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The 10 Best Time-Saving Home Appliances

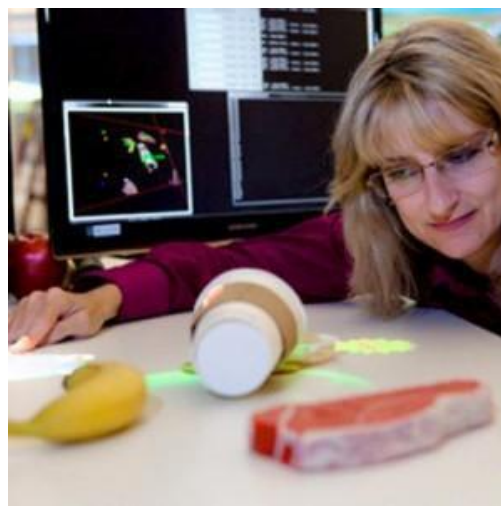


Jenna Goudreau Forbes Staff

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I write about business and women's leadership.

Now that dual-earning families are the norm and many are working twice as hard at the office, maintaining order on the home front is more important than ever. Working parents especially are turning to exciting innovations in home appliances to help them manage the complicated choreography of their daily schedules.



Oasis interactive countertop by Intel

“We are all so time-starved now,” says Lori Wood, product development director of manufacturer Kenmore. “Consumers want appliances that get their chores done faster. And the technology is becoming so advanced that you can go off to work with fewer constraints at home--while also saving money and the environment.”

[Gallery: 10 Best And Newest Home Appliances](#)

Many incredible new products allow consumers to interact with their technology while enabling easier and faster cooking and cleaning. Some products are almost entirely self-sufficient, requiring just a flip of a switch. Nearly all are being designed to be energy efficient—saving you money every month on your utility bill. And it doesn't stop there. Products under development promise homes of the future that are smart, interconnected and completely self-reliant.

The Best Of Today

The latest advances in home cooking come from induction technology, says JoAnn Emmel, a Virginia Tech professor who specializes in home technologies. Induction cooking was brought to the market decades ago but was unreliable and expensive. Today, it's new and approved. Induction cooktops, like [those made by GE](#), heat so precisely that, even on the highest setting, only the pan gets hot while the rest of the cooktop remains cool. Food never bakes onto the surface, and cooking is faster and better controlled.



Ikan Scanner

Many new products incorporate barcode scanners to help ease cooking and shopping. The [Ikan Wireless Scanner](#) sits on your countertop and digitizes grocery shopping. When you notice your cereal box is almost out, for example, scan the barcode and the item will appear on your online grocery list. By hitting send, your complete grocery order will soon be delivered to your doorstep, eliminating time-consuming list-making or big trips to the supermarket. Then, once your pantry is stocked, [smart microwaves from Smarthome](#) take the guesswork out of heating food. Scan the package, and the microwave will set itself.

Even more amazing, appliances are beginning to think and act for themselves. Robotic floor cleaners from [iRobot](#) will mop, sweep or vacuum without supervision. Kenmore has developed a system called Kenmore Connect for its washers and dryers. When one breaks down, repairmen are able to troubleshoot the problem by diagnosing an electronic signal over the phone. The advance helps avoid wasted afternoons waiting for a handyman to arrive.

Perhaps most impressive is the interactive [Oasis countertop](#) designed by Intel. Equipped with cameras and a touchscreen surface, the countertop recognizes the ingredients you are using and helps you cook. If you place a steak and red pepper on the counter, it offers recipes, methods of preparation and nutritional facts. The counter also displays timers and plays videos to help you master a cooking

technique. Emmel believes that computerized appliances reveal a glimpse into the future ahead.

Gallery: 10 Best And Newest Home Appliances

The Future Beckons

How will homes of the future function? Emmel envisions smart homes where all appliances are interconnected and communicate with each other. The devices would rarely need supervision and could diagnose themselves and automatically alert a repairman. It's not science fiction, she says. These advances are in development. It may be just a matter of years before your alarm clock triggers the shower and coffee maker to start, after setting the TV to your favorite morning news program.



Induction cooktop by GE

Emmel believes that current induction technology will be pushed forward. Researchers are investigating an induction countertop, she says, that would power appliances anywhere you place them—meaning they'd be completely mobile and wireless, no longer needing a plug. Induction will be “the technology of the future,” agrees Kenmore's Wood.

Home appliances will also evolve to incorporate multiple uses, Emmel predicts. Already in development is an oven that doubles as a refrigerator. “When you leave in the morning, you place your dish in what begins as refrigeration,” she explains. “Later, it will cook the food. If you're running late, you can call the oven from your cell phone and tell it to wait.” Talk about time management.

At this year's Electrolux Design Lab, an annual technology design competition, the third-place winner constructed a sleek shelving unit that functioned as an all-in-one cooktop, refrigerator, storage space and lighting tool, all powered by wireless technology. The effect is a compact kitchen that is energy efficient.



Courtesy of Electrolux Design Lab

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Who knows what the future may hold, but ultimately, “it all comes down to innovation that makes your life better,” concludes Wood.

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