

INTERVIEW: Andy Scothern of Jewson

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Internet Retailing caught up with Andy Scothern, director of ecommerce and web at builders merchants Jewson ahead of its first transactional site going live this week.

Builders merchants have hardly been synonymous with retail innovation in recent years. As a destination for difficult-to-transport commodity items such as sand, cement, bricks and blocks, the need to offer the multichannel services that consumer-facing retailers excel in, has been far from obvious. It's no surprise, then, that up to now Jewson has been in no rush to sell online.

But things are changing. More builders are using their mobile phones from the building site. And not only do they order by phone, they use their smartphones to place internet orders with Jewson rivals who have already embraced ecommerce such as Screwfix or even, despite its primary focus on the retail market, Screwfix's Kingfisher stablemate B&Q. All this has propelled Jewson's onto the internet, where its first transactional website launched this week under the aegis of Andy Scothern, director of ecommerce and web at Jewson.



Scothern (*pictured left*), who joined the company five months ago, sees Jewson's big advantage as its network of 600 branches through which it will be able to deliver a multichannel service that he hopes will make Jewson the "John Lewis of the building merchant world." But before that can become a reality the challenge is to join up those channels to serve its core white van man constituency. That's an area where, admits Andy Scothern, himself a former carpenter, Jewson is "a little way behind."

The challenge for Jewson, says Scothern, is to get its offering right for its specific market. "For us it's about engaging with the target audience and saying to them how do you want to engage with us?" he said. "We know it's a multichannel approach because builders on site are using their phones." Use them they do – and in great numbers, since Jewson takes more than a million phone calls a month with orders that up to now have been written down on scraps of paper or bits of plasterboard or timber.

"For us to get them to convert that activity so they're writing their list on a mobile phone and pressing send instead of dial when they're talking to us is not a big technological leap for them but for us it's huge," said Scothern. "That's where we're really moving to. Everything that goes on behind the scenes to make that happen is a lot of work but it looks simple on the surface.

"Our main strategy is to enable our builders to engage with us through their mobile phones but in a way that removes a load of aggravation for them – shopping lists, reminders, regular pricing, what they paid last time, all that's where we need to get to."

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The first part of the jigsaw was put into place this week with the launch of its transactional site, jewsontools.co.uk which sells a range of everyday tools. Leading up to the launch of the Magento site, designed by Nottingham-based BCS Agency, Jewson ran a social media campaign that encouraged builders to upload secret agent-style photographs and videos through a dedicated app for a chance to win a top-of-the-range set of tools.

“Our dream would be that some of our customers might get spotted for hilarious videos in the way that Paul Whitehouse and Harry Enfield got spotted on the building site years ago, just cracking jokes,” said Scothern. “It’s a platform to spread it to their mates.”

But it’s also a way to raise the profile both of Jewson’s new website as well as its other channels. “For me,” said Scothern, “it’s about tying up the whole online Facebook thing with offline PR, in branch sales, then going through to a site where you buy online, collect in branch, tie up those channels and then show Facebook has a lot of value for business as long as you tag it to a strategy rather than tagging your strategy to Facebook.

“A lot of people start off with Facebook and say how can we leverage the strategy into this rather than saying what could help us achieve our strategy.” The company is also using Twitter and its competition entries can also shared via YouTube.

From here Jewson’s aims to move to features such as ordering on the move through a mobile-optimised site. After that, the next move will be to tackle the logistical challenge of delivering bulk items, such as low-margin sand and cement. But throughout, the emphasis is on keeping costs low. The site is built on free ecommerce platform, Magento, while use of free monitoring software also fits with the aim of minimising spending. “I think the thing about Jewson’s is that if you want to invest £5m in digital in John Lewis you just put a plan together and they say get on with it. If you want to invest £5 in digital in Jewsons they’d ask why,” said Scothern. He adds: “We’ll always invest in bricks and mortar because we understand that, but investing in digital is still a tougher challenge.”

Scothern is Jewson’s first ecommerce specialist, and combines experience both as a tradesman and at digital agencies and most recently gaming analytics. “I was recruited specifically to disrupt things,” says Scothern. “It doesn’t do any harm that I’ve built a few houses in my time. My brother’s a builder, my dad and many of my mates so it’s pretty easy for me to do market research.”

His ultimate ambition at Jewson’s is clear. “It’s pretty easy really. I’d say we want to be the John Lewis of the builders merchant industry – easy to say but if we could get to their level of experience and amazing customer service in branch, online, mobile, everything else, I think we would be in a very, very happy place. It’s going to take us a little while to get there, but that’s certainly my aspiration.”

Link: <http://internetretailing.net/2012/11/interview-andy-scothern-of-jewson/>