

Domotex: “Unique Youniverse”, keynote theme for the 2018 showcase

It is a fast-moving world that we live in. A world of rapid digitalization and globalization. Among its many effects and manifestations, this increased pace of life is changing the way consumers behave, with products and services becoming increasingly personalized and individualized as people seek more and different ways of expressing self-determination and uniqueness. Co-creation is gaining new meaning as customers aspire to greater involvement in the creation and design process, which they are increasingly viewing as an added opportunity for self-expression. New and more sophisticated technologies are constantly emerging to meet this demand and

provide ever more unique and personalized customer experiences.

In recognition of this trend, the organizers of Domotex (Hannover, 12-15 January 2018), the leading trade fair for floor coverings, have chosen “Unique Youniverse” as the keynote theme for the next year showcase. The keynote theme will find concentrated expression in Hall 9, which will be home to a richly diverse and immersive world of experience that will serve as a central gathering point and source of inspiration for visitors. This area will comprise four distinct zones. In the “Flooring Spaces” zone, companies

from the floor coverings industry will stage highly creative product showcases that reflect the keynote theme. The “Living Spaces” zone is where exhibitors will team up with partners from the interior design sector to craft inspiring spaces and innovative lifestyle realms. In the “NuThinkers” zone, students, young designers and startups will present the innovative projects they have developed on the topic of product and service individualization. And finally, the “Art and Interaction” zone will present the keynote theme of “Unique Universe” in a sensory feast of exhibits from the worlds of art and design, paired with interactive multimedia displays.

Photos: Deutsche Messe.





What does the lead theme “Unique Youniverse” stand for?

With many products, consumers are now able to exert considerable influence over the creation and production process. Thanks to digitalization, consumers can now design their own personalized items with just a few clicks of the mouse and then have them made. The consumer's emotional journey is a key part of this trend because the emotional buy-in is what gives individualized products their unique value. Jargon abounds for this process of bending mass produced products to one's own personal taste. Expressions like "customization," "co-creation" and "bespoke". This is a world where the customer is increasingly a "prosumer" – at once a co-producer and a consumer. Individualization also changes how people relate to brands. The greater the customer's input into the creation process, the more closely s/he identifies with the brand.

their own sports shoes, football jerseys and hoodie jackets. Once they have received their creations, they can upload their own personal design stories. Adidas has also teamed up with the U.S. environmental organization Parley for the Oceans to offer a swimwear collection in which each item is unique because it is made from upcycled fishing nets and debris retrieved from the world's oceans.

Even luxury fashion brands are getting into customization. For instance, the iconic British luxury label Burberry now has in-store “Scarf Bars” where customers can select from a vast array of materials, patterns and colors to create their own unique cashmere scarves. They can even have their custom creations monogrammed. Fashionistas who don’t require personal in-store service and advice have the option of crafting their scarves online instead. Designer fashion label Jimmy Choo offers a range of personalizable

shoes and bags under its “Made to order” brand. The items are designed online and handmade in Italy. As with Burberry, the turnaround time for these digitally co-created items is about three months.

One-off car and sofa originals for luxury consumers

Major international brands in other industries are likewise offering these sorts of one-off

Even luxury fashion brands are getting into customization.

Shoes, shirts and scarves - individualization is really big in the lifestyle apparel sector

Sportswear manufacturer Nike's "NIKEiD" customizable shoe service has been around since the late 1990s. A user-friendly software interface guides customers through the design process step by step as they select color, material and labeling to create their own personalized footwear. The shoes are delivered three to five weeks after the order is placed. Similarly, Adidas has a "Miadidas" customization web portal where users can design





originals. Luxury consumers, in particular, like to have a say in the design and features of their products. They are, after all, paying top dollar for small-series hand-crafted creations, not mass-produced goods, and having a unique, highly personalized customer journey is part of the deal. One example of this is the Austrian upholstered furniture maker Wittmann, which gives its customers the option of being present while their furniture is being made. Lamborghini is another case in point. The Italian supercar maker has seen a sharp increase in its personalized car business. In 2016, half of all the luxury cars it sold were custom-finished, although with a total output 500 to 700 vehicles per model, that's still a fairly manageable number in absolute terms.

Mass production for large-scale projects

In the interior design and furnishing sector, product individualization for the most part means allowing the customer to select individual product elements from within a set range. But there are also manufacturers who offer products in small batches outside their normal production runs. The Swiss bathware ceramics manufacturer Laufen is one such company. With its Bespoke Projects business, Laufen partners with architects and designers to create individualized washstands, bathtubs and toilets for special construction projects. This relates to monument conservation projects such as the restoration of Mies van der Rohe's Villa Tugendhat building in Brno and the construction of Herzog & de Meuron's luxury residential tower in New York City. The Warsaw-based furniture startup Tylko takes customization a step further with its "Hub Table". Created by world-famous designer Yves Béhar, the table can be personalized online using an app. By moving sliders on the online interface, customers can determine the dimensions, surface finish and color of their table as well as the angle and shape of its legs.



Unlike most makers of personalized products, Tylko even allows returns and exchanges.

No exchanges!

By contrast, exchanges are not possible with the "My Very Own" line of digitally personalized eyewear by Mykita. That's because every pair of glasses is tailored to the individual topography of the customer's face. The Berlin-based maker of glasses and sunglasses realizes its customized creations using a mix of 3D-scanning, parametric design and additive manufacturing (3D printing). Some individualized products are not actually for sale – as in the case of "Alessi goes digital". The Italian giftware and houseware company partnered with industrial designer Giulio Iachetti to undertake a research project on individualized pens. Together they developed and exhibited a collection with a difference: the casing of each pen is 100% digitally designed and 3D printed. The aim of the project is to explore the possibilities and limitations of the fledgling 3D printing technology. Then there's the recently announced joint project between British designer Tom Dixon and the Swedish furniture giant Ikea. The two are planning a modular sofa bed that Ikea customers can plan online and endlessly adapt and customize using add-on items and components. The basic frame for the sofa bed will consist of extruded aluminum

sections made from 40% recycled material. Ikea plans to launch the sofa bed platform, known as "Delaktig" (Swedish for "involved"), on the market at the start of 2018.

The future: the customer as brand co-creator

Individualized products are the result of a combination of skilled manual and industrial production and digital control and ordering technologies. Projects pioneering this area used to be looked upon as quaint gimmickry, but now, with the digital transformation of production in full swing, the sky is the limit. Today, more and more manufacturers are seeking greater customer involvement as they look to grow their personalization offering – an offering that may soon go beyond the mere ability to select from a number of pre-set options. More and more manufacturers are enabling their customers to provide feedback on their products and effectively have input into the brand creation process. In the not-too-distant future, the world may see completely new genres of products whose forms and uses – in some cases combined with services – are radically different from those of the products we know today.

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