, more consumers are coming around to the idea of the smart home as some of that fear is being dispelled.

Voice control

Voice activation is a great way to control appliances and something the public are likely to get on board with because it’s so straightforward.

Last May, LG announced that its latest range of appliances – the Signature Collection – would be fully compatible with the Google Assistant on the Google Home smart speaker.

The functionality is available on a range of appliances and with it users can check the time remaining during wash cycles on their Signature washing machine, tell their Signature refrigerator to create more ice, or adjust thermostat settings on their air conditioner through simple spoken commands from anywhere within range of Google Home.

BSH Home Appliances sales director for kitchen independents, Tristan Sherlock, comments that the current explosion of interest in

connected appliances is being driven by voice technology and devices such as Amazon Echo. “Consumers that are looking to buy a new kitchen and are in that mind-set to make more significant changes to their home are more open to the idea of connected appliances to work seamlessly within a connected home,” he says.

Other appliances featuring voice-activation technology include Hoover’s new AI range which includes the Hoover AXI washing machine and dishwasher, as well as the Novy Connect by Novy. It has “no flashy aesthetic extras, but allows for extraction and mood lighting to be adjusted by voice control, or via an app, as opposed to using touch or remote controls”, country manager Owain Harrison says.

He is also of the opinion that voice control will help move the connected appliance market forward and says it will be a game-changer.

No more gimmicks

One major accusation historically levelled at connected appliances is that they are ‘gimmicky’ and that consumers can pay a premium for ‘smart’ features and connectivity without ever using them to their full functionality. For example, a washing machine that you can remotely start is interesting, but you still have to load the washer manually, so you could just turn it on then.



Samsung Family Hub 3.0 connected fridge-freezer



When everything else is connected – your car, your mirror and your lighting, the consumer will not think twice about going for a connected appliance
Natalia Andrievskaya, global director, GfK





Creating a showroom where consumers can experience for themselves the spine-tingling excitement that a beautiful connected kitchen can offer will keep you one step ahead

Tristan Sherlock, sales director for kitchen independents, BSH

Novy ONE 780mm combination induction hob and downdraft extractor



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- 1. LG Signature fridge-freezer and wine cellar both are fully compatible with AI platforms such as Google Assistant and Amazon Alexa
- 2. Siemens SN278I36TE freestanding dishwasher with Home Connect in stainless steel

What might be more interesting is a washing machine that features diagnostic functions that can tell the user when something is wrong and calls an engineer. This offers a genuine benefit, because it's potentially going to save the user time, money and the hassle of being without a washing machine.

To avoid gimmickry, Nick Platt, business director for built-in appliances at Hoover Candy, advises that when developing new features, manufacturers need to ask how the smart functions will positively affect customers' lives. "If it's not truly impactful, offering a bespoke solution to the user," he says, "then it's not worth having."

Applications

So what features are most beneficial?

Steve Dixon, head of category range cooking at GDHA, believes that giving the consumer control of their appliance remotely is of particular importance. He mentions the Zeus Bluetooth Connected Timer, which allows the user to control and adjust cooking times without having to be in the kitchen.

Similarly, Miele's smart ovens provide a status report through the Miele@ home app, enabling users to check up on the progress of their dishes and turn the oven off while on the go or take care of other chores in the home.

Also using connectivity to assist with cooking and food generally is the Smeg Linea range, which can be controlled using the SmegConnect app. The range features a wine cooler, oven and dishwasher, all of which have useful smart functions.

For the Wine Cellar, the app can

be used to manage wine stocks, pair wine with dishes, order wines through an e-commerce platform, and more. The oven, meanwhile allows the user to access new Smeg recipes with preset parameters that select the correct time and temperature. The 'My cookbook' feature lets users save their favourite recipes.

Fridge-freezers too can be loaded with smart functions to help the consumer and one of the latest of these is the Samsung Family Hub 3.0. It features cameras, which allow the user to check what's inside via a smartphone app. The machine also allows the user to set simple food reminders to alert them when food is close to expiring. It is also possible to browse online and create shopping lists right from the fridge door.

Some, including Grundig, believe that consumers will be increasingly occupied with environmental concerns, including reducing food waste, and Gino Grossi, brand manager at Grundig, explains that the company is proud to channel its innovation into this meaningful cause. "At IFA last year, we revealed future product innovations, such as our new FreshMeter technology that helps tackle food waste. It assesses the freshness of meat within a fridge by detecting the bacteria level present and then displaying the condition of the food via an LED indicator: blue (analysing), green (fresh), yellow (going off) or red (dispose)."

Laundry care

Laundry care is another area where connected technology can have real

A smart secret

Will Hopkins, managing director of smart-home retailer, Your Smart Home and CEO of Intrinsic Group, a company that specialises in creating the software that enables devices to communicate to control systems, gives his view on the interoperability...



The ability to interlink and intercommunicate is a key ingredient of the smart home. As CEO of Intrinsic Group, I've personally met with several of these kitchen appliance manufacturers.

From these meetings, I can say that the common ethos they all share is that they see the closed protocol as being a sales protection method. However, many retailers and indeed purchasers, carry multiple brands in their showrooms or homes.

I've seen a lot of data and I have yet to see any that justifies the logic that a closed ecosystem protects sales. In fact, I'd say it's actually the other way around – if customers can use products that can form part of an overall solution, then these are preferred. In today's connected home with Amazon, Google and Apple offering mainstream solutions, the ability to communicate is critical.

At Intrinsic, we intend to continue to work with manufacturers to help them create solutions to enable wider, simpler integration and the kitchen sector is very high on our target list.

benefits, according to the brands we spoke to. Here, features that help with dosing, picking the right program for the load, and diagnostics are most prevalent. According to Ian Moverley, brand communications director at Whirlpool, the laundry care segment is making headway and certainly leading

the way within connected appliances, with volume and value soaring by 518% and 485% respectively, according to GfK.

"Smart technology in laundry appliances gives consumers the opportunity of taking energy and resource savings to the next level ►



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1. The Whirlpool 6th Sense Live washing machine (FCSR 12441) can be purchased with a matching tumble dryer. They can communicate via the Whirlpool 6th Sense Live app. The app communicates the washer's current program to the dryer, which will automatically synchronise and set the correct drying cycle, to ensure optimum garment care
2. Zeus Bluetooth connected timer by Stoves

518% THE LAUNDRY CARE SEGMENT LEADING THE WAY WITHIN CONNECTED APPLIANCES, WITH VOLUME AND VALUE SOARING

– to optimise wash programmes, as well as control the appliance remotely. These innovations, which improve the lifestyle of the consumer, have resulted in washing machines leading the way within smart appliances,” says Moverley.

The Whirlpool connected washing machine (FCSR 12441) and matching tumble-dryer (HSCX 10441) communicate with each other and can be controlled from anywhere using the 6th Sense Live app, which is available on both iOS and Android. Wi-fi enabled appliances from Whirlpool offer the consumer genuine assistance in the everyday running of their homes, Whirlpool claims. Features such as task delegation, maintenance tips and the flexibility to run appliances at the most efficient time of day, give consumers an intuitive experience and the freedom to live their lives.

Miele's Twin Dos wi-fi washing machine, meanwhile, features the brand's 'intuitive two-phase detergent dispensing system, TwinDos', and can calculate precisely how much detergent is required. It releases it at the most appropriate time during the washing cycle, for the smartest, most beneficial clean.

Interconnectivity

Whatever the functionality, though, what is most important is that the appliance is easy to use, providing intuitive and seamless operation. Manufacturers need to ensure their retailers are experts on this technology and these products have to be demonstrated in-store to allay the fears of wary consumers who often assume that this technology will be too complex for them to operate.

Short instructional videos can also be helpful for making consumers more comfortable in operating their new connected appliance.

BSH Home Appliances' Sherlock adds that those retailers who can capture the early adopters will have a head start on the rest. "Creating a showroom where consumers can experience for themselves the spine-tingling excitement that a beautiful connected kitchen can offer will keep you one step ahead."

Concerns over interconnectivity are also high on the agenda in this market, with many believing that appliances



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won't be truly 'smart' until they can communicate with each other. At present, each manufacturer has its own app and closed operation system. They see this closed protocol as a sales protection method.

However, many brands are getting on board with IFTTT (If This Then That) compatibility, which is described as an easy, free way to get apps and devices working together.

One example is Samsung's SmartThings app. It offers a simpler way for users to control TVs, fridges and other home appliances, as well as syncing them together. It is said to seamlessly connect with hundreds of Samsung, and other third-party, compatible connected devices, allowing users to do everyday tasks



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Nick Platt, business director for built-in appliances, Hoover Candy



from one single product.

It's fair to say that Samsung has been at the forefront of leading an IoT revolution, but it also has a significant head start compared with most appliance manufacturers given its background in consumer electronics.

As Nick Bevan, head of product management for home appliances, Samsung UK and Ireland puts it, "the consumer experience for IoT (Internet of Things) should be as easy as flipping a switch".

Whirlpool, too, has recognised this issue of compatibility – an issue that must be overcome if the market is to grow significantly. The company says it has extended its leadership in the fast-growing Internet of Things, by developing IFTTT compatibility for its suite of connected appliances.

Tomorrow's world

So, it's clear that smart technology within home appliances is here to stay and will grow, though the pace of this growth will very much depend on whether appliance manufacturers can come together to develop technology quickly enough to bring prices down to meet the mainstream.

One can look for clues as to how this market might develop by examining that of smartphones and TVs. Both dismissed as pure, pointless gimmickry with no future, they are now everywhere because manufacturers listened to consumer need and reacted.

So perhaps one day in the not too distant future, the connected oven, washing machine or fridge will be as ubiquitous as your iPhone. **kbb**

Turn the page for RETAIL



Showroom design

"It is important to replicate the realism of a real-home kitchen." pg 78



High Street focus

The Midlands

"I don't think the high street is in trouble at all. People talk themselves into it." pg 86



Retailer Profile

Kutchenhaus

"There will always be the need to be able to come in and see a kitchen." pg 90



Showroom of the month:

Victoria + Albert

"The space is about inspiration but also drilling down into the details." pg 98

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