

IoT Embedded Water Heaters are Our Next Big Launch: Orient Electric

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- The company said that it is gearing up to release consumer electronics into India
- Orient Electric has launched IoT-enabled air coolers and fans in India earlier this year
- It also wants De'Longhi, Breville and Kenwood products in India

Saurabh Bishakhia (SB), Sr. VP & Business Head, Home Appliances, Orient Electric Limited, in an exclusive conversation with ETV Group shared his thoughts on IoT and consumer electronics. Saurabh shared that Orient Electric has been able to bring down the incremental costs while offering strong value proposition.

He told ETV ACE, "The future of IoT embedded consumer electronics is bright in India. As time passes by and consumers become more aware of the benefits IoT brings along, we are sure to see more home appliances and products to get on the IoT bandwagon."



Saurabh Bishakhia, Sr. VP & Business Head, Home Appliances, Orient Electric Limited

Here are some more interesting excerpts around consumer electronics, IoT and Orient Electric:

ACE – The winter season is fast approaching, which consumer electronics/appliances will you be betting on this winter season? Will IoT be a part of them?

SB – After a good season in air coolers, we are now all geared up for the festive season with our complete range of BEE star rated water heaters in different types and capacities. Our new range of storage, instant and gas water heaters is in line with the evolving market trends and changing consumer preferences. Our aim is to fit the existing gap in the segment, which is to have smarter and efficient water heaters. We will be also focusing on both water, both from Orient and De'Longhi brands. We also have aggressive plans to market and sell breakfast appliances.

As far as IoT is concerned, we are introducing water heaters based on the same IoT platform we used in our air coolers. Our IoT-enabled air coolers and water heaters can be operated from anywhere, anytime via Orient Smart mobile app available on both Google Play and App Store. On top of that, they are also compatible with voice assistants such as Alexa and Google Assistant thus taking convenience a notch higher. We are not simply using IoT to deliver comfort and convenience to the consumers but will be also using it to improve our service capabilities.

ACE – Which sales channel will you be relying on to retail these IoT-enabled consumer appliances...online or offline?

SB – We are working on an omni-channel strategy and are continuously looking at ways in improving needs and experiences of our customers both online and offline. IoT-enabled products are expected purchases, so we are quite particular about selection of retail partners and are ensuring that the product features are well explained to the customers. We are also selling these products through leading marketplaces targeting today's tech-savvy, aspirational-seeking customers.

We are closely following the market trends and consumer requirements in order to target the right audience through the right medium. Apart from the traditional mediums, we are going heavy on digital to increase product awareness and conversions. We are creating quality content for online platforms to explain the features and benefits of our IoT-enabled appliances.

ACE – When we say IoT-enabled home appliances from Orient Electric what exactly can these do? How are they different from other brands?

SB – Keeping pace with new leaps in technology and innovation, we have launched a complete range of IoT-enabled air coolers and water heaters. As a time when air coolers and water heaters are IoT-enabled a commodity, we have created differentiation by introducing IoT-enabled models. Easy to use, accessible and human-centric, these products are aimed at making consumers' experiences better and life easier while also offering them pride of ownership.



IoT-enabled water heaters

Our IoT-enabled water heaters and air coolers can be operated with utmost ease via Orient Smart mobile app or virtual assistants. With our IoT coolers, you can even get weather updates or set a timer for when you want to turn it on. Besides other basic functions, in case of our IoT-enabled water heater, users can schedule it to automatically switch on/off at the required temperature for a relaxed bathing experience. One can also analyze trends of power consumption on a daily, weekly and monthly basis.

With the addition of IoT variants, we now offer a complete range of air coolers and water heaters to cater varied aesthetic preferences, setting needs and usage environments. Our strategy has not just been focused on IoT, while it is surely the most prized feature. Every new product that we are launching is based on consumer insights. Take for example our technologically advanced water heaters. There are many factors to consider when it comes to buying a water heater such as fit capacity and size, space available, ease of installation, hot water pressure, hard water compatibility, energy efficiency etc. We have ensured to address every aspect in order to give the just-right solution to the consumers.

ACE – Do you agree that IoT in consumer appliances is the next big phase of growth in India? Which other product categories can gain by embedding IoT in them?

SB – IoT technology is gaining popularity, concept of connected homes on the rise and smart home devices are becoming more

all encompassing than ever. We now have inter-connected devices talking to each other inside a smart home helping homeowners with the domestic chores. This all points to the rising popularity and trend of a 'connected lifestyle' wherein people are preferring a single point of control to manage and monitor a host of home appliances and systems. The technology adoption amongst the new age customer is very fast and app based control is being appreciated in the entire appliances segment. People are willing to spend on appliances which can be easily controlled using smartphones and voice assistants.

Such is this shift that even appliances like air coolers, fans and water heaters have gone smart and their market response is increasing with time. Simply imagine setting the timer on your water heater or controlling the speed of cooler from a smartphone or with voice commands via Alexa or Google Assistant. Conveniently comfortable, isn't it?

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ACE – What new consumer electronics product categories will Orient Electric embed IoT in? How soon? Can you share a roadmap?

SB – We have received an overwhelming response for our IoT-enabled coolers, and we are hopeful that our IoT-enabled water heaters will also be appreciated and accepted by the Indian consumers. In fact, Orient has launched India's first IoT-enabled fan early this year.

While we won't be able to share complete details, we are exploring all the options to launch more IoT-enabled products across categories Orient Electric operates in.

ACE – Are these IoT-enabled consumer electronics completely developed in India?

SB – We are working with multiple national and international partners in developing these technologies-led products. We are focused on using technology-led innovation to create the differentiation that the new age consumers expect and for the same, we are making timely investments, as required, in technology and R&D.

We are working with the current generation IoT platform to deliver a superior customer experience. I would also like to mention that we have been able to bring down the incremental costs while offering strong value proposition. Our intent is to make the technology affordable for Indian consumers.

ACE – Can you share some consumer insights and trends which have led to penetration of IoT technology into appliances and consumer durables?

SB – Consumer landscape in India is changing fast by dint of rising incomes and aspirations, changes in lifestyle patterns and increased proliferation of product choices, along with increased exposure to global lifestyle and technologies. With penetration trend is on the rise, there is an ever-increasing demand for smart home appliances, particularly amongst the mobile and technology savvy consumers.

Consumers increasingly want personalization and IoT is helping them achieve it which accounts for quick acceptance and migration to IoT-enabled products in the country. The comfort and convenience, connectivity, security and increasing need for IoT products is driving the adoption. Aiding this adoption is increasing penetration of internet and smartphones.

We at Orient are focusing on exploiting IoT to gather consumer insights and understand data-driven trends to further improve consumer experiences. Migration of IoT is helping us to speed up the process of troubleshooting and servicing.

ACE – How has been the response to Orient Electric's range of smart home appliances from consumers been in India?

SB – Our IoT-enabled air coolers and fans have been liked by the consumers from across the country and it clearly indicates the increasing appetite within Indian consumers for aspirational lifestyle. We are equally excited with the addition of IoT variants in the water heaters range.

ACE – Are you providing separate training to dealers and retailers dealing in smart home appliances?

SB – Most of the products in our portfolio including IoT coolers and water heaters are feature-led and therefore it is important that we demonstrate and explain the product features in a proper manner to the consumers. To ensure that, we frequently organise training meets and programs for our dealers, retailers and salespeople to educate them about our new product offerings.

We are also offering De'Longhi, Breville and Kenwood products in India, which are loaded with features and innovations, so such training programs are all more relevant for us and our channel partners alike. We also do instant demonstration led video inferencers for retail owners for their knowledge and to show to the audience.

ACE – Please take us through overall strategy the brand is taking in order to grow. What kind of marketing and branding are you looking forward to?

In view of the changing competitive landscape and evolving consumer aspirations, we at Orient Electric, are focused on driving sustainable competitiveness through innovation, while addressing the consumer need gaps.

The marketing landscape has evolved drastically over the years with the influx of new mediums and channels for distribution and consumption of content. Digital revolution is redefining marketing and communication strategies. While we are regularly doing ATL and BTL activities, we have also embraced the power of digital and are focusing strongly on online mediums to increase the amplification of our activation campaigns.

Our aim with all branding and marketing activities is to build strong brand image and reach while improving B2B communication tools, and to do so, we are exploring the best of both the online and offline worlds.