

In Brief

Now you're talking

THE WORLD'S first Freeview digital box with integrated text-to-speech (TTS) capabilities has been launched by Goodmans. The Smart Talk box, which is available this month, was designed in partnership with the Royal National Institute of Blind People (RNIB), Harvard International (which owns Goodmans), DVB software provider Pixsan and technology company Loquendo. Consumers can control, among other things, the way text on screen is read out. They can also change the volume, the level of detail and the size and colour of the text.

Siemens comes top

THE SIEMENS top-of-the-range EQ7 coffee machine gained top marks on Five's *Gadget Show* in a head-to-head consumer test against two models from other brands. In fact, most consumers who drank coffee from the Siemens machine gave the product full marks. "We welcome product testing of this nature as it demonstrates the impressive capabilities of our appliances in challenging situations," said Siemens consumer products sales director Ian Nicholson. "In this case, the EQ7 won over consumers by its authentic tasting bean-to-cup coffee, as well as its excellent styling."

Harvard sales manager

CONSUMER electronics distributor Harvard International has appointed Mark Jenkins as its UK sales manager. The company said it made the appointment to help position its brand portfolios – which include Goodmans, Grundig and iPhone accessories brand iLuv – as major competitive players. He joins from Fujifilm UK where he was business group manager. Harvard is increasing its role in the industry. It has recently appointed a new chief technical officer to widen its technical abilities and it has also launched two new websites aimed at providing a faster and more efficient product support service.

HMV group marketing

HMV GROUP has consolidated its marketing for HMV and Waterstone's into one department, headed up by Graham Sim in the newly-created role of group marketing director. HMV said the new structure will maximise synergies across the group. Three new teams have been established – group customer relationship management headed by Matt Button, brand marketing headed by Lee Bannister and brand creative led by Mark Robertson.

Poor growth for non-food sales

By Penny Williams

ELECTRICALS have been hit by growing concerns among shoppers about their financial future.

Figures from the British Retail Consortium (BRC) revealed that TV sales slowed markedly in July, with larger screens suffering most.

This was not unexpected following the boost the sector received from World Cup football, however, sales in other categories were down, too.

This was especially true for more expensive purchases. The BRC/KPMG Retail Sales Monitor found that when shoppers forked out for goods, it was often for replacement purposes rather than upgrading equipment and they often "looked for good deals amid the many promotions and clearance deals".

There was good news in some sectors, however. The warm weather had a particularly buoyant effect on refrigeration, cooling and laundry, although white goods generally displayed mixed fortunes "across stores and sectors" during the month.

Mixed fortunes and often



promotion-led also described the performance of computers and digital imaging.

There was a much better story to tell in small appliances, which held steady, with essential kitchen and cleaning products holding up best, the BRC said.

Consumer caution also seemed to affect online sales. Growth for non-food, non-store sales (that is including mail order and phone sales as well

as those made over the internet) was 11.3 per cent higher than a year ago – a big drop from the 20 per cent year-on-year gains made in May and June.

"Eleven per cent growth is not to be sniffed at and the comparison is with last year's second strongest month," said BRC director-general Stephen Robertson. "But, seen against non-store retailing's rapid growth, it's disappointing." "This is well below the average

for the past 12 months and the worst sales growth since last August," he said.

Figures from the sales monitor showed that the value of UK retail sales rose 0.5 per cent on a like-for-like basis from July 2009 and by 2.6 per cent.

From May to July, non-food growth was just 0.3 per cent while for food it was 1.6 per cent. "These are poor results for non-food retailing," said Mr Robertson.

Fans make a V-line for the V Festival Mansion

VIRGIN Media and Ovi by Nokia joined forces to provide music lovers who attended the V Festival last weekend with a complete entertainment package inside "The Mansion".

Gaming, 3DTV, music provided by guest DJs and fast and free wi-fi access across the festival sites were all featured in The Mansion, which for the first time this year was at both festival venues in Weston Park, near Birmingham and in Hylands Park, Chelmsford, Essex, on both days.

Virgin Media – the main V Festival's sponsor – provided 50Mb broadband for the first time, and guests were encouraged to post comments and photos on Twitter and Facebook.



Energenie looking for independent retailers

ENERGY-saving accessory maker Energenie has appointed distributor AVSL to move its products into the independent electrical retail trade.

Energenie products are said to be recommended and certified by the Energy Saving Trust and are currently sold by Scottish Power, EDF and Scotts & Co.

"AVSL's reputation as a leading distributor in the British consumer electronics market place made our decision an easy one," said Energenie managing director Alan Tadd.

"The combination of their ability to deliver high-quality products and services to its customers is completely in line with those of Energenie and what we know will help grow our business in the coming years."

At AVSL, marketing manager Becky Stanton added: "This is an exciting new range for AVSL to add to our product portfolio, one that will have a strong place in the UK market. The range will become a complementary sell and we see our partnership with Energenie being long and successful."

