

HOMEWORLD[®]

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Cookware & Bakeware
Lenox champions French cuisine with The French Chefs line. **Page 16**

“[Ree Drummond] is making sure that her personality and sensibility is there in everything, from the packaging to the products.”

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Small Electrics

Keurig's John Whoriskey talks about the single-serve brand's future growth plans.

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Oxo keeps brand fresh with GreenSaver launch. **Page 200**



The Rating Game

Rise Of 'Influencers' Invites Challenge To Online Reviews

By **MIKE DUFF**
Senior Editor

NEW YORK— Mass-market retailers, vendors and the service providers that support them recognize that, today, they have to face challenge and controversy by immersing themselves in marketing that employs social media to reach consumers who are employing new and rapidly changing means in seeking information about products and services.

Some, including Keurig, already have

gotten a taste of how navigation of that particular communications channel can prove choppy. Others including Nordstrom, Inc. and Village Green Network, an organization active in social media marketing, have even had to deal with a United States Federal Trade Commission that is revisiting its approach to elements such as endorsements, in working out appropriate ways to conduct social media marketing.

Today, of course, most companies

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HOMEWORLD BUSINESS EXCLUSIVE

Meyer's Darrin Johnston Charts Future Growth Opportunities

By **EMILY CAPPIELLO**
Senior Editor

CHICAGO— Charged with the task of executing the overall corporate business plan, Darrin Johnston, managing director at Meyer Corp., has his sight set on future company growth. Johnston said he brings a fresh set of eyes to the company's existing business model and while, he noted, Meyer has been a dominant player in the market, he is looking forward to further increasing its market share.

“What I hope to be for this company is an example,” Johnston said. “If you want to come to this company and you want to make a commitment here, this is a company that will give you opportunities,” he said, noting that he started at Meyer as an entry-level account executive 18 years ago. “I never would have thought that this opportunity would be mine.”



Darrin Johnston,
Meyer Corp.

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YEARS

Meyer's Darrin Johnston

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On a personal note, Johnston said he is honored that he has been given the vote of confidence to take on this role, while knowing there is work to be done. HOMEWORLD BUSINESS® recently spoke to Johnston about his new role, new strategies and the future of the company.

HomeWorld Business: Tell us a little bit about what the managing director position entails. What are some of the major changes that you are going to be taking on in your new role?

Darrin Johnston: What has changed is that before I was really involved in overseeing the building of our revenue plan in conjunction with the business development and marketing teams and then the sales team would go and execute that at the retail level. In that role, I worked alongside a lot of the operational aspects of the company—planning, forecasting, inventory management, supply chain, accounting, obviously sales has a touch point in pretty much every department. Now, as managing director, instead of focusing exclusively on the revenue aspect end of the business plan, I will now be overseeing the development of the overall corporate business plan, which will include all of those areas that I worked alongside. I am in charge of all operations for the U.S. and Latin America for Meyer Corporation, U.S. I have a very seasoned senior management team and it's been an honor to work with them through the years and they are a great group of people.

I will no longer be directly involved in the sales operations, but will oversee sales from the managing director role. Our brand portfolio is really split into two segments in the marketplace—we have gourmet and we have moderate. We have a robust brand portfolio, and we manage those segments with separate sales teams due to the different business requirements that the two separate segments need focus on.

Tula McDougal is currently our vp/sales for the gourmet segment and Chris Mangan is our vp of the moderate segment. Previously they reported up to me as senior vice president. I will not be replacing my former position and Chris and Tula will be fully responsible for all sales aspects and will work side-by-side to manage the overall business

and revenue planning. They have been my right hands for the last five years in the business. I rely and will continue to rely heavily on their expertise in the marketplace. I've got incredible confidence in both of them and I'm excited about the opportunity that this shift is going to create for them.

HWB: Are you relocating to California now that your role in the company has shifted or are you planning to stay in Atlanta?

DJ: I am going to stay in Atlanta and my agreement is such that I have agreed to spend a certain amount of time in the California office and I will maintain a Georgia office as well, which I already have.

HWB: What are some of the short-term goals for you in your new position?

DJ: My short-term focus is really going to be bringing a fresh set of eyes to review our organization and I'm going to spend a lot of that time really listening and learning and familiarizing myself with these additional areas of the company that I've worked alongside versus really being involved in all the day-to-day details of how those parts of the company operate. I think that's really going to be very important because I very quickly have to assess the overall structure of our company, but I'm pleased to say that we do many things right and this is not a company that, quite honestly, needs any drastic change.

We're a solid company. We've accomplished what we've accomplished in the marketplace because of the strategies that are in place that are sound, and I'm going to continue with a lot of those. But early on, my main focus and goals will be to really immerse myself in all areas of the company that I've got to get pretty up-to-speed on quickly. I'm going to be drawing from the immense amount of industry knowledge that our senior team has.

HWB: What are some of the longer-term goals that you have your sights set on for the company, including managing the different brands and segments to serve the most customers?

DJ: We've really built our strength in the marketplace by trying to build a strong portfolio of brands. By having this strong portfolio of brands, it's really allowed us to build destination opportunities on a retailer-by-retailer basis, which has driven strong market



“We are going to continue to focus on expanding our brand portfolio. By having a strong portfolio of brands, it's really allowed us to build destination opportunities on a retailer-by-retailer basis.”

—Darrin Johnston, Meyer

share in gourmet, mid-tier and moderate segments of the business. As far as I'm concerned, the foundation of our future success is long-term planning. We are going to continue to focus on expanding our brand portfolio. I think that's going to be vital and that's going to be extremely important in keeping us current and up-to-date in the marketplace, but also focusing on a consistent, healthy, organic growth across all of our existing brands, meaning that we are not going to take our eye off the ball based on what we have.

This, I believe, will position us with a very solid foundation to take advantage of opportunities that the

market throws at us as it evolves and it is evolving very quickly. I think by continuing to focus long-term on how to expand that brand portfolio but also stay focused on growing the portfolio that we have, it's going to give us a lot of options and the ability to move and shift the right ways as the market evolves so that we can continue to build that destination opportunity retailer-by-retailer.

HWB: Speaking of brands, such as the Paula Deen line, are you thinking about relaunching that now that she's got a little bit of momentum back?

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IMUSA has added induction saute pans in three sizes.



IMUSA Rolls Out Induction Compatible Cookware

CHICAGO— As more consumers continue to cook at home, many are turning to ethnic dishes to expand their meal options. While Asian and Italian cooking are still popular, Mexican and Spanish-influenced dishes are quickly climbing and all of the tools needed to create those meals are seeing an uptick, according to vendors. In order to meet the increased ethnic cooking demand as well as the increase in designs compatible for induction cooktops, IMUSA is rolling out new cookware for 2015.

The IMUSA Induction Spanish Omelet Pan is designed to be used to make traditional Spanish omelets or a frittata. With a front-hinge feature for flipping, the pans can also be unhinged and used as two individual cookware pieces. Non-stick and made with induction technology, the frittata pan can be used on a variety of stovetops, according to the company.

One of the essential pieces of cookware when it comes to Spanish-style cuisine is a paella pan. IMUSA is bringing to market an aluminum constructed Induction Paella Pan, which can be used on a variety of cooktops and contains a non-stick interior coating. The IMUSA paella pan is designed with tall side walls and a spacious cooking surface for a deep dish paella, allowing home chefs to create meals for parties of six or less.

For casseroles, braising and more, IMUSA is also introducing a 6.9-quart non-stick Induction Caldero. This caldero is safe for use on gas, electric, ceramic and induction stovetops, said IMUSA, and is also PFOA, PTFE and cadmium free. It's oven safe without the lid and is made from cast aluminum. The design also has a high temperature painted exterior.

In addition, IMUSA is bringing Induction Sauté Pans to the market in 2015. Available in 8- 10- or 12-inch sizes, and in colors gray, beige or marble, the open stock sauté pans can also come in black non-stick or ceramic non-stick coatings.

With a high-temperature resistant exterior, the company said the pans can be used on induction, ceramic, gas or electric stovetops. **HWB**



IMUSA's induction line includes a 6.9-quart non-stick induction caldero.

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DJ: Our position on Paula Deen has been that we've stayed firmly behind that brand. There is still a very viable consumer out in the marketplace and, quite honestly, to this point, based on reviewing and monitoring the retail market during the last 18 to 24 months, we haven't seen anything that's come into the marketplace that has been able to replace that. We've maintained a very strong business, even to this day, in Paula Deen. Now, where that business is coming from has shifted, but we had a very good year, a very solid year in terms of our overall business with Paula Deen in 2014. I do believe that there will be some opportunities for the brand in 2015 with the Paula Deen brand. As we assess those opportunities, we will begin to make decisions on exactly how we're going to begin to strengthen that brand within the marketplace. (See related Meyer story, page 124)

HWB: What else is new for Meyer for 2015? What new company initiatives or marketing strategies are going to be tapped?

DJ: We built our market share through the years based on new technologies and technological advances in the industry. We've had a lot of firsts. That's something that we continue to look at and something that we continue to develop. Meyer has always been very heavily focused on new product development. We slowed down a little bit on new product development last year and really did some heavy SKU rationalization. The main reasoning for that was to really get our brands and our portfolios in line, to make sure that they were structured as healthy as they could be and that our assets and inventory were positioned correctly.

In the last seven to eight years with the tough economy, we saw a lot of our competitors take their foot off the gas. We were able to operate and do what we need to do and do what we felt was right for the business, so during the last seven to eight years, we never took our foot off the gas and I think we won a significant amount of market share because of that. I don't really see that changing for us and we are going to be ramping back up in Chicago and have more than 15,000 square feet of showroom space on the floor. New product development is a major focus for us this year.

HWB: What are some of the challenges that you see in the industry for this year, as well as the years ahead? How do you plan to meet those challenges?

DJ: One of the things that we are always doing at Meyer is looking three to five years down the road. Our industry has never been a dynamic industry that has, or sees, a significant amount of annual growth just based on the expansion of the marketplace. Consumers don't react emotionally to housewares. Having said that, if we're going to grow as a company, our focus has always been based on, "How do we take/grow market share?"

Challenging economic times have often been beneficial to the housewares industry because consumers are less distracted and there are less challenges for the amount of disposable income that they have. People stay at home more, they eat out less and they focus on home. As the economy improves, there are more options pulling at consumers and their disposable income. We are paying very close attention because the economy is getting better. Consumers are going to be looking for more things to spend their money on; they are going to be taking vacations again; they are going to be doing different things versus staying at home and focusing on family. A good economy can be quite challenging because of those types of things.

That's why our market share conversation still tends to be very important and why new product development has to remain a very vital part of that. That's what's going to help focus the consumer back on us as a place to spend their money. Consumers are out there with a lot more disposable income. You would think that would be a positive thing, and it is, but it requires us to be that much more focused on how we are going to capture our percentage of those dollars. That's the biggest challenge that I see.

How are we going to overcome that? We are going to continue to focus on how we take market share, not necessarily how we feel that the market as a whole is going to grow, and we are going to continue to develop and work on new product development. We've got a phenomenal new product development process here and we absolutely can bring as much new product to the market as we need or as little as we need.

We're in a very, very good place as far as a company on how we are going to position ourselves. **HWB**