

# **Modernising Trade Ordering in the Hardware Industry**

An Industry Whitepaper on Digital Transformation and Customer Experience

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## Executive Summary

Trade ordering is one of the most critical functions in the hardware industry. For decades, these orders have been captured through phone calls, handwritten notes, and email chains. While these methods are familiar and built on strong personal relationships, they are increasingly out of step with the pace, accuracy, and transparency required in modern construction environments. This whitepaper explores the challenges inherent in traditional trade ordering, examines why consumer-focused e-commerce platforms are ill-suited to the trade context, and outlines the principles that should define a modern ordering system. It considers the broader impact of modernisation on efficiency, customer experience, and competitiveness, and it concludes with a vision of how the industry might move forward.

**Key Takeaway:** Modernising trade ordering is not about replacing existing systems. It is about enhancing them to reduce errors, improve efficiency, and build stronger, more transparent relationships with builders and tradies.

## **The Current State of Trade Ordering**

In most hardware stores, the ordering process is still grounded in practices that have remained largely unchanged for decades. Builders call in their orders, store staff jot down the details, and those notes are then keyed into back-office systems or simply filed away. In other cases, orders arrive by text message or email, often lacking key information such as delivery location or required timing. These approaches are familiar, but they come with significant risks. Miscommunication over the phone can result in incorrect materials being sent to a jobsite. Handwritten notes are vulnerable to human error and can be lost or misfiled. Staff are frequently forced to re-enter the same information multiple times, increasing the likelihood of mistakes and wasting valuable time. Meanwhile, builders are left chasing updates or confirmations, which erodes trust and adds frustration to relationships that should be collaborative. The inefficiency is felt on both sides of the transaction. For the store, it means staff time is diverted away from service and sales towards administrative work. For the builder, it means delays, cost overruns, and wasted labour when the wrong materials arrive or when materials fail to arrive on time.

## **Why Modernisation Has Become Urgent**

The hardware trade does not operate in isolation. Broader changes in the construction sector and in customer expectations are making the need for modernisation increasingly urgent. Construction projects are under more pressure than ever to deliver on tight timelines, which leaves little tolerance for errors in supply. At the same time, the labour shortage in both construction and retail means that businesses cannot afford processes that tie up valuable staff resources in repetitive, manual tasks. Beyond these industry pressures, there is also a cultural shift. Builders and tradies, like everyone else, have grown accustomed to seamless digital experiences in other parts of their lives. They can track deliveries from global logistics companies on their phone in real time, manage banking without setting foot in a branch, and order consumer goods with a single tap. When compared against these experiences, the friction and opacity of traditional trade ordering stand out starkly. The risk for hardware stores is that outdated processes do not simply cause frustration; they open the door for competitors who are willing to offer a faster, more reliable, and more transparent alternative.

## **The Limits of Retail E-Commerce Platforms**

One response some stores have pursued is to adopt retail-focused e-commerce platforms such as Shopify or Magento, with the hope of digitising the trade ordering process. While well-intentioned, this approach has often created more problems than it solves. Trade ordering is not the same as retail shopping. Builders are rarely browsing catalogues or comparing items. They typically know exactly what they need and expect a system that lets them request it quickly. Unlike retail, trade pricing is highly variable, with account-specific rates and negotiated discounts that must be reflected accurately in every

order. Orders themselves are rarely simple; they often involve large quantities, multiple delivery locations, and staggered delivery schedules. Consumer e-commerce platforms are not designed to handle these complexities without extensive and costly customisation. The result is that staff end up creating workarounds, which reintroduces inefficiency and undermines the very purpose of digitisation. Rather than simplifying processes, these systems often add new layers of friction for both staff and customers.

## **Towards a Modern Trade Ordering Framework**

What the industry requires is not a retail system retrofitted for trade, but a purpose-built approach that recognises the specific needs of hardware businesses and their customers. A modern trade ordering framework should lower the barriers for builders to submit orders, integrate seamlessly with existing systems, and provide confidence that orders have been captured correctly. In practice, this means eliminating unnecessary steps such as account creation and password management. Builders should be able to place orders with minimal friction, whether from the jobsite, the car, or the office. Orders should flow directly into a store's back-office processes, whether that is a modern ERP, a traditional POS, or even manual workflows, without requiring duplication. Modern systems should also accommodate the reality of trade orders: the ability to split deliveries by date and location, to handle multi-jobsite projects, and to reflect account-level pricing that updates automatically. Equally important is transparency. Builders need the assurance that their order has been captured accurately and is on its way. Staff need the ability to approve, adjust, or confirm orders with minimal effort. The focus should not be on replacing human relationships but on enhancing them, ensuring that both sides can operate with clarity and confidence.

## **The Business Case for Change**

Modernising trade ordering has tangible benefits that go beyond efficiency. The most obvious gain is the reduction in costly errors. Every time the wrong product is delivered or a delivery is missed, the store bears not only the financial cost but also the reputational damage. By capturing orders digitally at the source, these errors are minimised. Staff efficiency is another key driver. When staff spend less time chasing details, re-entering data, or correcting mistakes, they can spend more time on activities that drive value, such as customer service, upselling, or supporting in-store sales. Customer loyalty is perhaps the most powerful outcome. Builders are more likely to return to suppliers who make their lives easier, who save them time on the jobsite, and who provide transparency throughout the ordering process. In a competitive market, where price differences are often marginal, customer experience becomes the deciding factor. Finally, digitisation creates opportunities for better data. Digital orders provide insight into demand patterns, seasonal trends, and account behaviour, enabling smarter decisions about inventory, staffing, and service offerings.

## **A Path Forward for the Industry**

The path forward will look different for every hardware business, depending on size, systems, and customer base. However, the broad direction is clear. The industry must move from manual capture towards digital-first processes. It must build on existing systems rather than attempt to rip and replace them. Above all, it must design processes that put simplicity for the customer at the centre, rather than allowing internal complexity to dictate the experience. This shift will not happen overnight. It requires investment, experimentation, and a willingness to rethink established habits. But the benefits are too significant to ignore.

## **Case in Point: Touchpoint**

At Coded Ventures, we have been exploring these principles in practice through the development of Touchpoint. Rather than presenting itself as another platform to adopt, Touchpoint acts as a conduit, connecting existing systems to a modern, mobile-friendly ordering interface. Builders and tradies can place orders through secure links sent to their phones or email, without needing to create accounts or remember passwords. Store staff can capture orders in-store or over the phone and send them to customers for approval in one click. Orders can be split by delivery date or location, and pricing is pulled directly from back-office systems. The purpose of highlighting Touchpoint here is not to position it as the only solution, but as one example of how industry principles can be translated into practice. The real message is that the hardware industry must adopt solutions — whether Touchpoint or others — that are designed for the realities of trade ordering, not for retail.

## **Conclusion**

The hardware industry stands at a crossroads. Traditional trade ordering methods are increasingly misaligned with the realities of modern construction, while retail e-commerce platforms fail to provide a workable alternative. What is needed is a deliberate modernisation effort, one that respects the existing strengths of the industry while addressing its most pressing inefficiencies. Modernising trade ordering is about more than digitisation. It is about safeguarding trust, strengthening competitiveness, and preparing the industry for the future. By embracing digital-first processes that are purpose-built for trade, hardware businesses can not only reduce errors and improve efficiency but also create the kind of customer experience that secures long-term loyalty. This is a transformation that benefits everyone: the store, the staff, the builder, and ultimately the projects that depend on reliable supply. The time for modernisation is now.