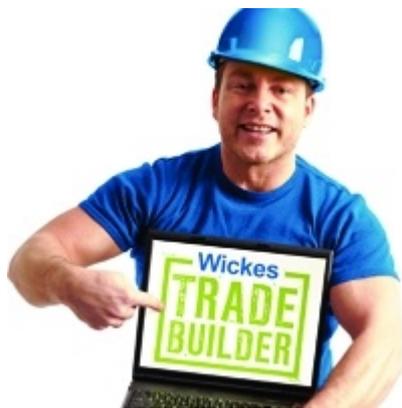


MarketingWeek

Case study: Wickes Trade Builder

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In the first quarter of 2011, there was a 23% increase in the number of construction companies entering administration compared with the previous three months. For Wickes, this was a problem, as a large portion of the DIY retailer's business comes from tradespeople and small businesses.

According to brand director Tony Holdway, tradespeople need management advice rather than any help with technical skills. "We have a responsibility to help them in their business beyond the products and services we sell. "The problems tradespeople face are not about how to do a job or what tools to use, they are about how to run their business, and where to get advice on administration and keeping up cashflow."

Wickes' own research discovered that nearly 40% of British tradespeople do not seek any form of business advice, Holdway says, while more than a third say it is difficult to find the information they need. As a result, Wickes set about creating a resource that it hopes will change this, designing an online service called Trade Builder. Its aim was to ensure all the advice would be accessible and relevant to trade professionals. But rather than compile its own information, Wickes

approached Business Link, the government-funded business advice portal, to work with it in distributing its resources.

“The information exists, it just has not been pulled together all in one place before, and put in easy-to-use language,” says Holdway. For Wickes, Trade Builder was a business initiative before it was a public service, conceived on the basis of customer feedback and market research. And while Holdway says the company could not have done what it did without Business Link’s expertise, he adds that any collaboration is likely to be more successful when there are clear mutual incentives.

As well as helping to keep Wickes’ customers in business, the site represents an added communications channel to an important target market. About 10,000 people have visited the site since its launch in September, which Holdway says is ahead of expectations, but Wickes is continuing to develop the site.

With further market research carried out and more focus groups planned, the brand is asking the site’s audience what it should add in the new year. Holdway says: “It started as a small idea, but we hope it will grow on the back of users’ feedback. We want to make it bigger, but only with what tradespeople want.”