

Smart products tackle pancakes, makeovers

March 13 2015, by Alexia Elejalde-Ruiz, Chicago Tribune

In the persistent quest to take all human effort out of basic tasks, manufacturers showcased several new "smart" products at the recent International Home and Housewares Show that tackle everything from pancake design to makeovers.

Here are three high-tech innovations that may be coming soon to stores:

PANASONIC'S FUTURE MIRROR

The idea: This [mirror](#) shows how different colors or styles of makeup would look on your face - or, for men, whether a mustache is a good idea - without anyone having to actually apply the makeup or grow the mustache. Unlike virtual photo tools with similar purposes, the mirror image isn't frozen, but moves with you as you turn your head and blink.

Why would you use this: It could cut down on time spent sampling lipsticks and eye shadows at Sephora or Ulta - though, arguably, that's the fun part of it - and lighting options let you see how the palette would appear in different settings. In addition, the mirror pinpoints wrinkles, sunspots and other skin imperfections and recommends products and lifestyle regimens to improve them, the efficacy of which you can evaluate by peering into the mirror later and seeing if it finds fewer flaws.

Where to find it: The company is in "discussion phases" with several specialty retailers that could install the mirrors in their stores, said Corrie Murphy, vice president of consumer marketing and beauty.

PANCAKEBOT

The idea: "Print" intricate pancake designs - the Eiffel Tower with all its lattice, for example - using a "smart batter dispensing system" that traces the desired image onto a griddle. Users design the image with provided software, save the image on an SD card, and insert that into the [PancakeBot](#), which uses a combination of compressed air and a vacuum to control where the batter is dispensed.

Why would you use this: Inventor Miguel Valenzuela, who in his day job works as a civil engineer at the San Diego County Water Authority, said "it is about inspiring kids to look at technology in different ways." In addition to kids at home being able to print dinosaurs or any other shapes that excite them in pancake form, restaurants could customize pancakes for customers or print their logos on pancakes.

Where to find it: In a recent Kickstarter campaign, PancakeBot met its goal of \$50,000 within its first 40 hours, Valenzuela said. The product (\$299) is expected to launch in early fall at a large retailer that caters to commercial customers, said Evan Dash, CEO of product innovation company Storebound, which helps inventors to get their products to market. He sees it at first being used in restaurants.

BLENDTEC CONNECT

The idea: Reduce the risk of human error with a system that uses Bluetooth technology to communicate the details of the recipe you are making to a Connect blender, mixer and food scale. Users select from 100 recipes featured on a recipe app, and then follow step-by-step instructions for adding ingredients to the blender pitcher placed on the food scale, which tells you when to stop pouring based on weight. The idea is to eliminate the need for measuring cups. The app also controls the blender or mixer to prevent over- or undermixing.

Why would you use this: An advance toward a "connected kitchen," the purpose is to help simplify and speed cooking and execute perfect recipes, the company says. A helpful feature is the ability to customize recipes based on servings, so that you don't screw up ratios, and suggestions for substituting ingredients you don't have on hand.

Where to find it: The company has not yet assigned the product a price. It is expected to launch in 2016.

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