

Top 5 power tool trends to watch

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Did you know that the first ever power tool is said to be a hand-powered lathe that was created by the ancient Egyptians? Then in 1859 the modern power tool was created when an electric motor was combined with a manual drill - and revolutionised the industry. Over the years power tools have continued to evolve and advance, and we are seeing several trends emerging.



Image source: Gallo/Getty

1. Smart tools have arrived

There really is an app for everything – tools included! Dewalt and Metabo have developed Bluetooth batteries and power tools that can be tracked and monitored remotely through an app. This app allows you to see how often the machine is working in a day and lets you activate and deactivate the tool – such as in a case of theft.

The market in South Africa has been slow so far in the uptake of these new developments, however, Brights predicts that they will grow in popularity as they offer great benefits for contractors who, for example, can monitor the number of man hours being put in by their workforce.

2. User-friendly tools

In response to a growing trend towards DIY home maintenance and repairs, tool manufacturers are making power tools more and more user-friendly so that they are accessible for the average person to operate.

In South Africa we are definitely seeing consumers embrace DIY. Tougher economic times mean that people can often not afford a contractor to do home repairs or maintenance – this has definitely stimulated growth in the “do-it-yourself” market and user-friendliness will remain a key focus in the development of power tools going forward.

Examples of user-friendly tools includes any power tool that is cordless, those that can operate for longer because of extended battery life, and power tools that require less maintenance because they do not have carbon brushes. Also any power tool with additional operator safety features would be considered user-friendly.

3. Going wireless: Cordless power tools

Just about everything is available in a wireless format and power tools are a part of that list. Globally, corded tools are still selling well, but there has been a substantial shift to the cordless market. Cordless tools are used for cutting, welding, sanding, metalworking, and more. Other advancements in the market mean that modern cordless tools are able to last much longer than they used to as well.

In South Africa our power tool purchase trends currently show 40% cordless versus 60% corded; compared to 75% cordless and 25% corded in the USA or Europe. However, we expect to see these numbers change in South Africa as more cordless power tools are developed.

Examples of power tools available in a cordless format include battery-powered circular saws, band saws, drills, hammer drills, impact drivers, screw drivers, and more. There is even a cordless heated jacket that has been developed which keeps the wearer warm in extreme climates.

4. Battery life gets a charge

Battery manufacturers are constantly dealing with the challenge of making batteries that last longer and produce more power. The advancement of lithium-ion batteries means that manufacturers have new ways to increase battery life and power.

A big trend we have seen in SA is the adoption of a single battery system or platform that fits all tools (with the most popular battery voltage system being the 18V/36V brands). So if you are buying cordless tools opt for 18V systems in lithium-ion technology – then as you grow your range of machines your battery systems will fit in all the different power tools – this will allow you to rotate batteries to ensure no down time while waiting for the other one to charge.

Also choose a brand that has intelligent chargers that can charge a battery in under 30 minutes. Makita has the most comprehensive range of longer-lasting 18V batteries, with over 80 different machines that can operate off one battery platform. Metabo, Bosch, Dewalt, Ryobi, Festool, Ingco, Hitachi and Black & Decker all also have 18V battery options.

5. Time to tool up: Innovative new power tools

As well as sales increasing for current power tools and batteries, exciting new products are being developed all the time and research and development departments are working hard to not only boost tool strength and life-span but to also offer new, innovative power tools.

For example, German tool manufacturer Metabo recently released a new collection of flat head grinders that are made to work within small spaces and narrow angles. It makes metalworking at a tight angle safer than the previous generation of flat head grinder models.

Although not power tools per se, a new range of LPG gas driven garden tools, compressors, pumps, generators and engines have been developed which replace petrol-powered units, and which are more eco-friendly, require less maintenance and are more cost effective to run.

Robotic power tools are also coming. You will be able to enter a command and there will be no operator needed - you will just sit back and watch to see the finished product.

The modern tool market is all about going cordless, increasing battery life, and becoming smarter and more user-friendly. In the face of all these developments, consumers should stick with reputable brands that offer back up spares and repair services. The next few years will see many no-name brands disappear, but brands like Makita, Bosch, Ryobi, Metabo, Dewalt, Festool, Hitachi and Ingco are here to stay.

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