

A modern kitchen and dining area. The kitchen features light-colored cabinetry, a white countertop, and a central island with a concrete top and wooden base. Three wooden bar stools are tucked under the island. In the background, there's a dining table with four wooden chairs. The room has large windows, pendant lights, and decorative wall art.

What Brands should know  
about **four trends** seen at  
KBIS and IBS 2024

**There is no industry more dynamic** than that which is represented at the annual Kitchen & Bath Industry Show (KBIS) and the International Builders' Show (IBS)

One of the things I set my sights on learning was the industry's state of mind. I'm pleased to report that there is a prevailing sense of optimism. While renovation and remodeling activity is expected to remain soft, things are heating up with new construction. Mortgage rates – while still elevated compared to recent history – have been falling slightly and, as a result, builders have seen new home construction pick up relative to year-over-year comparisons. Conventional wisdom suggests that as new construction picks up, the resale market is bound to follow. I believe it's going to take a long time before things get back to normal, but we're seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. As economic conditions and mortgage rates continue to improve, we'll see a healthy increase in resale activity, which will drive stronger renovation and remodeling activity. In this environment, smart marketers will focus efforts on driving business through professional and builder channels as they invest in their brands for increased DIY/consumer activity in the mid- to long term.

Much of these shows focus on showcasing the latest and greatest products. As someone who works with trends for a living, I enjoyed seeing how these were being incorporated into hard goods for the home. Beyond informing product design, four of the most popular trends I saw have relevance for all kitchen, bath and building product brands.



## NOSTALGIA

Living through the turbulent waves of COVID and now the chaos of AI, most of us are longing for the way things used to be. The future is unknown and frightening, and there is comfort in the past. Kate Bush's 1985 hit "Running Up That Hill" became a hit again in 2022. Two different brands paid tribute to 1983's "Flashdance" in last month's Super Bowl. The vintage and retro design trend dominated the floor, from cabinets, knobs and pulls to faucet, shower and lighting fixtures. Brands should think about the power that nostalgia can have in their marketing communications as well. Even a futuristic product can tap into the values of simpler times.



## HEALTH AND WELLNESS

The self-care trend is no longer limited to nutrition and beauty brands. We want our homes to care for us and provide a healthy environment. Many new products tapped into that, particularly in the kitchen and bath space, like incorporating water filtration and spa-like features into a shower experience. Even if marketers don't have new products or innovations that focus squarely on health and wellness, smart marketers will explore the health and wellness benefits of existing products and leverage them in touchpoints all along the consumer's journey.

## ECO-CONSCIOUS

Most prevalent on the building products side of the floor was a commitment to sustainability. This was evident in new and different composite and manufactured materials, new manufacturing processes, energy consumption and efficiency features, and emissions standards. Purpose remains a powerful pillar of attraction. I encourage brands to consider it as more than a product feature and integrate whatever you stand for into your go-to-market strategy. Don't stop at one page devoted to your purpose on your website. Live that value and do everything through that lens. Audiences across the entire spectrum, from retailers to pros to consumers, look for authenticity and can sniff out imposters in an instant.



## SMALL-SPACE LIVING

As the cost per square foot has been rising dramatically, it's no surprise that the average size of new homes has dropped 13% over the last eight years. Appliance manufacturers have caught on and are featuring trimmed-down offerings that fit better and integrate seamlessly into those smaller spaces. Brands should keep in mind that bigger is not always better. Consumers are putting a larger priority on mental health, which can be associated with freeing themselves of clutter, extra space to keep clean and unnecessary financial burden. Showing that a brand understands these concerns will drive brand consideration and loyalty numbers higher.





We practice **inspired thinking** at Marcus Thomas, which involves asking questions that reveal new ways of approaching a challenge. I challenge you to do the same.

- How are you allocating marketing resources in this current environment?
- How have the journeys of your customers – and consumers – changed over the past 12 to 18 months?
- Are you mapping key marketing “touches” to critical moments along their journey?
- How are you leveraging these key trends to tell the story of how your brand adds value to your customers’ lives?

Regardless of what trend your brand is taking advantage of, the one thing I've seen drive the most success in this particular industry is having a **consistent presence** with your audience throughout their entire decision journey. Knowing them so well that you can provide the right kind of assistance when they need it most in a manner that they welcome is a delicate art. It takes **commitment and patience** to refrain from focusing every message on making the sale. The most successful brands are those that nurture the relationship and see it blossom into **loyalty and advocacy**, which provides a much greater return on your marketing investment.



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Known as one of the industry's top-tier strategists, Tim has honed his strategic planning craft over the past 25 years at agencies like Draft, Brokaw and Wyse Advertising for clients that include Sprint and Kaiser Permanente, as well as Sherwin-Williams, TimberTech Decking and CraneBoard Siding. At Marcus Thomas, he leads strategy for our home and garden clients, to whom he brings unique insights and innovative communication solutions that drive business. An active member of the 4A's Strategy Committee, he gives back through frequent guest lectures at Kent State, Bowling Green State and Cleveland State universities.

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