

AIM Research Reveals Silver Lining In Consumer Spending Plans

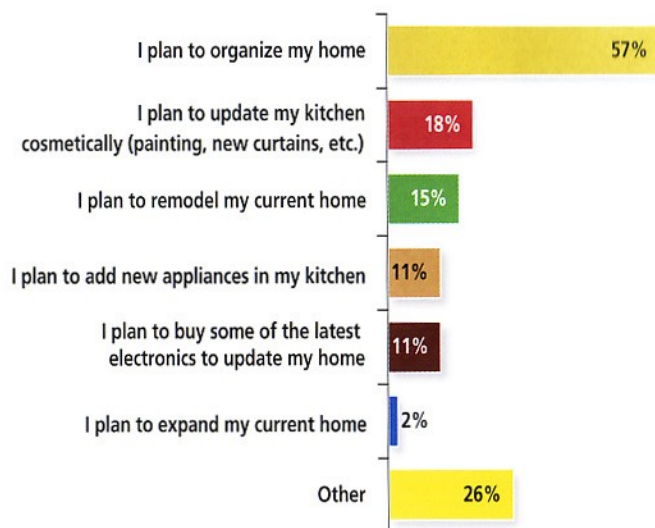
continued from page

focus groups and in-depth interviews with consumers, many cited a desire to “reward” themselves with small purchases to “spruce up” the look of their homes.

In a late-January Internet survey of 800 middle-income consumers by AIM, 40% of consumers polled stated that they “plan to make a few small purchases to keep things fresh and updated.” Only 8% of those surveyed have “completely stopped spending” on their homes, according to the AIM research.

When asked to rank their priorities for spending in the next year (after paying for housing and insurance), home furnishings spending (for housewares, furniture, appliances and accessories) ranked number four after food/basic necessities, fuel, and clothing/accessories. Home furnishings spending ranked higher than spending for home improvements, electronics, travel/leisure and education. Education ranked solidly at the bottom, chosen last by 40% of the participants in the AIM survey.

The top two choices were clear priorities: food/basic necessities drew 77% of the top votes, and 57% of the respondents selected fuel as number two. Home furnishings stood right in the middle in terms of anticipated spending, according to the AIM survey, with 20% of the number-four votes and 20% of number five.



How is the economy reshaping your spending?

Albing said the cautious, yet potentially receptive consumer spending attitudes revealed by the research signal the need for home furnishings companies to be clear about which pricepoints represent “value” in their respective categories. “The manufacturers and retailers must be able to understand the difference between what is considered investment spending and what is

perceived to be an update. A colorful new toaster at under \$50 is an update, while a \$300 state-of-the-art food processor is an investment.”

The channel of choice for many consumers surveyed by AIM is online retail. In AIM’s research, consumers cited several reasons for turning to online retailers: increased general comfort with the Internet; the perception that online shopping al-

lows shoppers to search for the lowest prices; and lingering concerns about fuel prices that is limiting local shopping trips (despite the decline in fuel prices in late 2008).

Home furnishings are also perceived to be easier for consumers to buy online than apparel, according to AIM.

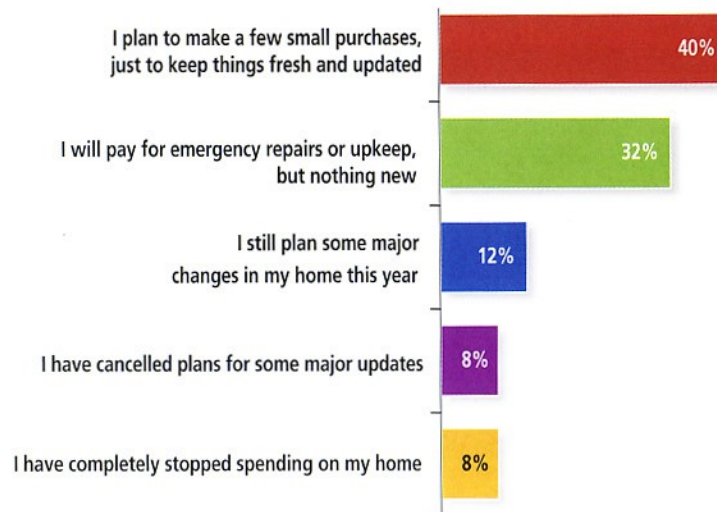
AIM has found that aggregate “online shopping” consumers include many catalog

shoppers who visually shop the catalog, then transact the purchase online. Many of these consumers said they chose not to buy over the telephone because of long waits, but they would not buy at all without first seeing the product in a catalog. Most retailers do not differentiate between these catalog/online consumers and strictly online consumers, according to Albing.

What are your home spending plans?

“Only 8% of those surveyed have “completely stopped spending” on their homes

—AIM research.

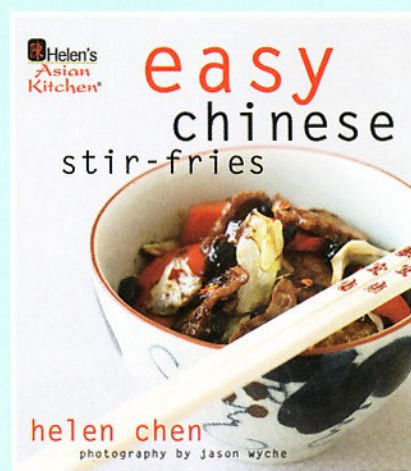


Harold Import Showcases New, Expanded Lines At Housewares Show

CHICAGO— Harold Import is expanding the range of products and brands it offers with the announcement of several new distribution agreements. Among the newest additions on display within the Harold Import booth at the International Home + Housewares Show, as a result of these agreements, will be the Silex and Cuisine Ideale cutlery lines from French cutlery maker Deglon; cutlery from U.S. professional cutlery maker Dexter Russell; cleaning tools from upscale supplier Casabella; and gadgets and kitchen tools from Prepara.

The new additions join Harold’s already extensive offering of products for distribution spanning the full range of housewares product categories. They will be joined by two new cookbook offerings that complement housewares lines currently distributed through Harold: Helen’s Asian Kitchen and Elizabeth Karmel’s grilling accessories.

Helen Chen’s new cookbook, *Easy Chinese Stir Fries* is the first in the planned



Helen Chen’s new Asian cookbook.

series of Helen’s Asian Kitchen cookbooks. The book includes recipes for many familiar dishes such as Kung Pao Chicken, Moo Shu Pork, and Sweet and Sour Shrimp. It also includes recipes for

less familiar dishes, such as Chicken with Cashew Nuts, Black Pepper Beef with Green Beans, and Shanghainese Shrimp with Peas. The book is designed to complement the Helen’s Asian Kitchen ethnic cookware and kitchen tool collection, which is not affiliated with Joyce Chen Products, said the company.

Helen’s focus in product and cookbook development is to make Asian cooking easy, healthful and more accessible to the average home cook, according to the company. Her recipes incorporate the authentic taste of Chinese cooking while making for a healthier dish using heart-healthy oils and ingredients, according to the company.

“I learned to cook the old fashioned way— from my mother— with a style that emphasizes the delights and comfort of homestyle dishes,” said Helen Chen in a prepared statement. “I love to teach the methods of the Chinese cook at home— quick, easy, healthy and delicious. I created my Helen’s Asian

Kitchen line of cookware and cooking accessories to help make the process even more carefree.”

The other new cookbook making its debut at the show is Elizabeth Karmel’s *Soaked, Slathered and Seasoned*, a BBQ guru’s guide to marinades, mops, sauces, rubs and other flavor-boosters for grill-bound foods. Elizabeth Karmel is owner of the Grill Friends line of grilling products, distributed exclusively through Harold Import; is Executive Chef at New York’s Hill Country barbecue restaurant, and has appeared on Today show and Good Morning America, among other television appearances.

In her new book she provides 400 ways to add flavor to grilled foods, including marinades, brines, barbecue sauces, glazes, mops, and more. In addition to the new book, Harold Import will be showcasing a new collection of organic wood grilling planks under the Karmel collection. The line includes a variety of wood flavors.