



DIY – both tools and consumables – is rarely viewed as one of the most go-ahead markets. It's one where predictable quality and dependable availability are vital, so perhaps experimenting with the tried-and-tested ways of buying and selling has never seemed very necessary or appealing. But times have changed and, while consumer spending on DIY-related categories increased 12.2% in 2017, sales through the DIY specialists declined 1.9% over the same period.

Traditional retail DIY is grappling to deal with changes in the way people live, do home improvement, and shop. Yet, while it is easy to blame the internet or the increase in rented accommodation, and say that these challenges are leading to terminal decline; for every retailer that is in trouble, there are others who appear to be succeeding.

Certainly, the market is fragmenting, with a growing number of non-specialists launching or expanding their DIY ranges – and claiming 49% of DIY sales in the process. Dunelm has launched a limited DIY range in its homeware stores; Wilko and Argos are the most popular non-specialists; the discounters have made a play for the value end of the market, with Poundland and B&M expanding their ranges. Meanwhile, Amazon is estimated to be the fastest-growing of the non-specialists, with a range that, like that of another big player – Ebay – offers the sort of choice that can compete with a warehouse store but without the need to travel.

As more options become available for people to shop for DIY and home improvement, there are fewer reasons to visit a specialist – one reason why warehouse-style stores

DIY IN STORE – WE NEED TO GET THE MESSAGE OUT

In the fifth of a series of articles on sales and marketing in the home improvement and DIY industry, **Kate Newton** from home enhancement marketing agency Brookes & Co, talks about communicating key messages to your customers and not giving up on bricks-and-mortar DIY.

are experimenting with smaller and often more local formats.

The answer for DIY retailers must be to ensure they are the authority on DIY, offering advice, services and demos – all things non-specialists will find difficult to match – and ranges that start to include professional-quality products and trade appeal.

They also need to make sure they are taking the message to end-users, and not necessarily expect them just to turn up without any incentive to do so. In other words, much more proactive in the online space, while creating a user-friendly bricks-and-mortar resource where people can easily turn to get trusted advice and support on any project they might be undertaking.

Two good examples of the above offer are Screwfix and Toolstation. The British Home Enhancement

Trade Association (BHETA) held one of its many supplier forums with Toolstation earlier this year. Historically it has not usually been cited as one of the leading DIY retailers, but with its targeting of professional users and seasoned DIYers, it is nevertheless one of the fastest growing. Its growth seems to be based on an appreciation of those traditionally vital qualities of precise performance, reliable quality, and convenient, efficient service with an appreciation of the latest in digital technology to communicate that proposition to its target customers. Its use of customer data to understand how best to reach them through everything from newspapers and radio to social media and web browsing and how that changes literally through every hour of the day is revelatory.

Clearly specialist DIY retailers

need to provide an online support network, with experts available to chat online and provide help and assistance at all times. Smaller local stores should focus not just on selling product but providing a destination for amateur DIYers to get advice from experts, learn skills and order products. They need to be the first place people think to turn when they look for advice and support during a project.

To supplement this, smaller stores can also provide top-up essentials while also providing expert advice, guidance and in-person support.

Meanwhile, in urban areas with a high concentration of flats, just providing a space for people to carry out projects, such as building, renovating, or painting small items of furniture could be a good way to tap into a desire to create something and spark an interest in DIY.