

Giles Slater, md of Figura, is more than a designer of bespoke kitchens – he has taken a smart approach to growing sales in tough times – page 26



Neve's Bev Neville brings a woman's touch to the macho world of plumbing, albeit designer radiators – page 37



The UK is just the beginning of Methven's European expansion, says new UK ceo Steve Lee – page 52



Essential kitchen & bathroom business

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www.ekbbusiness.co.uk



The Integro 864 high-gloss lacquer white finish with handleless soft-close drawers by Habitat

Habitat's raid on the kitchen sector

Home furnishing retailer Habitat has launched into the fitted kitchen market with a German-manufactured offer.

The concept was due to be unveiled on Boxing Day at five of its 34 UK stores – Kings Road, Tottenham Court Rd, Lakeside, Oxford and Cambridge. The company says it plans to roll out fitted kitchens to the majority of its stores.

Customers can choose from 103 door options, 16 carcass colours and almost 100 worktops – in granite, Corian, stone and glass. Habitat says the fitted kitchen

offer includes design and installation.

Prices start at £5000 and, according to Habitat, will "cover almost all price points in the middle to upper sector". All kitchens come with a five-year installation guarantee, with carcasses guaranteed for life.

Integrated appliances from AEG, Baumatic, CDA and Neff are available too; those in AEG and Baumatic's premium ranges come with a free five-year parts and labour warranty.

'Snow way like... Mereway

The crippling effects of the extraordinary wintery conditions in December affected deliveries as well as deterring shoppers. It prompted one retailer body to call on the Government to postpone the VRT increase scheduled to start on 4 January.

The snow and ice that brought the UK to a virtual standstill in early and mid December hit our kbb industry hard, too. And stories of companies going the extra mile to overcome the odds have been coming in thick and fast.

One, Mereway, even managed to deliver kitchens and bathrooms to the further reaches of Scotland despite three of its transport drivers getting stuck in a 17-mile tailback that took a mammoth 19 hours to clear. The journey eventually ended after a 27-hour ordeal when they finally unloaded their respective deliveries.

Having left Mereway's Birmingham HQ at 2am, the three plucky drivers, Keith Vernon behind the wheel of a 38-tonne articulated lorry and Charles Bennett and Mike Spencer each in 18 tonne

lorries, were determined to meet their deliveries whatever the weather threw at them as they made their way to Aberdeen.

Keith had the extra burden of risking customer disappointment since his cargo was due to be loaded on the last ferry for a week to Lerwick in Shetland. He made it by the skin of his teeth.

Ginette Crowther, Mereway's group marketing manager praised all three drivers' dedication and commitment: "It makes me proud of our industry to see customer service at its best."

And Mereway's Shetland island customers? "We were very impressed with the commitment we've seen from the Mereway drivers," says a spokesperson from Lerwick Building Supplies. "We couldn't thank Keith enough as our customer was delighted to get their kitchen delivered on time."



Ex Pedini boss's Milla showroom assets to be auctioned

The assets of former Pedini UK md Darren Miller's Mayfair Milla showroom have been seized. They are to be sold at auction on site at the Milla premises at 22 Bruton Street. The sale is due to take place between 13 and 15 January.

The agents, Sherlocks Auctioneers, acting on behalf of the landlord, declined to say who had taken possession of the goods or on whose behalf they were acting.

Sister company County Bailiffs – who seized the assets of Pedini UK in October

last year – say they were not involved on this occasion.

Sherlocks are also accepting private bids for the goods, which include granite-topped Milla island units and appliances by Gaggenau, Miele and Wolf.



A kiss set in stone: The lovers' embrace made so famous by Gustav Klimt's masterpiece *The Kiss* has been beautifully recreated in ceramic. Devon-based tile manufacturer Original Style has crafted a hand-decorated 600 x 600mm tile of the painting. The original is thought to be the most valuable work of art in the world. Suitable for both kitchens and bathrooms, the opulent design, pictured here with the Copper Chariot bath from Chadder & Co, is layered with 24-carat gold and platinum applied to the same areas as the original painting. It also has the textured 3D effect of Klimt's canvas creation, which is impossible to replicate in print.



www.silestone.com

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The Sport Series!



Cemento

White Platinum

Rosso Monza

ATLAS
FreshWater Filter Co
Tel: 0845 117 0896.
www.freshwaterfilter.com

FreshWater's Atlas model is a three-way monobloc, controlled by two levers: one for selecting hot or cold water and a smaller handle on the spout for choosing filtered water. A concealed aerator ensures a steady water flow



AURORA
Abode

Tel: 01226 283 434. www.abodedesigns.co.uk
Combining great design with great performance, Abode's Aurora kitchen tap has an LED base ring which changes colour from blue to pink to red depending on the temperature of the water. The monobloc tap comes in chrome and matt black finishes, a model in chrome with a pull-out spray is also available



running hot and cold

Today's generation of taps offer much more than just running hot and cold water, and most leading brands now offer products which can dispense filtered cold water through the main tap. Some manufacturers, like Triflow, with its new Quadro tap, push this concept further, offering products that not only deliver hot, cold and filtered water within one spout but also instantaneous, coffee-ready hot water.

Quooker is one of very few companies offering water at 100°C and has a strong customer fan base including Johnny Grey, Mark Wilkinson and Laurence Pidgeon.

"Sales are very, very strong," says Stephen Johnson, md for Quooker UK. "This year we will install over 10,000 and have over 1,000 displaying dealers. So sales are reaching boiling point!"

InSinkErator's sales and marketing director, Ashley Munden, also reports strong sales in the hot tap sector.

"Hot tap sales are up 25% on last year's figures for October to December. This growth is a direct result of the investment we have spent on developing the hot water tap category," he says.

3300
InSinkErator

Tel: 0800 389 3715.
www.insinkerator.co.uk
InSinkErator currently has two hot taps and is adding the 3300 model to its collection later this year. The stylish single-lever design has a child safety lock feature and a swivel spout for added practicality. Available in chrome or brushed steel, the 3300 can deliver up to 100 cups of 98°C water per hour as well as filtered cold water



H2OTAP
Itho

Tel: 0845 250 8090. www.itho.co.uk
Itho is one of the few companies to offer 100°C boiling water straight from the tap. Its monobloc, three-in-one H2OTAP models - the curved Dolce and the more angular Gusto, pictured - provide cold, hot and boiling water, via a compact 5 litre boiler. Available in chrome or stainless steel, the rotatable taps are fitted with a patented childproof push-wheel and recoil spring



QUOOKER MODERN
Quooker

Tel: 0207 923 3355. www.quooker.com
In four different designs and six different finishes including satin chrome and gold plate, the Quooker boiling water tap allows customers to dispense entirely with a kettle. All Quooker taps are height-adjustable and insulated and have a childproof push-and-turn handle. Pictured is the gold-plated Quooker Modern



LOT
Dornbracht

Tel: 02476 717 129.
www.dornbracht.co.uk
Dornbracht's stylish kitchen mixers just got even more luxurious with the launch of a new range of hot water and filtered water taps. The curved Tara Ultra and the angular Lot, pictured, both create modern sculptural silhouettes and offer near-boiling water - 93°C - and purified drinking water at the push of a lever. Hot water-only versions are also available



QUADRO CONICAL
Triflow Concepts

Tel: 0845 313 5000. www.triflowconcepts.com
Building on the success of its Triflow technology - which delivers hot and cold water as well as filtered water through a dedicated tube in the spout - Triflow Concepts has launched Quadro, which adds the option of instant, filtered water heated to 98°C. Mains water goes through a filtration system before it is heated in a tank, delivering water on demand for making tea and coffee or blanching vegetables. Quadro is available in a three-lever mechanical tap or an electronically-controlled version, in a number of models including the award-winning Zaha Hadid design, above.



ALL-IN-ONE HYDROTAP
Zip

0845 602 4533. www.zipheaters.co.uk
Zip's new All-in-One HydroTap range delivers instantaneous boiling and chilled filtered drinking water via two buttons on top of the tap. A separate single-lever mixer controls hot, cold and warm water. Two taps are available; one which blends its water supply with stored boiling water and one which has a local hot water system. The All-in-One has a number of energy-saving features, including a timer function which switches off the system during periods of inactivity, such as overnight.



web doctor

www.triflowconcepts.com

In a series of virtual health checks, our web doctor monitors the pulse of one company's online offering. This month, it's Triflow Concepts – so what's the diagnosis?



It is never a good idea to get your unmentioned in a twist, not least because it makes you walk funny. But there is one thing guaranteed to make this practitioner's blood boil: the insidious doublet speak that permeates all media and is particularly beloved of marketing types. You know it has got to critical levels when even the BBC can't resist dropping the latest 'trendy' phrase that, for the rest of us, means very little. Try the Beeb's latest – "life-changing injuries" – answers on a postcard as to what injuries aren't, in some way, life-changing? No wonder Spoonerisms on Radio 4's Today programme get so much traction. Anything to relieve all that po-faced earnestness!

However I must admit there is one bon mot that has stuck in my cerebral cortex: status stories. It came to me first from the ruby red lips of that divider of camps and scourge

of rubbish service Mary Portas, who uses it to describe those brand identities that we tell our friends about, our new toy that makes us feel happy and momentarily superior. It is the art of creating brand affinity that rubs off because we buy into the idea that our new purchase is not only a must-have creation but a must-brag. Heritage doesn't need to be earned over decades – get the branding right and it can arrive almost overnight.

This struck a particular chord while perusing the month's roster, and led to the following question: who has captured this theory to its fullest? Triflow Concepts emerged the overwhelming winner despite its relative newness in the market. The instant hot tap is swiftly becoming a status symbol bar none in today's hi-spec kitchens, but as the number of options increase, establishing a point of difference will get harder and harder.



quooker.com

Quooker

Video plays a big part in telling the Quooker story within a minimalist red-and-white-themed rectangle that keeps things short and to the point

Top marks Take a gander at the demos page. The success lies not just in professional-level demonstrations, but in how the menu shows at a glance how many uses the tap can be put to

Works well Even a novice can grasp the fundamentals of just how easy the tap can be installed and maintained thanks to concise sections on safety and the tanks

Could do better There are two splash pages – one that determines what language you want, and then a full screen 'innard' that houses a video loop and 'Welcome/Enter Shop' links, which can be done without

Suggestion box Forcing the browser window to open full screen may sound like a great way to inhabit the space entirely, but if you, like me, have plenty of window estate available and like to have more than one app open at once, having to manually resize downwards is a bit of a faff

Attraction factor Four stars for being small and almost perfectly formed ★★★★★



zipheaters.co.uk

Zip Heaters

There's a large contingent of Flash at Zip HQ, mitigated by simple-to-use menus, obliging graphics and quick-look feature panels for the products

Top marks A "How can we help you?" panel on the index sends retail and commercial customers in the right direction, without the need for those irritating "Click here for trade/domestic" splash pages that hamper free flow

Works well Drop-down menus zip you along to a fully-fledged support section, with How Tos, service and spare part guides, and corral the instructional videos in one place for zippy browsing

Could do better A news ticker showing tales from 2009? Really?

Suggestion box Could the homepage Flash movie be thinned, perhaps by taking out some of the generic image sections? It does slow loading time somewhat

Attraction factor Not even a year old, this site is maturing nicely. Three stars ★★★



insinkerator.co.uk

InSinkEerator

Navigation is easy peasy courtesy of a simple top-right menu highlighting waste disposers or taps, plus the all-important 'Where to buy' button

Top marks With a hard-to-spell company name, InSinkEerator has sensibly invested in some advertising on Google so its name pops up at the top when you search for hot water tap in the UK. Good thinking

Works well "Why do you need one?" asks the main landing page for hot water taps, and then nimbly answers the question, aided by a professional demo video. There's too much worktop stroking from the model mum for my taste, however!

Could do better A comparison between its two hot tap models might be advisable as it isn't obvious how they differ

Suggestion box Do the eco and money-saving benefits get a big enough push?

Attraction factor There's a strong sell at work, helping homeowners doing their online research. Three stars ★★★



fantini.it

Fantini Rubinetti

First impressions can be wrong! What appears to be a largely empty site is actually a cunning and unusual format that opens out like a butterfly

Top marks Head over to the product pages and the lateral navigation comes into its own. Rather than a prosaic nav bar, the product listing is set into the middle section, with the selected product on the right. A nice change from the norm

Works well Fantini, keen to leave acres of real estate empty to up the drama, has put the technical information like drawings and installation manuals into an aptly named Technical Area. Shows a single-minded attitude to design

Could do better Most of us now know how to increase text size on our computers, but it shouldn't be necessary

Suggestion box Isn't it tempting to take up just a bit more of the window space?

Attraction factor Stylish and serious. Three stars ★★★

web watch

next generation taps

The race is on to reinvent the tap, but have these hot water and purified water manufacturers succeeded in reinventing the web?



But clever Triflow is ahead of the game. A revamp, or, in Triflow's case, a va-va-vamp, has added uncommonly-sleek Flash drop-down menus that float at the top of the page as if they are wall-hung, swooping up and down main and sub menus. Just too cool for school when set against the swathe of the mysterious deep black background with purple accents. Is there a better colourway to offset the sparkling chrome wares? This luxe look is carried through to the individual product pages, resplendent in their simplicity. Leaving the detail behind a further link is almost like saying, "We know how good this looks, so don't worry too much about the practicalities". Triflow can get away with this approach for two reasons: firstly, the photography is top quality, and secondly, the learning curve for high-function taps is not as steep as it was. The sell has got much simpler.

Besides, there's a mini movie to answer the big questions about running costs, safety and usage that are peppered with the sorts of wordage that does hit home: "British-based factories" and "traditional craftsmanship with the latest technology". It's another important element of successful status stories. Triflow's made-over site has an inherent status story thanks to the high-end delivery, and doesn't it know it. Having made first-rate use of social networking functions on the product pages, you can just imagine customers posting a picture of their new tap directly from the page. There's nothing like speed and ease to aid a little brazen gloating. With styling and storytelling as accomplished as Triflow's, it proves you don't have to be first out to be first class. You just have to make sure everyone gets the message. The Jones's must be fuming...

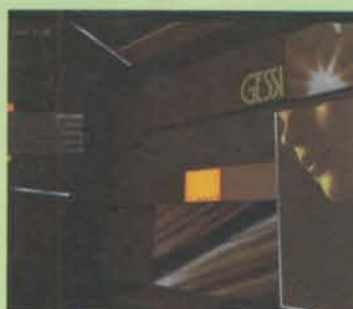
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mgsprogetti.com
MGS Progetti
MGS has gone for the white on black classic design that shouts Italian style
Top marks The product pages are a lesson in sharp editing, with minimal text and all the gubbins of features, warranty and manufacturing details kept tidily at the top of the pages. It could be said that clicking on Features should show more than a drawing: great for trade customers, but not that helpful to the masses
Works well Loads fast as a cheetah
Could do better What with dodgy sound effects on the homepage and even dodgier spelling, MGS would benefit from a small refit to iron out the snags. Let's face it, pan pipes don't say Italy to most
Suggestion box Surely only techies fully understand those 'Best viewed' labels which suggest the ideal pixel width to browse the site? Isn't it time we all just designed for the majority of screens?
Attraction factor Darkly appealing but slender offering. Two stars ★★



the1810company.co.uk
The 1810 Company
A sleek rectangular design boxes in content to keep all the elements superbly organised
Top marks Page-turning brochures are a great innovation, but 1810 sensibly offer the option of downloading the pdf. It might be worth slicing it up into bite-sized sections to achieve a smaller file
Works well The 'Care & Cleaning' section was surprisingly informative about looking after your stainless steel. Out goes the plastic bowl thanks to 1810!
Could do better A Flash movie of splashing water at the beginning is outputted inexpertly, making it look pixelated and homemade.
Suggestion box Rather than a spec drawing of the Neoperl Aerator, how about a short demo of the non-splash flow in action? Seeing is often believing
Attraction factor Some elements still to be finished up, such as the distributors list. Two stars ★★



gessi.it
Gessi
There's no denying Gessi's Italian/English affair is a high-end, minimalist lovely, tapping into the luxury vibe in a swath of golden tones
Top marks Brevity on the web should be applauded, and most corporate identities online have too much padding and timewasting. No danger of that here
Works well Evokes a Bond-era glamour, despite the ambient muzak
Could do better Websites are the ultimate tool in show-and-tell, so how come the product pages for the Just range are so secretive? One image each and a boring spec sheet pdf. You would have to be on the ball to discern Just's unusual coloured light features.
Suggestion box I suspect only retailers in the UK will have the patience to navigate the spartan contact roster to get info. Consumers will run out of steam
Attraction factor Bit of a bimbo - all fur coat and no sensible shoes ★★



freshwaterfilter.com
FreshWater Filter Company
Strong branding sometimes gets lost in a cluttered site that would benefit from rationalised sectioning
Top marks There is much effort to give the site a magazine look and feel, with 'Did you know' panels and easy-to-digest facts to help consumers understand the products' key selling points
Works well An unusual mix of marketing narrative and virtual shopfront
Could do better Banner ads for nutrition experts should make sense, but could send the message that FWFC is a reseller rather than a manufacturer selling its own brand products. Can it be worth it?
Suggestion box Using images rather than a mix of text and graphics spells disaster for search engines which can't 'read' those vital keywords. It is certainly worth having a quick rejig to solve
Attraction factor A busy central section on the homepage lets the clear-minded navigation down. Two stars ★★



itho.co.uk
Itho UK
Perhaps the translation from Dutch to English is to blame for strange turns of phrase throughout the site. Would you know what 'Assortment' meant?
Top marks The Functionality section contains a nifty step-by-step demo of how the taps work that's easy to follow
Works well Itho has embraced multimedia and understands that brief movies and diagrams help tell the story
Could do better Once you click into the unfortunately named Kitchen Comfort area, a complete absence of images of the H2O tap is bewildering. Green beans and leeks conjure up freshness, but hiding the merchandise at this early stage does not make sense
Suggestion box Compare Quooker's videos of uses with this site's paltry four suggestions and a novice may get the idea that the H2O is somehow lacking
Attraction factor Highly unlikely to get the juices flowing ★★



First past the post...

Speed is of the essence on Quooker's seemingly sparse site which is actually laden with information. The trick here is crystallising all the data into very small bite-sized chunks - vital when the design offers limited room to manoeuvre. Product pages feature the bare necessities, such as images of the available finishes and a link to usage diagrams and text that outlines the main features. Prices are corralled onto one easy-to-read table, the same brevity also coming into play on the 'Safety' page, which says it all in three finely-tuned sentences