

Gadgets galore - desperate housewives are no more

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New research from MINTEL finds sales of household cleaning products booming as manufacturers successfully entice houseproud Britons to clean up messes we didn't know we had in ways we didn't know possible. A new willingness to spend more money on effective cleaners, with convenient, time-saving gadgetry is driving this mature sector forward. Gone are the days of the simple mop and bucket, duster and polish and toilet brush, today's cleaners could well be armed with all-in-one floor cleaning systems, ergonomically designed dusting devices and battery operated toilet brushes.

By the end of this year this sector is estimated to reach some ?557 million, having increased by 13% since 2000. This is particularly impressive bearing in mind that this is a mature market, which is dominated by every day low prices and own label. While many would think that people would rather spend their hard earned cash on other, perhaps more desirable products, as many as three in ten (31%) Britons look out for new products to try. What is more, many consumers are obviously taking the issue of household cleaning very seriously, as one in twenty (5%) of us now admit to being neurotic about cleaning, with this neurosis peaking among the 35 to 44 age group (10%).

"Exploiting our fixation for sterile surroundings, seemingly mature segments are re-inventing themselves with new applications - look no further than the toilet blocks sector, where a rash of new products is triggering an obsession for gleaming rims. Sinks have also come into focus, with a trend for do-it-yourself plumbing now entering the mainstream. Simultaneously, dusters, cloths and brushes are becoming "gadgetised", with new technologies and designs taking the grunge out of cleaning. This market is doing everything right - developing innovative products, adding value to its products, and stirring interest at point-of-sale," comments Ellen Shiels, Senior Consumer Analyst.

Things that make us clean - guests, kids, pets and allergies

Many of us are keen to keep up appearances as having guests round is the one thing that is most likely to get us to put on a pinny. Indeed, three in ten adults (31%) admit to doing most of their cleaning just before they have guests round. Interestingly, those aged 15 - 19 years old are the most likely to get caught up in this last minute cleaning frenzy.

Pets and children seem to cause an equal amount of chaos around the house, with almost a quarter of women and Mums feeling they have to clean up that much more because of the trail of destruction left by our four legged friends and sticky fingered kids. Men on the other hand seem to adopt a much more relaxed approach with near 90% happy to sit back and let the pandemonium simply wash over them. Amongst parents it is those with kids under 4 years old who are the most likely to feel the pressure of tidying up after their tots.

The recent increase in awareness of allergies is also having an impact on how we clean, with just over one in twenty (6%) adults now cleaning to prevent problems with allergies.

Doing it the way nature intended

MINTEL's research also shows that there seems to be an interest in natural or traditional cleaning products, such as vinegar, bicarbonate of soda and lemon. Indeed, one in three of us (32%) believe that traditional cleaning products are just as effective as any new products available, with those aged between 55 and 64 particularly keen to adopt this back to basics approach. In addition, a quarter of adults (25%) claim to choose products that are better for the environment, those aged 55 and over proving to be the most environmentally friendly, while one in five (21%) prefer more natural-scented products.

"One important aspect of the interest in traditional types of cleaning is the harshness of cleaners and their damage to people's skin and to the air. Beyond these factors, an interest in low-allergy ranges, perhaps using lemon or vinegar and positioned as containing fewer chemicals, could increase the incentive to buy these products. In recent years, a trend towards more natural ingredients and scents shows that manufacturers are prepared to suggest or imitate natural cleaning processes. The programme How Clean Is Your House? has also played a part in the rising popularity of this back to basics approach to cleaning," comments Ellen Shiels.

Power to the people

The household cleaning market is one of two extremes. On the one hand, multi-purpose formats, in particular, have driven value rises over the past two years. A desire on the part of consumers for effective, all-in-one product ideas reflects the time-poor attitudes of many in relation to the cleaning process. New trends placing the emphasis on 'power' as a prime focus for products appear to have also captivated public imagination. This has been best illustrated by the success of the Cillit Bang range of cleaners, launched in 2004. The all-purpose/kitchen cleaner sector has grown by 12% since 2003 alone, to stand at an estimated ?159 million in 2005.

On the other hand there has also been an element of greater segmentation, which is benefiting companies of less well-known brands which find it difficult to break the mainstream stranglehold of the big five multi-nationals in the UK market, and also influences distribution trends. This has resulted in many becoming more aware of those messes that perhaps would have just been wiped over with a cloth and a bit of elbow grease. Now we can get cleaners for every type of surface from marble and granite to acrylic and enamel - there is no excuse for not providing the different areas of your home with the individual care they require.

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