

From online to high street: How Screwfix found DIY success

TIME is money for busy builders, which is why they have been among the most enthusiastic users of mobile phones.

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Screwfix hopes to hit its target of 425 shops in the UK Screwfix hopes to hit its target of 425 shops in the UK [FREE PIC]

Being able to order equipment on the move is a boon for white van man and tapping into that demand has turned Screwfix into one of Britain's fastest growing businesses.

While many shops are still figuring out how to make the most of the internet, new technology has allowed the firm to build on its mail-order and online shopping base to open a nationwide chain of stores.

This month Screwfix opened its 300th shop at Birstall, West -Yorkshire – one of 60 a year it is now opening to reach its target figure of 425.

Birstall is a remarkable milestone for a business that began life in 1979 with a one-page catalogue selling screws and opened its first store just eight years ago.

Screwfix chief executive Andrew Livingston said: "Our purpose is to be unbelievably convenient for our customers in whatever way they want to order.

"We have seen a big shift in customers ordering online and using click and collect. Tradesmen do invest in mobile technology and they always seem to have the latest mobiles."



Livingston's company has done well despite the economic downturn [FREE PIC]

Aimed at builders, electricians, plumbers and serious DIY-ers, Screwfix is the trade's equivalent of Argos. Behind its modest shop fronts are storerooms carrying 11,000 items, with another 3,000 available from its central warehouses.

It does not sell so-called heavyside items, such as timber and sand, but offers products across 25 categories including plumbing, electricals, decorating and insulation. Items range from nails and screws to power tools and radiators.

Since 1999 it has been part of Kingfisher, which also owns B&Q. In the last financial year it contributed £577million of sales and £47million of profits towards the parent firm's total sales of £10.6billion and profits of £715million.

One of its fastest growing lines is clothing, including safety boots that would not look out of place in a fashion shop and a high-visibility body warmer that can be turned inside out away from the building site.



Screwfix's fast growing sellers include safety boots and hi-vis items (PIC POSED BY MODELS) [GETTY]

Livingston added: "You've got a tradesman who's worked hard for their qualifications, bought their van. They want to look the part when they go out to do their business and when they go to the pub."

In addition to its British business, Screwfix sells to 23 countries via the internet and is looking at suitable sites to trial its first overseas stores in Germany.

Its success has come in spite of the financial crisis and the subsequent downturn in construction and building.

Livingston said: "I don't think anyone is immune from that kind of stuff. We've come through it okay, and we have noticed a bit more positive feedback about the economy from trade customers in the past three months."

Link:

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