

Will Big Boxes Make the Big Difference?

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With the biggest retailer, Walmart, reentering the appliance business, the big box stores, committed to energy savings for their customers, will play a future role in bundling appliances with connected home systems.



Appliance sales at big box stores will generate more sales as well as link into smart appliance and energy management solutions. Walmart tested the appliance waters once before in 2000. Image: Walmart

Earlier this year, Walmart began selling some major home appliances in Dallas-Fort Worth stores. The first stores: a Supercenter in Frisco and stores in North Richland Hills and in Fort Worth. Others stores will be added during this summer.

On the selling floor will be GE and Hotpoint refrigerators, freezers, washers, dryers, dishwashers, ranges and microwaves and the display areas will be branded "The Appliance Market at Walmart." Placement is in the front of its stores where the big retailer often leases space to banks and other services.

To meet the specialized needs of its customers, The Appliance Market at Walmart is staffed by employees of Dallas-based Flexi Compras, a chain of 140 appliance, consumer electronics and furniture stores in four states. It will also offer

lease-to-own options. Other national retailers such as The Home Depot and Lowe's have expanded their appliance lines in recent years.

The big box stores have taken a big chunk of the large appliance business from the more traditional mom and pop authorized dealer outlets of the past. They compete at the price level, of course. One of the reasons is their sales volume can allow lower per unit profits. But the advantage for home energy management and smart grid concepts is that the big box stores also sell or promote energy management solutions.

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