

Bigger, faster and more intelligent

Home laundry products don't have a reputation for looks or intelligence, but the latest products are sleek, stylish and brimming with technology. Retailers can benefit by mastering the latest trends in brains and beauty.

Washers

The household penetration of washers in the UK is somewhere above 90%, so most sales are replacement purchases. However, because manufacturers are rapidly developing new and better technologies and features, consumers are unlikely to be able to simply buy another model like they had before. This makes for opportunities for the retailer, who can step in to explain the latest features and hopefully get the customer to trade up.

But it is important not to just reel off the long list of features that every washer now possesses. This can be confusing, and it is better to concentrate on the features that offer the most benefit to the customer. A few key features are particularly persuasive and what customers are most likely to pay a little extra for. 'Quick wash', 'half-load' and 'hand wash' settings are good examples. They all offer ways to make a customer's life and laundry easier.



Increasing the capacity of washers has recently become the focus of a range of manufacturers. Most machines are still rated for a 5kg load, but sales of 6kg washers are growing much faster, and 7kg models are now available. Larger capacity machines have distinct advantages. More space means reduced wrinkling and creasing and less stress on clothes – so clothes will look newer for longer. Larger capacity washers appeal most

strongly to families, or those with large wardrobes who wish to use their washer less often.

Drum sizes can seem a little confusing to consumers and retailers alike – after all, who has ever weighed their dirty laundry? A better way to describe it is that a 7kg machine has 25% more space than a more usual 5kg washer. If talking to a customer about the possibility of buying a larger capacity machine, always offer to show them the difference between a smaller and larger drum size.





Washer dryers

Washer dryers are units that combine the functions of a washer and condenser dryer into a single drum. These products are great space-savers for small households, removing the need for separate appliances. They are also a good option for people who would not use a dedicated dryer often enough to warrant buying one, but would like to have the option of a dryer function for occasional use.

Washer dryers do have their limitations though, and the main one is that their capacity for the washing and drying programmes differs. Although it is possible to get washer dryers able to wash 6 or 7kg, drying capacities are typically around half that size. This means it is not possible to load the machine to maximum drying capacity and programme it to have the lot clean and dry. Drying capacities are improving however, and the best washer dryers are able to wash and dry a load of 5kg, the typical capacity of a stand-alone washer.

Keep it green

Energy ratings are important for whitegoods sales, and influence buying decisions even if consumers don't always know exactly what they mean. More than 70% of washers are now A-rated, but there is more variability in the ratings of washers and washer dryers, which are generally not so efficient.

It is also worth considering that saving energy is not just about going for the best efficiency rating. Drum size is also important, because the larger drum sizes may enable less washes a week and, therefore, use less energy. Some premium products contain technology able to monitor the washing process and to make adjustments to use the lowest possible energy and water consumption.



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Looking good

Like whitegoods in general, looks and style have become more important for home laundry products. It is now possible to get more than just the traditional white finish, with the ever-fashionable stainless steel look the most popular alternative. Non-white finishes come at a price for the consumer though, so the retailer can benefit from knowing which customers are likely to pay more for a better look.

As manufacturers have increased the design effort on their products, they have also made attempts to make their home laundry appliances complement one another. This is attractive to consumers who want their kitchen to look the best. Having a washer and dryer from the same manufacturer side-by-side offers the proud owner a coordinated look not available any other way, and the retailer a chance to theoretically double every home laundry sale.



Sales Tips

- ✓ Retailers should be ready to guide their customers through the features on offer. Remember your customer may have bought their last washing machine 8 or 10 years ago, technology that is not new to the retailer, may be new to the customer and he may benefit from explanation.
- ✓ Have sample loads for all types of laundry appliances to show the different capacities. For a big American washer put in the 22lb/10kg load and then show the 11lb/5kg load of a European appliance. Getting the customer to decide which load suits them gets buy-in early on.
- ✓ Some of the latest washers use sensors to adjust water usage and wash time for perfect results, using as little as 39 litres of water. That's less than half the amount machines 10 years or older guzzled, so if consumers are still clinging onto their 90's bargain it will be costing them more than twice as much to run!
- ✓ If a customer asks about a dryer, bring up washers and vice versa. Highlight the benefits of having two up-to-date appliances so that one is not 'letting down' the other, as well as the aesthetic advantages.



Keeping cool

Understanding a customer's motivation is key to successful selling, and with fridges and freezers, the motivation often lies in lifestyle trends.

Lifestyle

The kitchen is the centre of the modern home, and the increasingly fashion-conscious public is more concerned than ever about the type of products that appear in it. Lifestyle programmes on television and 'modern living' patterns, such as the lack of time and an interest in healthy eating, are driving the market.

The popular products are the larger fridges that have a greater capacity and a more stylish design. Finishes also play a large role in decision-making for the consumer – the majority of cooling appliances are still white, but stainless steel and black are rapidly growing in popularity.

Asking the right questions

Identifying the lifestyle needs of a customer will help you match the right product to the right person.

For example, ask your customer if they have a family, or what kind of food they buy when they shop. Do they buy a lot of fresh food and shop regularly? Do they store a lot of food? How much cooking do they do? Do they buy many bottles that would require additional storage space? Are they looking for a more practical solution, or do they want a product that will make a statement about their kitchen?

These are all questions that will help you to find the most suitable product for your customer – an American style side-by-side is no use to a single professional who eats out regularly and buys convenience food, just as a small compact product is no good to a family of four which is interested in organic food and home cooking.

Standard features in any fridge include automatic defrost, interior lights, dairy containers, adjustable shelves and egg and bottle holders in the door. The next step is to highlight the additional features that match the lifestyle requirement of the customer.

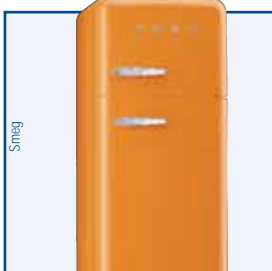




De'Longhi



Gorenje



Smeg



Indesit Grafitti



De'Longhi DR0740

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Features - Compartments

Different types of food require different methods of storage, and the more sophisticated products will have compartments with adjustable temperatures. For example, meat and fish keep fresher for longer if stored between 1° and 0°C; salads and vegetables benefit from temperatures around 1°C with a little humidity to assist longevity, while fruit benefits from temperatures around 3°C. If stored at the correct temperature, food also retains nutritional value. This will appeal specifically to the health conscious and to families.

Temperatures above 4°C provide ideal conditions for bacterial growth. It is, therefore, important that a fridge operates within the safe temperature zone meaning below 4°C, while freezers at -18°C or below.

Fridge freezers may also have a function where one section can be turned off whilst the other remains on; this will suit people who are away a lot. Remember this when you are asking your customers lifestyle questions.

Top of the range products will also have features like pizza storage and deep door balconies for bottles. The temperature of these compartments can also be separately controlled.

The American-style side-by-sides will frequently have an external ice maker for easy access and for instantly chilled, filtered water as well as crushed and cubed ice.

Frost free

This is a good target area for replacement purchases. Customers will need to be educated about what ‘frost free’ actually means. Many people assume that it means no more frost, but they may be unaware that there is no need to defrost their freezer ever again. As there is no build up of frost, it means that storage space doesn't shrink, frozen products won't stick together and it will be

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possible to read the labels on products and distinguish frozen peas from frozen gooseberries. Fresh food also freezes down faster and therefore keeps its texture and nutritional value.

Energy saving

Energy cost is one of the top three considerations with consumers. Products with an A and A+ rating are cheaper to run and are therefore attractive to the customer. Research carried out for Whirlpool by Martin Hamblin reveals that consumers are willing to pay a £20 premium to have A+ rated product over an A rated product. Make sure you explain what the rating means – it could be a cost efficiency that the customer is unaware of.

LCD

Interactive LCD displays keep the customer informed about storage conditions, allow the user to set functions and take advantage of specific settings, such as ‘holiday modes’ that turn off certain sections of the appliance. LCDs also have features that set off alarms if the door has been left open.

Some products even have televisions set into the door. If your customers are looking at high end models, it is worth showing such a feature.

Anti-bacterial

Anti-bacterial coatings are also appearing on more models and these help to limit bacterial growth, keeping the interior of the fridge more hygienic.



Sales Tips

Top tip – Demonstration

Displaying products is one of the best ways of maximising a sales opportunity. Lack of space is always an issue, especially in an independent's showroom. However, remember that:

- ✓ “Do what the Internet cannot do – demonstrate the appliance. Involving the customer in the sale and getting them to use the appliance, touch it, feel it and gain a greater understanding of it under retailer guidance is a solid way to increase the likelihood of a sale.”
- ✓ Also, with a move towards healthy eating, consumers are looking for such things as longfresh chill zones which allow fresh food to be kept for longer at a low temperature. Show them to the customer and explain the product options and benefits.
- ✓ Consider starting with top end products – it's easier to move down, but often difficult to move up. This is particularly important when demonstrating a product – customers will see features in action that they previously hadn't considered. For example explain the benefits of flexible storage and sensor-driven technology, and consumers will be much more likely to buy a higher specification product.
- ✓ Likewise with the finishes – being able to see the difference between white and stainless steel may be the deciding factor for the customer.