



Helping consumers make smart choices for their future

The numbers speak for themselves. We are seeing the baby boomer generation retire en masse. This demographic “bubble” is being felt in many ways from labour shortages to increased leisure items and more. But the impact of Covid is still being felt and we should not underestimate what this means for the kitchen cabinet industry. The traumatic impact of what the last 3 years revealed has generated conversations in homes as people witnessed and experienced first-hand the challenges Covid imposed on some of our most vulnerable populations, the aging. Speaking with individuals in their 50’s and 60’s now, many reflect on what has transpired and are more determined than ever to live independently and safely in their homes for as long as they can. But it’s not just about aging in place, it’s about living in place safely and comfortably regardless of age. All these considerations have started a trend with exciting opportunities. Not only does every home have a kitchen, but it is also the most used space in the home which means it should be functional. A place that, as you age, can become more challenging and potentially more hazardous if proper measures are not in place to ensure safety and accessibility.



We spoke with Lucy Traetto, Sales and Marketing Representative for over 22 years at Blum Canada Ltd. who holds credentials including CAPS – Certified Aging in Place Specialist, CLIPP – Certified Living in Place Professional. Lucy’s expertise is a tremendous



resource for our industry and we were so pleased to take a deeper dive into the topic to better understand what is happening and how this trend offers tremendous business opportunities for kitchen cabinet manufacturers. But more importantly, our industry is in a unique position to help consumers make better choices for their future and improved quality of living in the home.

What is aging in place versus living in place and how are they similar or different?

Aging in Place means that a person, in their later years (baby boomer) is choosing to stay in their home as they age. This means that modifications are inevitable as they age depending on their health and physicality. Perhaps they are using a walker or need grab bars in the bathroom or even a zero-clearance threshold at the entry of the house or into the shower. Living in Place is really about making all homes safe to live in. Making them suitable for any age, for anybody that steps through your front door – that it will accommodate any age group or ability. This is also a great selling feature because the house will be suitable for any family coming/moving into it.

The term “Living in Place” is more commonly used in Canada and the US because this is a process that benefits people of all ages, including the aging population. This is a win for the people enjoying and living in the space as well as anybody who visits the home or for future residents of that home.

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The difference between Aging and Living in Place is really about the timing of planning a functional and safe home. Aging in Place is usually someone who is already older (baby boomer or older) or perhaps that has a disability that needs to make modifications so they can function well and safely in their home. Living in Place is just designing in a smart way so people of all ages can live in a functional, safe and well thought out space. As people age, they may have certain limitations so if a house is already planned properly, the necessary modifications will be minimal compared to a home where no planning or minimal planning was done. Somebody aging in place would benefit from having drawers in base cabinets, having electrical assist in their drawers, placing heavy items like plates in full extension drawers but when you think about it, all these things benefit somebody that is living in place.

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The data speaks for itself

- 9 million people that are part of the Baby Boomer generation, born between 1946 and 1965 and they have the largest disposable income
- Women make up approx. 51% of baby boomer population
- Baby Boomers currently make up 29% of Canadian Economy
- **There are now more old people than young people**
- Over 80% want to stay in their homes and more than 1 million are already caring for aging parents
- Women over 45 make/influence 80% of household decisions
- Of the population of Canada, 1/6th have a disability, 1/8th have a severe disability and the probability of a severe disability for those 65-69 is 1 in 4 (1 out of 11 have trouble lifting a 10 lb. bag of groceries)
- **People are generally living longer with one or more health issues thanks to the innovations in medicine that help individuals live with less pain and greater quality of life**
- We start seeing changes to our bodies already starting in our 30's. In our 40's, we start to lose muscle mass which is 1% a year and this accelerates when we hit our 50's
- In our 50's, our hearing and taste buds start to decline, and many people already need to wear some type of glasses. We also start to lose sensitivity in our fingertips
- In our 60's, 40% of people have some type of back problem and vision worsens
- **According to Stats Can Canada's population is expected to grow up to 47.8 million by 2043 and 56.5 million in 2068**
- According to CMHC the country's housing stock should increase by 2.3 million units over the next decade
- **The largest number of accidents in homes are falls**

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Are you seeing more kitchen cabinet companies starting to factor these trends into their designs and builds?

Yes, and no – not enough in my opinion. It has a lot to do with the fact that “you don’t know what you don’t know”. Many cabinet companies are not familiar with what is needed and how easy it is to improve people’s quality of life just by doing some simple things like adding full extension drawers and knowing where to place frequently used items (in areas that are reachable/accessible), like adding lift systems in upper cabinets to avoid having doors as obstructions and products like the SPACE STEP toe kick drawer that eliminates the need for people to step on a chair or a stool. The largest number of accidents in homes are falls so if they can be eliminated, this is a great thing! We need to keep educating ourselves on these types of things as well as new products that are in the market. Knowledge is power they say and when you can improve people’s quality of life – it is a WIN WIN WIN!



Simulating mobility restrictions with Blum’s AGE EXPLORER suit helps researchers design better ergonomic products that address the unique needs of those with mobility or other issues. When you don’t have full extension drawers that require to bend, kneel and reach, it can be painful plus visual acuity changes and you can’t see as well into those cabinets. This can pose an additional health risk if expired food products are stored in the lower cabinets which is often the case when overhead cabinets are even less accessible.

What trends are you seeing to address these needs?

We are starting to see more and more full extension drawers in base cabinets which is a great way to not only increase usable storage space but also benefits people of all ages as they no longer need to bend and reach into cabinets that have doors and shelves. Everything should be accessible and right at hand. We are also seeing touch to open which gives an assist on the opening action of drawers, doors, and lift systems. This can be electrical with SERVO-DRIVE or mechanical which is our TIP-ON technology. There is still so much more we can do, which we should use to our advantage as we can add value to kitchens, bathrooms, and other rooms of the home.

I use these principles in my job every day when I visit customers and when I am presenting to all target audiences, including students. I talk about why it is important to have full extension drawers in base cabinets. Everything is accessible, organized and space is maximized when you have drawers in base cabinet. When you have doors/shelves in base cabinets it is inevitable that you will be bending and reaching and as we age, this becomes more and more difficult as well as if we are suffering from an injury, surgery or as a pregnant woman. Having lift systems in upper cabinets that go up and out of the way mitigates potential injury from open doors in uppers as they are obstructions and can be dangerous.

When we age, we lose not only our peripheral vision but also other aspects of our vision changes and colours can become difficult to distinguish. Our dishes should be placed in our drawers and not above because of the heaviness of them but also, we can no longer reach high up when we age because of restricted range of motion. Having your home organized is also very important in order to save time but

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also improves quality of living. If contents are organized, neat and tidy items will be easy to find and makes it more efficient and more enjoyable to work in. These are just a few examples – there are so many more!

What customer demographic is starting to ask for aging in place functionality?

I would say between 50 and 75. The 50's and 60's demographic may presently be taking care of an elderly parent/family member so for them it is important that their loved one(s) live the best that they can which means having their homes equipped with things to make working in it easy as well as safe. I feel that baby boomers (into their 60's and 70's now) are so much more educated than the previous generation thanks to the internet, social media and their children. They want to stay in their homes longer, and they understand that this will likely be their last kitchen as they would typically not invest this amount of money if they were in their 80's. The lifespan of a kitchen is 15-20 years which is a long time and worth the investment. They should enjoy it!

Is there an increase in adaptive design especially in senior residences/condominiums as well as their individual homes?

Unfortunately, no and this is very sad. The budgets for these types of residences are very low and very competitive so they are usually builder grade with little to no consideration of the aging individuals that live in these residences. It almost seems as though the people that need it the most, get the least. This being said, there is great opportunity here.

“There is so much opportunity that has not been tapped in to and I hope through education, more and more manufacturers will design spaces that work for the aging demographic and segment of the marketplace.” Lucy Traetto, Blum Canada Ltd.

What are the business opportunities for kitchen cabinet manufacturers?

There is so much business potential for the kitchen cabinet industry and I feel oftentimes it is being missed and needs more attention. It merits more attention. Not just in revenue generation but in improving the lives of people! This generation and segment of the market have the most disposable income and would be willing to invest in comfort, ease, functionality and ergonomics if they were aware of what was available to them. Everyone has the right to know what is available so that they can make their own educated decision on what they would like in their living spaces. Happy customers bring more customers and there is no greater way to measure success in my opinion.



Blum's AGE EXPLORER is a simulation suit that ages your body 20 to 25 years older than your current age (up to a specific age of course!) and it simulates physical limitations such as loss of muscle mass, joint restriction, restricted range of motion, arthritis, impaired dexterity, impaired sight, loss of peripheral vision and hearing impairment. In use for 14 years this research has really helped Blum understand how their products can improve ergonomics and functionality. You can go to their showroom in Mississauga, ON and try it!

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I do think we need to be really careful what we say when we are talking to older individuals – we don't want to say, "this could very well be your last kitchen" but rather, word it differently so that they come to their own conclusion – perhaps saying something like, "wouldn't you want full extension drawers in your base cabinets so you can organize all of your grandchildren's favourite toys or snacks? With a SPACE STEP toe kick drawer, your grandchildren can step up and reach the countertop so you can cook/bake together! It's all in the wording and finding ways of promoting products and solutions that in the end will benefit the aging client.



Is new manufacturing equipment or technology required in the kitchen cabinet manufacturing process to meet this demand?

Absolutely not when it comes to functional hardware – at least nothing that is not already available and being used. There are definitely things to be learned when new products are developed such as the SPACE STEP toe kick drawer or our Pull-Out Shelf lock. It is more about educating ourselves on assembly of a new product. There are so many tools available to help with all of this whether it be a hands-on training with the physical product, online installation videos or product presentations that are all easily accessible.

Where is this trend going in the future and why?

This trend is not going away! We are all going to age, people will always get injured, everyone likes to be organized and who doesn't appreciate efficiency? There is so much more we can be doing – one home at a time. No matter what age, simple things like full extension drawers in base cabinets, organization inside the drawers, lift systems in upper cabinets – these are all things that benefit a child, teenager, middle age and/or older person. Why not do it right from the start and create a positive emotion and experience for each customer? It is a win for us as a supplier of functional hardware because we sell better products, it is a win for the cabinet maker/kitchen manufacturer because they are selling better products, but we wouldn't be doing all of this if it wasn't a win for the end consumer! We are here to make their lives better!

Lucy would also like to offer any insight or information to anyone interested on this topic. There is so much great information and it is important that we help each other and share this information. You can reach Lucy at Blum Headquarters in Mississauga - lucy.traetto@blum.com or 905-670-7920



Remember, kitchen cabinet manufacturers don't just design and build kitchens, they work in other areas of the home including in-home offices, bedrooms, living rooms and more. So many possibilities to help your customers live well today and into the future.

