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A newsletter for the home furnishings industry
brought to you by Cotton Incorporated

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HOME



Think you know what the consumer is looking for?

In our efforts to raise the bar of innovation for home products, there have been countless examples showing us that when developing a new, value-added product that we feel the consumer is just going to love, the exact opposite happens and we end up with tons of inventory piled up to the warehouse ceiling that cannot be sold. When we offer the consumer something new, based on a gut feeling that the masses will love it, it fails, miserably in most cases. **Consumers have become so comfortable with the “give me thread count or give me death” mentality** while shopping for bed sheets and other home products that they often don't want to look for anything else. Just a simple numerical quantifier will do, nothing more nothing less, and they usually want it for \$10 less than they paid two years ago.

You may be asking yourself why have consumers become so savvy when shopping for apparel but not for home products? Today's consumer expects their dress shirt to stay wrinkle-free throughout a rough day at the office and still look nice when they join their friends for happy hour. They expect their t-shirt to effectively wick moisture away from the body and keep them dry and cool after a 45 minute run. And as we've all seen on TV, they expect their pair of casual slacks to resist stains and spills associated with a weekend of debauchery in Vegas. This level of performance has become a must in our lives and we expect that all of our apparel will “perform” in some way or another. According to research conducted in Cotton Incorporated's Lifestyle Monitor™, 54% of all consumers have purchased a wrinkle resistant garment, 31% have bought a water repellent garment and 25% have purchased a garment with a stain resistant finish. Of those consumers, between 93% and 96% say they would buy another garment with the particular finish again, indicating shoppers like the finishes once they have tried them. If consumers are willing to buy into performance and added value for apparel, then why not home products?

Apparently they are beginning to warm up to the idea. In Cotton Incorporated's Home Products Market Research Survey, we set out to delve a little further into the consumer mindset and determine exactly what performance criteria they were looking for in their home products and what value-added features they might be willing to try. Through our survey, we asked 811 female consumers what most influences purchase decisions by providing a laundry list of performance criteria, such as softness, color, price, durability and life of the product. We also inquired about more specific things like stretch and antimicrobials.

A common desire that we found across many home product categories was that **consumers expect their products to be durable and have extended wear life**. Let's go a little further and quantify that - durable to laundering and the rigors of household use. Performing their expected duties and doing so with style, few frayed ends and minimal color loss.

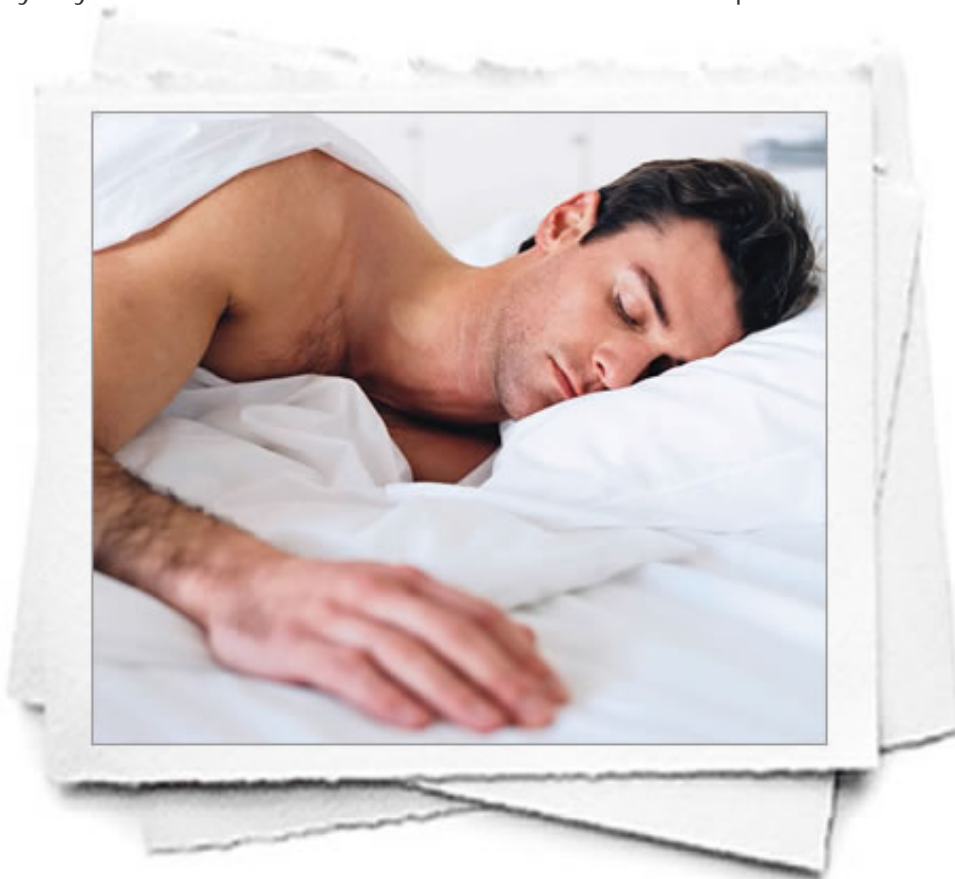
We often assume that price and color are two of the most important factors in home products purchases. In our study we confirmed this, but found that they aren't as important as durability. **75% of the female consumers interviewed in our survey indicated that durability was very important to them** when purchasing towels, much greater than the 63% who said price was an important purchase factor, followed by 60% who said color was most important. For sheets, we found much the same, that 75% rated durability as being a very important purchase factor. 71% said price was very important, with color following close behind at 67%. Bedding was slightly higher, with 80%

expecting durability in their products. Additionally, half of the respondents stated that they expect their sheets to maintain original color after 25 launderings.


And how many consumers told us thread count was important to them? Surprisingly, only 50%, much lower than what we might expect. So, as much as we want consumers to keep buying into the idea that higher and higher thread counts are the continuing wave of innovation for sheets, it seems that it continues to be a niche market. Among the 50% who still consider thread count to be very important, 65% of them are over the age of 40 and are significantly more likely to have annual household incomes of \$60,000 or more.

For upholstery fabrics, we found that durability was expected by 93% of the respondents who told us what performance characteristics they look for in their cotton upholstered furniture.

To address this growing concern that cotton apparel and home products perform up to the budding expectations of the consumer, **Cotton Incorporated has researched several different finish formulations that impart abrasion resistance to cotton textiles**, each with polyethylene as the basis and each with its own functional performance benefits. These finishes have merit for a variety of applications and when properly applied, results have shown these finishes surpass 50 HLTD's and can be even be enhanced with the use of selected cross-linking agents. OK, let's cut out the chemistry lesson and put it in simple terms – the finishes cause fabrics to resist abrasion, thereby extending their wear life and improving color retention over the life of the product. Tear strengths are improved and when tested for flex abrasion, fabrics perform as much as four to five times better than their untreated counterparts. The finishes can also be combined with other chemistries such as resins to impart additional benefits like wrinkle resistance. The best part about these finishes is that they are affordable and use common chemistries found in many manufacturing facilities - we've just found the right combinations that work well together.



So are we going to continue to give the consumer what we want them to have or offer something they're telling us they want? Consumers are looking for increased durability and extended wear life in their cotton home products. The technology is here and Cotton Incorporated can help.

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