

Got milk? Just text your fridge and ask

Smart appliances take guesswork out of shopping, vacations

Keith Barry
Reviewed.com

LG is bringing a host of smart appliance tech to CES this year, including a new service that lets you control your air conditioner, washer, dishwasher and Wi-Fi speakers via text messages. Also on the docket? A fridge with a built-in camera that lets you see what's inside — even when you're at the grocery store.

HomeChat, which LG calls a "virtual assistant," lets users talk to their home appliances and electronics in plain English via natural language processing. Smart appliance owners just have to download the LINE messaging app (available for most smartphone platforms, including iOS



LG's HomeChat allows you to change your refrigerator or other appliances to power-saving mode if you're on vacation.

and Android), add their appliances as contacts, and start texting them the same way they would a real, live human being.

For instance, you can tell your refrigerator, "I'm going on vacation," and it will enter a power-saving mode. Or you can ask your washer, "How much longer?" and it will tell you your sheets and towels will be ready in 30 minutes. There are preset modes for Vacation, Leaving Home and Coming Home that get appliances ready for your departure or arrival.

Though it's still easiest to engage simple functions on your device's control panel, HomeChat is useful for remote control and monitoring, or doing something more complex — like downloading a recipe to your oven, or asking your washer to create a custom cycle for removing a specific stain.

HomeChat, which debuted at CES last year, is already available

in South Korea and got a lot of interest at IFA in Berlin earlier this year. But when the next generation of LG smart appliances goes on sale in the U.S. in the first half of 2015, it will mark the first chance American consumers have to use the tech.

LG plans to roll out HomeChat across its lineup of home appliances, including refrigerators, air conditioners, washers, ovens and the all-new Music Flow Wi-Fi-enabled speaker system.

One particularly exciting innovation: LG's new Smart Refrigerator. Every time you close the door, it takes a picture of what's inside. When you text your fridge from the grocery store, it will show you a picture of all the food on the shelves. That means you can check to see if you've run out of orange juice or if those greens are looking brown. It also lets you text a photo from your smartphone to the fridge's external display.

How Kickstarter is saving film photography

High-tech funding site gives lo-fi lovers bright future

Brendan Nystedt
Reviewed.com

To ordinary people, film photography has been extinct for years. But for the analog faithful, the art of exposure is undergoing an unexpected renaissance, gaining new followers after a lull in the mid-2000s.

It's not unlike what's happened recently with vinyl records — whether it's down to nostalgia, tactility or simple aesthetics, film has an indisputable allure for a certain set of photography fanatics.

Modern technology may have almost killed film, but now it's helping bring it back in a big way. Not only are film fans congregating and communicating online, but they're also sustaining the hobby that brought them all together — and they're doing it via Kickstarter.

FILM FINDS ITS FANBASE

Among film fans there's a very real fear that, someday soon, fresh film might no longer be available at any price.

This kind of extinction event almost happened to Polaroid-style instant film half a decade ago. Then the unexpected happened: A group of enthusiasts rescued the last complete Polaroid film assembly plant in Holland and restarted production.

Since 2008, The Impossible Project has been cranking out color and monochrome cartridges for Polaroid cameras from that factory. Impossible has been embraced by lo-fi loving people of all ages, including some high-profile celebs like Taylor Swift.

Impossible's success paved the way for another independent company to capitalize on the public's reignited appetite for film. In 2012, co-founders Nicola Baldini and Marco Pagni brought new life to the venerable Ferrania film brand.

"FILM Ferrania is named for the original company (Ferrania), founded in 1923, and is utilizing carefully selected parts of the former facilities, (which) closed in 2010," says Dave Bias, Director at FILM Ferrania USA.

FILM Ferrania has been working to salvage what's left of the defunct Ferrania plant in Liguria, in northwestern Italy. The new company has plans to restart production of color reversal film in 35mm and 120 for stills, along with Super 8mm and 16mm color film for motion picture cameras.

And it looks like they'll pull it off, thanks to a hugely successful Kickstarter campaign that came in the nick of time.

"As we approached a very tough deadline to salvage key pieces of equipment from the old Ferrania buildings, we had the idea to use Kickstarter to raise the necessary funds before our time expired," Bias said.

"We know, obviously, that the analog community is many times

smaller than it used to be — but it's also many times more connected and passionate. 5,582 backers voted with their dollars to help us."

The company surpassed its original goal of \$250,000, collecting \$322,420 by the end of the campaign. It's now on track to start producing small batches of film in 2015.

Bias gave us an idea of what will happen after that: "Once [the Kickstarter film reward] packages are out of the door, work immediately begins on Batch #2, and construction begins at the factory to begin to incorporate the larger machinery purchased from the Kickstarter funds."

VINTAGE STYLE, NEW TECH

There are plenty of old film cameras out there that still work, but that hasn't stopped enterprising designers from cooking up brand-new ones. Again, thanks to the online film community, we're seeing a renaissance in film cameras and related gadgets.

The Impossible Project, for instance, used crowdfunding to develop its Impossible Lab. While it isn't a camera, per se, it lets users print pictures from an iPhone screen directly onto Impossible film.

"(Kickstarter) enabled us to raise over half a million dollars in 2012 and attracted a good deal of attention, when analog photography was rarely in the spotlight," says Creed O'Hanlon, chief executive for Impossible. "The Instant Lab won us a new following, and since then we have seen a great resurgence of interest in analog, with Kickstarter campaigns often being at the forefront of any innovations in the field."

One of this year's most prominent Kickstarter camera successes has large-format photographers throwing their money at the screen. The Intrepid 4x5 Camera was designed to be



Picture taken on Feb. 19, 2011, with a lomographic Holga camera shows street artists in uniforms in front of Berlin's landmark, the Brandenburg Gate.

VALERY HACHE, AFP/GETTY IMAGES



GANNETT

Diana + Dreamer Camera by Lomography, \$65 at Urban Outfitters.

a simple, affordable way for hobbyists to shoot big negatives with existing vintage lens boards. Backers helped Intrepid Camera double its original funding goal, raising almost \$100,000.

BEYOND MASS APPEAL

Lomography, seller of low-cost Holga, Lomo, and Diana film cameras, has also had some suc-

cess in this arena. In 2014 it launched the Lomo'Instant Camera. Piggybacking on the well-developed Fujifilm Instax film system, it's the only instant camera with conversion lenses, and it'll even let you do long exposures. Support from the Kickstarter photography community was outstanding, netting Lomography over \$1.1 million to work with.

Of course, none of these cameras are the sort that provide the kind of razor-sharp, effortlessly well-exposed photos the average consumer expects from a modern camera. Likewise, these new kinds of film — no matter how lovingly made — won't match digital for ease-of-use.

But that's not the point. The obsessives who are still buying film paraphernalia don't want perfect results: They want the unpredictable, character-rich shots film provides. And they're willing to pay for it.

Though Nikon is still cranking out F6 bodies and FM10s, it's unlikely we'll ever see another mass-market film camera from a major manufacturer. Instead, the industry is getting "right-sized"—scaling down from broad appeal to niche obsession.

With the millions of dollars raised by Kickstarter campaigns, film fans are putting their money where their mouth is. Their funding not only ensures analog photography will survive far beyond its expected expiration date—it also guarantees manufacturers produce the kinds of products they want to buy. That's a win for all involved.

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