

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER 2014

THE HAI HARDWARE JOURNAL

THE VOICE OF THE IRISH HARDWARE INDUSTRY

WATER TORTURE

- HOW MERCHANTS CAN EASE THE PAIN

ALSO INSIDE:

INTERVIEW WITH HAI PRESIDENT
PADDY KELLY

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ISSN 2009-5481

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Published by:
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New HAI Monthly Business Index launched

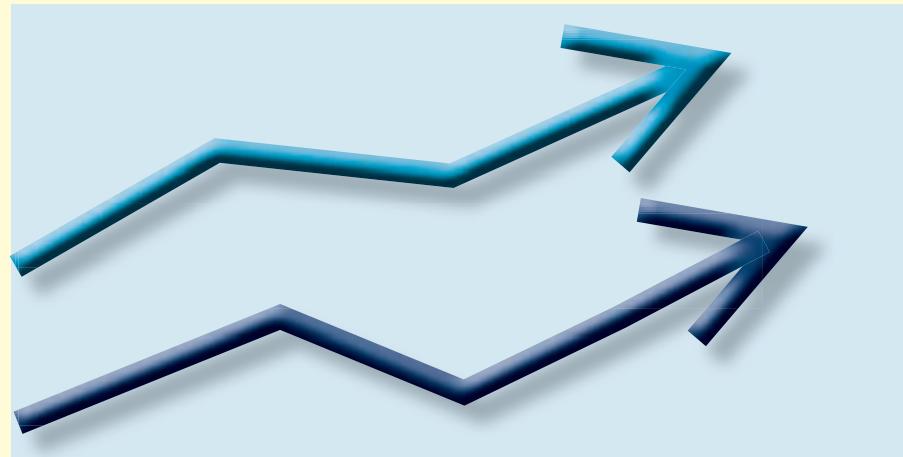
MEASURE YOUR BUSINESS AGAINST YOUR COMPETITORS

There are many ways hardware retailers and builders merchants measure their business success. Profitability, obviously, and sales growth month-on-month or year-on-year. Other indicators include sales or profit per employee, business expansion, footfall, or softer indicators such as employee retention, reputation and longevity. Apart from hard numbers, each business will identify its own key indicators based on its history, management objectives, geography and so on.

But the one key metric that is difficult to source is 'how am I doing compared to my competitors?' Now, Hardware Association Ireland is offering its members that opportunity. With the new HAI Business Index to be launched in January, each participating merchant will be able to measure their own performance by comparing their own sales turnover (net of VAT) with other merchants in their region and nationally, as well as in other ways, such as urban/rural. Your Association will also be able to compare the new Business Index results with retail indices such as those provided by the CSO and other retail sectors.

Confidentiality assured

The Index will be produced in a way that provides utmost confidentiality; the HAI Executive or Board will not have access to information provided by individual merchants. To ensure absolute confidentiality HAI has appointed the well-respected and long-established research company, Behaviour & Attitudes (B&A) to undertake this research on a monthly basis. B&A will collate all the information received by individual merchants to ascertain the average business levels from local to national. All information provided to B&A will be coded to ensure that



the source is completely anonymous. In urging all HAI merchants and retailers to join the information gathering process, HAI President Paddy Kelly says: "To encourage the highest possible involvement by members, we have made the process as simple as possible for each merchant. It will only require the provision of one figure each month to B&A. The benefit of the monthly index will be immense. With the cooperation of all members we will be in a position to provide them with a key business indicator, which will tell them if they are ahead or behind the industry norm and also, for the first time, provide an actual overall figure for the importance of the sector.

Listening to what members want

"The full research will be shared immediately with the merchants who participate and summary findings will be reported quarterly in The Hardware Journal," he added. According to HAI CEO, Annemarie Harte, this is the latest in a series of initiatives designed to add value to the service HAI provides its members. "We have listened to members about what's important to them and with the assistance of B&A, we will deliver a response which will provide valuable intelligence to assist members in running their businesses."

John O'Mahony, B&A explains: "The first piece of research which we will conduct in January will measure members' performance during the year in 2014 as well as January 2015. This will allow us to benchmark the Index throughout 2015 against the previous year, month by month, and give HAI members a valuable trends analysis. "The identity of all participants will remain strictly confidential with the results only being reviewed in a summary, anonymised form." Behaviour & Attitudes Ltd. (B&A) is an independent Irish market research company, and is a member of both the European Society of Opinion & Market Research (ESOMAR), and the Association of Irish Market Research Organisations (AIMRO). As such, all studies undertaken by Behaviour & Attitudes are conducted in accordance with the strict professional and ethical guidelines set down by ESOMAR and AIMRO.

In 2014, B&A was appointed as the sole provider of research services in Ireland to the EU after a rigorous quality audit. In November 2014, B&A completed the ISO 9001 accreditation for Information Security

More information about the Business Index can be found on www.hardwareassociation.ie

HAI IS DELIGHTED TO WELCOME OUR NEWEST MEMBERS.

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E: enda@independentfencing.com
Business: Fencing

Quinn Building Products

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Fermanagh BT92 9AU
Contact: Ken Jackson
T: 028 677 48866
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Business: Building products

Firebird Heating Systems

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Contact: Colm Murphy
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Business: Heating products

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E: dorr@arcbuildingproducts.ie
Business: Building construction & DIY products

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E: kevin@earthridge.ie
Business: Plumbing and heating

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Business: Heating products

Baxi Potterton Myson

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Business: Metal Products & Ancillaries

Grundfos Ire. Ltd

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Contact: Gordon Barry
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E: gbarry@grundfos.com
Business: Pump manufacturers

Colortrend

Maynooth Road, Celbridge,
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Contact: Liam Holland
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Business: Paint and decorative products

Deanta Doors

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Business: Doors and accessories

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Main Street, Newbridge,
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Business: Solid fuel manufacturers

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Business: Solid fuel suppliers

Prime Source

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Contact: Ryan O'Leary
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E: ryan@primesource.ie
Business: Building, hardware and industrial products

Lagan Cement

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Westmeath
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T: 044 937 9200
E: jonathan.tiernan@lagan-group.com
Business: Cement products



WE NEED YOU!

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HAI provides the following benefits to member companies:

- Lobbying and representative services to Government – we campaign on your behalf so you can get on with running your business.
- Promoting the industry through opportunities with the media - we often showcase member companies and use specific member examples to support what we're saying.
- Keep up to date with the industry, your colleagues and competitors through our website, bi-monthly magazine, monthly email newsletters and events.
- Regular surveys and intelligence about the industry – we are the only providers of hardware specific trends and developments.
- We plan to enhance our range of services in the coming months to bring additional value to members.

To find out more about how we can help you, visit www.hardwareassociation.ie or call Jim on 01 298 0969



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US STORE UNVEILS ROBOTIC HARDWARE ASSISTANT



OSHbot will ask customers if they need help and guide them to products. Pictured are: Marco Mascorro, CEO of Fellow Robots, left, and Kyle Nel, executive director of Lowe's Innovation Labs. *Rachel King/The Wall Street Journal*

A Californian hardware store is using smart technology in a novel way. A robotic shop assistant will become the newest staff member of Lowe's California Orchard Supply Hardware Store. The five-foot tall OSHbot is bilingual, can display in-store specials, allows for video conferencing with a store expert and will greet and assist customers as they enter the store.

According to the *Wall Street Journal*: "As customers follow OSHbot to the correct aisle, they will see ads for in-store specials on its back screen as they pass various departments, communicated through in-store beacons. Customers who need help with, say, a specific type of plumbing project can initiate a video conference on OSHbot's front screen with available experts at any Orchard store." In the future, the robot may even create the part with a 3-D printer.

At first, there will be two OSHbots present in the San Jose store, but more robots may be introduced later. The exact cost of the robot was not disclosed, but as this technology becomes more affordable, the robot assistant may be making its way into retail stores and restaurants worldwide (Hardware Retailing, US).

LARSEN COMPANY APPOINTMENTS

Larsen Building Products has appointed two sales managers to its builders' merchants sales division. Sheila Mulligan and John Henihan are experienced, well-known sales professionals in the north and west of Ireland.

Sheila currently covers the northern counties including Louth, while John is covering the midlands and western counties. John and Sheila will assist the company's existing sales and technical support teams.

JOHNSTONE'S PERFECTS SPECIALITY RANGE

Paint brand Johnstone's has unveiled its new Speciality range, which has been designed to be "easy to choose and easy to use."

Grouped into three key areas - prepare, transform and problem-solve - this compact range comprises 14 core products and will, according to Johnstone's demystify the process of selecting specialist paints.

With a striking tin design and supporting point of sale (POS) materials, the range can be presented by stockists in full in one bay to make maximum impact in store, ensuring the range stands out to customers, according to Vicky Jones, stockist brand marketing manager at Johnstone's. She says the new range showcases Johnstone's commitment to making paint selection easier than ever before for both retailers and consumers alike.

The new range has been influenced by extensive research carried out by Johnstone's, which has revealed that the first consideration for consumers, over and above price point, is the project's requirements, primarily the surface to be painted. The scaled down product range and simplified product names, coupled with the new tin design, communicates clearly the substrate each product can be used on and takes away any confusion for customers.

The range, which includes a Magnetic Blackboard Paint and an Any Surface Primer, will be supported by help and advice for customers online, on the tin and via a guide to take them through every step, as well as a full range of eye-catching POS materials for stockists.

Vicky Jones added: "We are extremely excited about the launch of our new Speciality range, which is guaranteed to offer end users excellent product quality at great value. All the products in the range boast extra performance characteristics compared to standard emulsion and with its stylish new tin and POS design, we're sure the range will make a striking impression on customers. With Johnstone's support, stockists have an ideal opportunity here to benefit from market growth in this sector."

For more information about the range please visit today www.johnstonespaint.com or contact your PPG Account Manager.

TESCO CLOSES KITCHENS AND BATHROOMS BUSINESS

In the UK, Tesco has decided to close its dedicated kitchen and bathroom business over concerns about provider Mark Two Distributors.

The announcement was made on Tesco's website, following news that its supplier Mark Two Distributors left hundreds of customers without kitchens or at risk of losing their deposits.

A statement from the supermarket giant said: "Following a review of our Tesco Kitchens and Tesco Bathrooms provider, Mark Two Distributors Limited, we identified concerns about their ability to deliver the service our customers expect." (www.diyweek.net)

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HARD-PRESSED CONSUMERS TURN TO RAINWATER COLLECTION DEVICES

With people bracing themselves for the first water charge bill in 2015, hardware retailers across the country are recording a massive jump in the sale of rainwater collection devices, predominantly water butts, with nationwide hardware retailer Homevalue recording an increase in sales of 1,100% compared with the same period last year. Homevalue retailers sold a combined 5,579 water butts between June and September of this year, compared with sales of 463 during the same period last year.

According to Paul Thompson, CEO of Associated Hardware,

operators of the Homevalue brand, "Our retailers have seen a big jump in the sale of water butts over the last few months indicating that our customers are turning to water retention solutions as a means of reducing the quarterly water charge bill."

Another increasingly popular solution for conserving water is cistern displacement devices, aimed at reducing the amount of water used per flush. Homevalue's Save-a-Flush water saving device saves one litre of water for every toilet flush and has the potential to reduce water usage in the home by five percent.

"WE'LL TAKE YOUR OLD ONE BACK"

As a part of the new WEEE 2 regulations recently announced by the Department of Environment, Community and Local Government, Irish consumers will see the introduction of more information on recycling in electrical retailers, emphasising the free take-back in store of old electrical appliances. WEEE Ireland, the Irish compliance scheme for electrical recycling, is working in conjunction with the Trade Associations and other stakeholders to encourage retailers to motivate consumers to recycle old appliances for free at their local store.

This means that a dedicated fund has been created to help retailers promote this campaign, entitled "We'll take your old one back", which is currently being implemented in electrical retailers nationwide.

The fund is allocated to retailers dependent on their 2013 WEEE take back tonnage figures, and the compliance schemes have also provided promotional posters and other marketing materials to the retailers via www.weeeireland.ie.

This initiative will create more awareness to the consumer of where they can recycle their old appliance. One such benefit of the Irish WEEE system for householders is that retailers will continue to take back WEEE from private households free of charge and on a one-to-one basis in store and on delivery of new appliances. For further information on legal requirements and retailer obligations please visit www.weeeireland.ie



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60 SECOND INTERVIEW

KEVIN BRADY

Kevin Brady is Director of Brady's Homecare in Greystones, a family business which was started by his father Sean in 1968. Brady's Homecare is now co-owned and run by Kevin and his brother John, with full-time employee Emma, resident designer and colour consultant.

1. Are you an optimist?
Yes.
2. Business leader you most admire?
Michael O'Leary.
3. Biggest lesson learned in business?
Try to be one step ahead of your competitors.
4. Best business book you have read?
Like a Virgin by Richard Branson.
5. Advice to fledgling entrepreneurs?
Put in the hours and the benefits will come.
6. Who is your greatest inspiration in life and/or business
My father.
7. Apple or Android?
Apple.
8. Most useful app?
AIB Internet Banking.
8. Favourite song/band?
U2.
9. Favourite pastime?
Badminton.
10. Favourite food?
Fish.
11. Favourite holiday destination or part of the world?
France.
12. Four dinner guests dead or alive?
Sean Connery, The Edge, Darren Clarke, Julia Roberts.

GOOD AUTUMN FOR GRAFTON'S IRISH MERCHANTING BUSINESS

Trading conditions for the Grafton Group were favourable in the four months to the end of October supported by increased demand in the residential repair, maintenance and improvement (RMI) markets in Ireland and the UK, according to the group's Interim Management Statement in November. The pace of growth moderated somewhat as anticipated in the four months following strong growth in the first half. Revenue for the ten months to 31st October 2014 was £1.76bn, an increase of 10.1% on revenue of £1.60bn in the same period last year.

Gavin Slark, Chief Executive Officer of Grafton Group plc commented: "As anticipated, the growth in the UK market continues to moderate from the first half and the Irish merchanting business is showing a marked improvement from a very low base. The overall outlook continues to be positive and the Group remains on course to report full year operating profit in line with its expectations." Demand in the DIY business in Ireland continued to be subdued by pressure on household budgets. The like-for-like revenue comparison for the four months to October was also impacted by very strong demand for seasonal products in the prior year and by discontinuing a number of product ranges as the business refocused on its core strengths of DIY, Home and Garden. Volume growth in the UK merchanting business, which accounted for three quarters of Group revenue, has continued to be driven by the ongoing recovery in residential RMI activity and in the new housing market. Favourable trading in the established business combined with acquisitions and strategic development initiatives have led to total revenue growth of 10% in the ten months to October 2014.

The marked improvement in first half trading in the merchanting business in Ireland continued through the four months led primarily by a recovery from a very low base in demand in the residential RMI segment of the market and a tentative recovery in house building. Demand in the Belgium merchanting market continued to be impacted by a decline in consumer sentiment as the economy weakened after a positive start to the year. The revenue decline in the like-for-like business in the four months to October was principally due to lower volumes in the Readymix division.

The table shows the change in average daily like-for-like revenue by segment and the change in total revenue by segment compared with the same periods in 2013.

Segment	Average Daily Like-for-Like Revenue Growth – 2014 *				
	Three Months to 31 st March 2014	Three Months to 30 th June 2014	Four Months to 31 st Oct 2014	Ten Months to 31 st Oct 2014	Ten Months to 31 st Oct 2014
Merchanting					
- UK	9.8%	6.8%	5.4%	10.0%	10.0%
- Ireland	7.4%	18.6%	15.4%	11.7%	6.1%
- Belgium	28.7%	(11.7%)	(10.8%)	60.3%	52.2%
Retailing	3.1%	3.2%	(1.7%)	0.3%	(4.7%)
Manufacturing	51.6%	27.3%	29.6%	34.3%	33.7%
Group	10.3%	7.5%	6.1%	11.4%	10.1%

*Constant currency

LOWES LIFTS EXPECTATIONS IN US

Lowe's recently stated that it expects to make more profit in its current financial year than it did just three months ago after third-quarter sales climbed more than forecast. Same-store sales in the US jumped 5.1% in the quarter to October 31st, as the now three-year rebound in house prices encourages Americans to spend on doing up their homes. Profits for the quarter climbed to

\$585m, or 59 cents a share, from \$499m, or 47 cents, in the year ago quarter. Revenues also marched higher, rising to \$13.7bn from \$13bn. Robert A. Niblock, the chief executive of Lowe's, said: "We are pleased with our performance, and continue to be cautiously optimistic about the home improvement landscape. Thanks to a third-quarter that beat forecasts, Lowe's now expects to make \$2.68 a

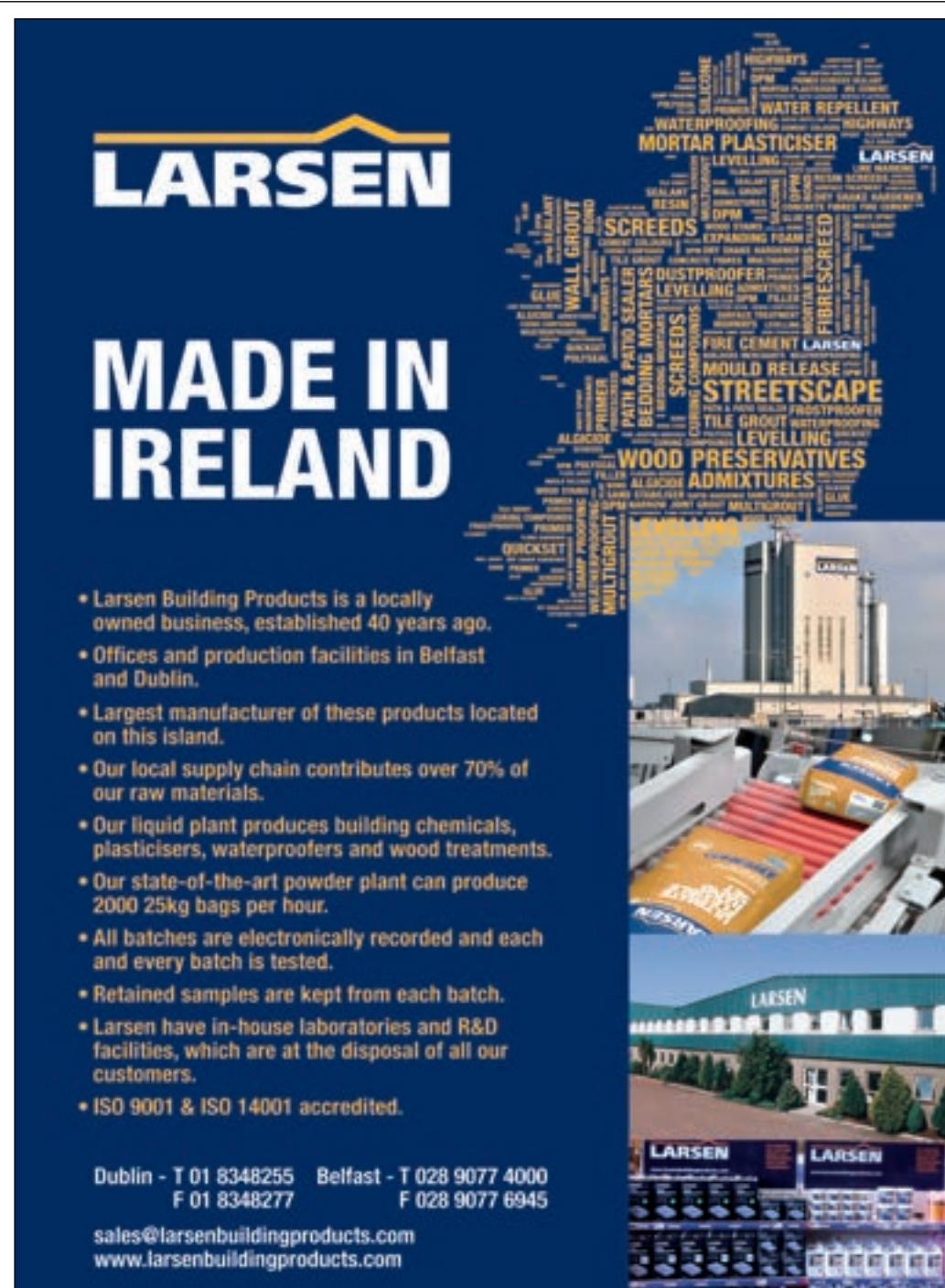
share for the year to January 30th, up from an August prediction of \$2.63. The company also lifted its same-store sales prediction for the year to a range of 3.5% to 4% from an August outlook of 3.5%. Shares in Lowe's, which have outperformed Home Depot's this year, climbed 2% in pre-market trading. *(Financial Times)*

DIY IS GOOD FOR YOU

Learning practical skills may produce the same wellbeing benefit as tripling income and learning, using and sharing practical skills like DIY and gardening can empower people and strengthen communities, according to a recent report, published by independent think tank the New Economics Foundation (NEF) with support from Kingfisher plc, and drawing on data from the UK Big Lottery Fund, academic research and expert interviews. The report finds that having the confidence and knowledge to use practical skills like DIY and gardening is one way to confront these challenges head on. Programmes aimed to help people learn and use practical skills create very big impacts on wellbeing, the report claims, in some cases improving life satisfaction by the equivalent amount as would be expected from a tripling of household income. Businesses connected to these activities have the potential to play an important stewardship role, in terms of preserving and spreading skills which can deliver multiple benefits to society. Sir Ian Cheshire, Group Chief Executive, Kingfisher plc, says: "This report reinforces that those communities programmes we're already involved in, not only pass on valuable practical skills to the individuals who learn them but also make a much bigger contribution within communities as well. The findings are really useful for helping us plan our future communities engagement work."

You can download the full report at: www.kingfisher.com/files/pdf/Full_published_Hands_on_Communities_report.pdf

- Larsen Building Products is a locally owned business, established 40 years ago.
- Offices and production facilities in Belfast and Dublin.
- Largest manufacturer of these products located on this Island.
- Our local supply chain contributes over 70% of our raw materials.
- Our liquid plant produces building chemicals, plasticisers, waterproofers and wood treatments.
- Our state-of-the-art powder plant can produce 2000 25kg bags per hour.
- All batches are electronically recorded and each and every batch is tested.
- Retained samples are kept from each batch.
- Larsen have in-house laboratories and R&D facilities, which are at the disposal of all our customers.
- ISO 9001 & ISO 14001 accredited.



PET PROFITS ARE THE NEW WAY FOR US STORES

Hardware stores' next sales frontier might be products for pets. U.S. spending on pet supplies should top \$58 billion this year, the American Pet Products Association reports. That's more than triple the \$17 billion spent in 1994.

Joy Smith, a merchandise manager for PRO Group Inc., says it may be wise for hardware retailers to integrate pet-related items into their stores' impulse selling strategies as well.

"Pet supplies is both a destination shopping experience and an impulse category," she says. "The pet owner will come to the store regularly to pick up necessities like pet food, litter and medications." Allowing leashed pets into the store could also bring an impulse sale opportunity, she says.

"If the endcaps, dump bins and aisles have treats and toys, they are going to sell," she says. "It's just like walking a child through a toy aisle on the way to buy milk: you are walking out of that store with a treasure for your child. It's the same for your pets." But she says it's important to start small. Start off carrying the basic necessities for dogs and cats before expanding into their treats, vitamins, carriers, grooming tools and other items. Then add items for other small animals and fish, if it makes sense to do so.



Customers are often willing to spend a little extra on treats or toys for their pets.

SPREADING CHRISTMAS CHEER... AND CUSTOMER LOYALTY

The run up to Christmas presents a great opportunity to build customer loyalty, according to Ron Kaufman, author of the *New York Times* bestseller *Uplifting Service: The Proven Path to Delighting Your Customers, Colleagues, and Everyone Else You Meet*.

Here are five practical tips based on Kaufman's ideas:

of time, figuring that the complainer is a lost cause. However, customers only complain when they're still considering buying from you. Give your support team a set of approaches with which to make amends, based on the nature of the complaint. For example, if a customer thinks you're too slow, offer a free shipping upgrade on the next order.

1. Make it easier to get support.

The holiday season is the busiest time of the year for most customers. Making it easier for customers to get support makes you a haven from the hassle. Ideally, you'll want to create an environment where shopping, buying, and receiving support are all part of a seamless environment.

4. Treat your employees better.

Just as your customers are under extra stress during the holidays, so are your employees. Find ways to keep employees feeling supported, and connected to your business, to their colleagues, and (of course) to your customers.

2. Personalise the experience.

Personalised service makes people feel special. Keep track of your regular customers' preferences and choices and customise their experiences so they all feel as if they are your favorite customer.

5. Become a community leader.

Christmas is, of course, a time when people think of giving, which makes it the perfect time to exhibit your generosity in a way that your employees and customers will appreciate. For instance, if your customer base is local, consider sponsoring a local sports team.

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HARDWARE ASSOCIATION IRELAND IS CALLING ALL MERCHANTS THROUGHOUT THE COUNTRY TO MARK THEIR DIARY AND SECURE THEIR REGISTRATIONS FOR THE INDUSTRY'S BIGGEST SHOWCASE TO DATE, THE RECORD-BREAKING HARDWARE SHOW 2015. THE SHOW WILL TAKE PLACE AT THE CONFERENCE & EVENT CENTRE, CITYWEST HOTEL, CO DUBLIN ON THE 15TH AND 16TH FEBRUARY, 2015. VISITOR REGISTRATION IS NOW LIVE AT WWW.HAISHOW.IE

At almost 2,900m², the show was extended by 25% to meet demand and is already almost sold out. The multi-faceted show spans four key industry sectors – HOME – GARDEN – BUILD and DIY – and there will be no better place to find out about the latest products and services on the market for each of these sectors than at the show. The Hardware Show 2015 is not just an exhibition, it is a complete industry experience created to arm merchants with everything they need to know about what's going on in the sector as well as to network with industry peers. For example, the Information Exchange Area is a presentation forum where merchants can drop in on presentations as wide ranging as visual merchandising to building a social media campaign for your store. With experts cherry-picked for their knowledge, timely Q&A sessions will be scheduled after each presentation so that visitors can benefit from tailored answers to their queries. The Garden Feature at the Hardware Show is a new addition. Kildare Growers are Ireland's premiere plant producers with a group of six nurseries based in County Kildare. Specialising in growing trees, shrubs heathers, herbaceous and bedding plants, they supply garden centre and retailers throughout Ireland and will be displaying a full range of their locally grown plants at the show. Professionals will be on hand to answer any questions visitors may have in relation to merchandising and plant care. HAI is delighted to announce another new feature of the show – the Hardware Show Innovation Awards. Celebrity entrepreneur, writer and speaker Sean Gallagher of TV's *Dragons Den* fame, will be chairman of the judging panel. The awards are designed to both recognise and reward excellence and innovation in the industry. They are aimed at presenting exhibitors with

the commercial opportunity to draw the attention of visitors and the expert judging panel at the show. Indeed, the winners' display at the event will present visitors with a comprehensive showcase of the most lauded new innovations at this landmark show.

Commenting on the scale and content of the show, HAI Chief Executive Annemarie Harte says: "This event is organised by the industry for the industry and as such we know exactly what our exhibitors want to achieve, as well as what visitors are looking to learn. We are confident we have built a show that covers both and we are looking forward to the industry meeting at our biggest event yet."

HAI will have a significant presence at the show with a large stand towards the centre of the exhibition space with staff and members present to meet visitors, discuss membership and plans for the future. One of the biggest networking and social events for the industry is the HAI President's Ball. Welcoming Hugh O'Donnell, Chief Executive of Amalgamated Hardware Ltd as the new president of HAI for 2015/16, this is a great opportunity to meet and greet old friends and new in an informal, social setting, and it is always a very enjoyable occasion for everyone associated with the industry and their partners, both merchants and suppliers.

Amongst the companies that have secured their space at the show are ABC Abrasives, Allegro, Allied Merchants, Amalgamated Hardware Plc., Ames True Temper Ltd., Aquasource Distributors Ltd., Arc Building Products, Ashtown Trading, Assa Abloy, B&G, Bat Metalworks, Basta Parsons, Birkdale Fencing, Blackspur, Bord na Móna, Bostik Industries, Bret Martin, Calor Gas, Canadia Distributors Ltd., CCEC, Central Key, Clongrennane Lime, Centurion Europe Ltd., Classic

Hardware, JD Roberts, Colm Warren, Contech, Colortrend, CPL Fuels, CORE Software, Crown Paints, Curust Industries, Dargan John & Sons Ltd., Deanta Doors, DFE, Donal Lynch Hardware, Dosco, Draper Tools, DS Supplies, Dulux, Duracell, Earthridge, Ecocem Ireland, Everbuild, Fleetwood Paints, Frisco UK, Galco Steel, Glenbrook Nurseries, Gorilla Glue, Gyproc, Heat Design, Hamble Distribution, Henley Stoves, ICON Building Products, IKO Ltd, Independent Fencing, IITC, Intact Software, Irish Cement, Irish Wire Products, Henkel, JB Key, JD Roberts, Jefferson Tools, John Murphy Castlerea, Keypoint, Keystone Group, Kilsaran, Lagan Group, Laydex, Larsen Building Products, McLoughlins, Mercer Agencies, Mulberry Stoves, N and C Enterprises, Netwatch, OHRA, Olympic Fixings, PAL Petersons, Power Home Products, Powerline, Prime Source, Rawplug, Regatta Professional, Rhino Distributors, RHN - Retail Distribution Systems, Ronseal, Saint Gobain, Sasta Hardware, Seal Systems, Shannonbridge Pottery, Siniat Ltd, Sinops Distribution, Snickers, John Stafford & Sons Ltd, Stafford Fuels, Tegral, TIMCO, Toolbank, Tucks Fasteners, Tucks O'Brien, TW Clarke, UEL, United Hardware, Uppercross Enterprises Ltd., Varian LS & Co. Ltd., Waterford Stanley, WAVIN, Westaro Hosing, Whiteriver Group, Woodford Timber Products, Xtratherm.

[www.haishow.ie](http://WWW.HAISHOW.IE)

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THE DRIP-DRIP EFFECT

As we come to the end of 2014, homeowners have an unprecedented level of awareness of domestic water infrastructure and the issues related to it. That's a real opportunity for local hardware stores to help their customers conserve water and avoid water waste. *The Hardware Journal* talked to a chartered engineer about the kind of problems you can expect your customers to have with their water supply and we outline some of the innovative water-saving products you can add to your shelves.

According to Alan Curran, Chartered Engineer and Director of Network Management with RPS Consulting Engineers, the detailed understanding of the amount of water used or leakage in individual homes will only be available

when metering is in place. In the meantime, however, there are some broad indications of the type of hidden problems that homeowners may find. "If a water leak takes place inside the house the homeowner is likely to be aware of it, so the most likely place for hidden leaks to occur will be between the boundary of the property and the house itself – in locations such as under the driveway or garden at the front of a house. By definition these will be the harder-to-get-at places and homeowners will probably need to get specialist contractors to look at these kind of problems."

LIQUID ASSETS

A selection of some of the water saving products that merchants are stocking.

- Water Butt kit – collects rainwater from downpipes of homes.
- Water Saving Shower Head – reduces water used when showering, including products that claim not to compromise water pressure
- Kitchen Swivel Tap Aerator – rotating tap fitting which reduces water flow.
- Bathroom Tap Aerator – reduces water flow without a change in water pressure. Helps stop water splashing.
- Water Drop Digital Shower Timer – be more aware of how long you are spending in the shower and set alarm to get you out.
- Toilet Tank Bank – designed to be filled with water and inserted into your toilet cistern. This means that when the toilet is flushed the cistern never empties fully and thus you save water as less water travels back into the cistern after flushing. Ideal for older cisterns, in particular, which can have a flush level of between nine and 12 litres.

UNDERSTANDING WATER USAGE PROBLEMS

The types of pipes that are prevalent in usage around the country are, predominantly, lead, copper or plastic. Lead pipes tend to date from the pre-50s, copper from the post-50s on, and plastic pipes from the 70s onwards.

"Issues can arise with any type of pipe but other factors come into play too such as how the pipe has been installed and the depth at which it has been placed. The age of the pipes will be an issue too, obviously, with the oldest being the most likely susceptible to problems." Leaving aside problems with leakage, a proactive approach to efficient water usage can save money. Figures from the UK Water Companies are a reasonable guide to the way the public uses water, Alan says: "The bulk of water is typically used in the bathroom, showering and bathing. Typical figures from the UK suggest that 30 to 35% of water is used in bathing and showers, and 20 to 30%

accounted for by toilet usage. The rest is used for washing, bathing and cleaning. Only a small percentage, 3-5%, is used as drinking water and a similar level in average gardens."

CONSERVING WATER

In terms of changing habits and seeking to conserve water, it's clear that the big area to tackle is in the bathroom. Alan notes: "Changing habits, showering instead of bathing and controlling the amount of time in the shower are good starting points."

For those without that kind of willpower, there is also a wide range of water usage devices on the market. He states: "One such product is the Water Pebble. Placed on the floor of the shower, it changes colour, traffic light-style, the longer a person spends in the shower, going from green initially to amber and finally to red when shower time is up. It also 'learns' through usage, shortening the time it allows."

Modern houses tend to have dual flush toilets, which use much less water than their predecessors. The progress that's been made can be seen by comparing the amount of water that older toilets would use per flush, up to as much as 13 litres, to the modern toilet which would use approximately four litres. That trend is replicated by washing machines and dishwashers, which also increasingly use less and less water.

Since the 70s, washing machines have reduced by two thirds the amount of water they use.

Householders who have older houses and older bathrooms do have options to look at in terms of innovative devices that can make conservation easier. A lot of design work has been done around baths to come up with shapes that are more ergonomic and use less water. One of the most innovative, if not commercial, inventions has been the "breathing bathtub", developed by Chinese designers.

There are low flow devices available which can be retrofitted to existing taps. There are also cistern displacement devices for toilets. An example is the Water Hippo. You simply lift the lid of the cistern, insert the Water Hippo which fills with water, ensuring less water is used per flush.

Alan comments: "Depending on the homeowner's needs, some of these are innovative and useful. Of course, you also have to weigh up costs and benefits, taking into account the price of the product, the savings it can offer and the water charges themselves."

Another factor worth remembering, from a cost point of view, Alan concludes, is that there's a close link between water and energy usage and by reducing water usage you can also save on energy. "Bear in mind that up to 25% of a household's energy bill can be simply for heating water."

HARVESTING RAIN TO SAVE WATER

A Fine Gael senator raised a few smiles with a verbal slip on a recent edition of TV3's *Tonight with Vincent Browne* when he commented "water is a finite resource, it doesn't just fall from the skies." We all know what he was trying to say, but our abundance of rainfall can actually be a real advantage in water conservation with a wide range of rainwater harvesting solutions and products available through builders merchants across the country.

In most buildings, naturally clean rainwater is left to wash away while expensive purified water is used for flushing toilets and washing - only a fraction is used as drinking water. Rainwater harvesting can form an integral part of a well-designed sustainable drainage scheme and can assist where, for one reason or another, there are problems with the mains water supply. KingspanWater is one example of a manufacturer that offers garden irrigation and rainwater harvesting systems which can reduce a domestic house's reliance on mains water – in some instances by up to 50% (integrated systems). KingspanWaters' Envireau Gravity System has a facility whereby in the event of a power failure on site (or the rain stocks running dry), the system will automatically switch to mains water supply to ensure a continuity of service.

The gravity system requires a header tank to complete the package. The water from the header tank will flow by gravity to the serviced appliances. The system will always draw from the rainwater supply first.

A BATHTUB THAT 'BREATHES'

The Breathing Bathtub is an innovative concept from Chinese designer Li Xi that claims to turn bathing into a healthier experience for the users and is significantly more efficient in terms of energy and water consumption. The bathtub is lined with a revolutionary material similar to a sponge. The material molds itself to the shape of the users, guaranteeing maximum comfort and, as a consequence, uses less than half the water used normally.

As its name suggests, the Breathing Bathtub can breathe as the sponge material filters the water through a process similar to the osmosis of plants, meaning that any impurity in the water becomes trapped in the lower layer of the lining, guaranteeing clean water and an important reduction in consumption. Another surprising characteristic of the bathtub's lining is the product feature indicating when the water should be renewed.



ECO-FRIENDLY CONSTRUCTION IS KEY TO SUSTAINABILITY

Over the past few years there has been a great deal of publicity about the quality and standard of buildings constructed in Ireland in recent history. Issues with pyrite, poor insulation and poor construction have made turning your house into a home to be proud of, a difficult task for people in certain areas.

In April 2013 the then Minister for the Environment Community and Local Government, Phil Hogan, introduced a range of measures in the Building Control Amendment Regulations 2013. These measures aim to prevent the reoccurrence of poorly constructed dwellings, pyrite damage and breaches of fire regulations, all of which were results of the property bubble. One of the measures included the introduction of assigned certifiers - registered architects, engineers or building surveyors, who will inspect building works at key stages during construction. They, along with the builders, will both certify that a finished building complies with the requirements of the building

regulations. Furthermore, relevant professionals must sign off on mandatory certificates of compliance when a building is complete. The new building regulations were generally welcomed and recognised as a positive step towards achieving higher building standards. But it doesn't end there.

Once the house is built there is still plenty to do to make it more environmentally sound. Ecological and sustainable building practices are increasingly making their mark on the Irish construction industry.

MacCann & Byrne

One Irish company is leading the way in providing sustainable building materials, as well as training courses to create awareness of new building standards and alternative products that are now available.

MacCann and Byrne has recognised that there is a whole new market out there which wants to buy products that will create homes that are energy efficient, air tight, durable, ecological



MacCann & Byrne's Thermafleece Sheep'swool

and sustainable in every way. In fact, this market has sustained the company throughout the difficult years.

"We are definitely behind our European neighbours," says Tom Barbour of MacCann and Byrne.

"In Ireland, sustainable and eco

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products are seen as a niche market, while in Europe these products are the norm. In order to bridge the gap and provide everyone with sustainable, energy efficient and healthy homes we must continue to educate the market, up-skill and train our craftsmen," says Tom. Greater awareness is key, he believes. "The greatest challenge to sustainable and eco building is to create awareness of the many advantages that can be achieved. In order to offset this challenge we provide training courses at our training centre to educate the market. For example, our training course Fabric First is designed to assist architects, engineers, builders, merchants and homeowners in the advantages of using sustainable products."

In comparison to previous years, 2014 has been more positive, according to Tom and there is a general feeling that things are improving, particularly in this sector. "Sales of sustainable building and natural insulation products are up and we see this trend continuing for the future. "Customers are becoming increasingly aware of the need to build sustainable, energy efficient and healthy homes. "For 2015 we will introduce some new and exciting products including a new range of tapes especially designed for the Irish and UK markets which will be available in early January as part of the Pro Clima Airtight System.

The company recently received an award for their Wellhofer Airtight Attic Hatch at the Architecture Expo Exhibition and over the years their products have received

for more than 40 years. It manufactures products aimed at preventing heat loss from the home, through windows, doors and letter-boxes at its Coolock facility in Dublin.

The company has seen turnover increase by 9% over the same period in 2013. Gareth Dolan, director of Hycraft with responsibility for production and development has attributed the company's competitive prices, high quality and the recent upturn in construction to this growth.

"There has been more activity and we certainly welcome that," said Gareth.

15 to 20% of heat can be lost through windows, doors and letterboxes and Hycraft have developed simple solutions that can help save homeowners a lot of money. Some of the company's most popular heat-loss prevention products include: the Hycraft Brush Sweep, a strip of brush that can

the Grand Design Award and the Energy Globe Award from the EU.

Hycraft

Hycraft has been producing energy- and heat-saving devices, as part of their wide-range of products,

attach to the bottom of metal, wooden and PVC doors; the Hycraft P Seal (self adhesive) in white or brown, for old or new windows and doors; the Hycraft Letter Box for internal use. The company also manufactures snake-type draught excluders for internal door ends, as well as aluminium-faced, foam heat reflectors that drop down behind radiators.

"Our range represents more than 40 years of research and development and continued improvements, which always calls for new investments.

"We make energy-conscious products that are accessible to everyone in the home and easily purchased in DIY shops."

Irish Cement

Irish Cement has been a staple of the Irish construction industry for more than 75 years and as the leading Irish producer and supplier of cement products, the company says it has been 'fully committed to the sustainable development of its business activities'.



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Knauf's Earthwool

In this regard, Irish Cement has developed its Eco-Efficient cement brand, a high quality, general purpose, bagged cement suitable for all general concreting, block laying and plastering applications. But what makes this product unique is that it is made from local raw materials, it is a reduced carbon product, is sustainable and packed in non-bleached paper.

Eco-Efficient cement has grown to become the predominant

cement sold in Ireland since its introduction into the market in 2008. The product has been specifically designed to reduce the carbon intensity of cement production and to provide enhanced workability in block laying and plastering, the company says.

Knauf Insulation

Leading manufacturer of insulation in the UK, Knauf Insulation, says it takes its social and environmental responsibilities seriously.

The company says it recognises that true sustainability should permeate every part of the business, from the raw materials and manufacturing processes to the distribution and disposal of products and waste materials.

In August 2013, Knauf Insulation announced that it had achieved zero waste to landfill for all four of its manufacturing plants. A variety of practical applications and processes were put in place to achieve this. For example, at its glass mineral wool sites in St Helens (where the company's headquarters are also based) and Cwmbran, Knauf Insulation has introduced a number of measures to divert both production and office-generated waste. Baled glass wool waste is re-used by a ceiling tile manufacturer, while mixed glass wool and incidental packaging waste is collected by a recycling partner and re-processed for use as underground bedding.

When it comes to creating products, sustainability is also infused throughout entire product developments. Indeed, all of Knauf Insulation's glass mineral wool products are manufactured using the innovative ECOSE® Technology – a revolutionary, bio-based, formaldehyde free binder technology, that is based on rapidly renewable materials, rather than petro-based chemicals. Resulting in a softer, easier to cut and handle insulation products. What's more, Knauf Insulation was the world's first company to receive the coveted Eurofins Indoor Air Comfort Gold standard for its glass mineral wool products made with ECOSE Technology - a characteristic that not only benefits the end user but also the installers fitting the product.



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Paddy Kelly's term as HAI President ends shortly, after an eventful two years for the national economy, the hardware industry and HAI. Paddy spoke to *The Hardware Journal* about the challenges and highlights of his period in office.

A STRONGER HAI

-PRESIDENT LOOKS BACK ON 2014

Paddy Kelly, Managing Director of Tegral, became the 31st President of Hardware Association Ireland in January 2013. It was a pivotal time, just ahead of the first tentative signs of a recovery in the economy overall and a new phase in the development of HAI. Paddy notes: "As an industry, we have gone through very difficult times, but we now have genuine potential for a brighter future. The challenge is to realise that potential and HAI is taking a leadership role in this regard. There has never been a greater need for a strong trade association for our industry."

It's been a busy Presidential term for Paddy: "The period in office went very quickly and I got to see the hardware business from a lot of different perspectives. There was a substantial workload but it was productive, rewarding and a great experience. "We are emerging from a deep recession where merchants and manufacturers alike have suffered badly, and have coped with haemorrhaging losses by making cuts where they can, diversifying their activities and, in general, streamlining almost every aspect of their businesses. This was a widespread phenomenon, pretty much across the board, and, as HAI President, I became very aware of how much the diverse businesses that the Association represents have in common."

Changing business environment

Gradually, the business environment that builders merchants and suppliers are operating in is beginning to change: "Given that we are finally seeing some positive indications for the future, one of my priorities, with the support and guidance of HAI's 12-person Executive Committee, was to ensure, that as an organisation, we are effectively positioned to help the industry take advantage of current opportunities and those that will, we hope come our way in the next few years. "The HAI's Council and Executive Committee continually looks at all aspects of the Association's activities to ensure that it remains closely attuned to members' needs. As part of that ongoing process, a number of workshops have taken place and a three to four year plan is currently under development, building on the work of previous Presidents, including my immediate predecessor, Brendan Maher. Our focus is to revitalise the Association, promote HAI's brand more widely, strengthen communications with our members and, ultimately, enhance all aspects of our services to members." Paddy continued: "Great credit is due to Council and the Executive Committee for the initial implementation work that's been accomplished. The Committee line-up changes frequently to ensure



that it reflects the reality of the industry as accurately as possible. The team of personnel that I had the honour to work with are certainly among the best and the brightest in the industry. I have to compliment all the individuals on the Committee who generously give of their time and commitment for the sake of the industry overall."

Measures begin to take effect

Positive impacts are already evident: "A key initiative has been the setting up of a comprehensive membership survey, where we collate the views of members on a detailed list of issues vital to the future of the industry. While, as an Association, we are constantly listening to, and learning from, members, the introduction of a comprehensive annual survey, carried out on our behalf by the leading independent market research agency, Behaviour & Attitudes (B&A), enables us to develop evidence-based policies that reflect the most urgent concerns of our members. I want to thank all the members who took the time to participate in the survey as the data collected is vital to help us increase awareness and recognition of the issues facing our industry in discussions with Government and other key decision makers." Another milestone has been the launch of *The Hardware Journal* as

the official magazine of HAI: "The setting up of the magazine is part of a wider communications strategy whereby we aim to listen more closely to members, provide more recognition to members' achievements and enhance feedback between members and the Association to ensure policy reflects what they want."

Industry outlook

The B&A HAI Member Survey earlier this year indicated that the outlook is improving for hardware businesses overall but that hardware retailers outside of the major cities are not enjoying as strong a recovery. "All the indications are that Dublin and the greater Dublin area are continuing to recover significantly and the recovery is spreading more widely across Leinster and into Cork and parts of Kerry and Limerick in Munster. It looks as though growth in the areas outside the big cities will continue to move more slowly."

Speaking out for the sector

HAI has successfully lobbied government to introduce an initiative that has spurred some much needed additional business in the sector: "We strongly lobbied Government to introduce the Home Renovation Incentive Scheme in its 2014 budget. It was one of those rare proposals that was a win-win for everyone, the public, the Government and the industry and, in a sense, was a 'no-brainer'. So far, it has been a successful initiative; over 14,000 contracts in respect of 11,081 properties

to a value of €122 million have been entered (as at 28th October, 2014) with a year left. Again, take up of the scheme has been predominantly in the greater Dublin area. We are continuing to lobby Government to extend the scheme by another year, which would help add some momentum to the recovery and provide an opportunity to extend it into areas around the country that continue to struggle."

Government lobbying is, and will continue to be, a vital component of HAI's role, according to Paddy: "We are continuing to engage with Government to explore measures that will reduce unemployment and the costs of running a business, both factors that must be addressed if we are to see the recovery reach more widely across the country." He has seen a noticeable change in the Government's response to HAI submissions in recent years: "We have achieved a greater degree of credibility with Government and the Department of Finance specifically. A number of factors are responsible: the professionalism of the Association's submissions, the success of the Home Renovation Tax Incentive Scheme, the authoritative data that the HAI Membership Survey provides to back up our proposals and the strong, unified voice with which HAI speaks on behalf of everyone in the industry." Paddy has always been a committed HAI member and places a high value on membership: "Since I came into management in Tegral, the company has always been a consistent and sustained supporter of HAI and,

personally, I fundamentally believe it's essential that we all, merchants and manufacturers, speak with one voice if we're going to be heard and if we're going to be successful. The fact is, if we didn't have an Association, we would all be getting around a table to set one up. The good news is that we do have one and it's an Association that is vibrant, vital and improving its services all the time."

During the final year of Paddy's Presidency, he also oversaw the appointment of a new HAI Chief Executive. It is clear that Paddy places great importance on this appointment: "The appointment of Annemarie Harte as our new CEO comes at a critical juncture for the Association and reflects the Executive Committee's belief that HAI needs to clarify its role and mission and expand its range of services to make it more useful and relevant for its members. This is a challenging and important time for HAI and our new CEO will ultimately be judged on how successful she is in delivering these changes. She has the full support of the Executive Committee and I personally wish her well in her efforts."

A stronger, better HAI

Paddy is pleased with the effectiveness of the transition to Hugh O'Donnell's Presidency: "Hugh is a fantastic Vice President. He put in a huge effort in the role and, with him as President, members can be reassured that our revitalisation of HAI will continue to be wholeheartedly implemented. I'd like to think that I have contributed to putting in place a strong foundation for the future development of HAI and I have no doubt that Hugh will build on that foundation, driving the Association forward, making it even stronger and better."

Finally, how does Paddy see 2015 unfolding? "By nature, I'm a fairly positive person and for the next few years, I see the glass as half full rather than half empty, with 'Ireland plc' continuing to recover. We will still have problems with financing but the key will be creating jobs. The most important and urgent objective for the country is to get people back to employment. At HAI, we can't drive recovery, but we will work hard to influence government and decision makers to create the conditions that will deliver jobs and, ultimately, increase the number of people walking through the doors of merchants around the country."

HAI EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE 2013/2014

President:	Paddy Kelly (Managing Director, Tegral Ltd.)
Vice President:	Hugh O'Donnell (Chief Executive, Amalgamated Hardware Ltd.)
Honorary Treasurer:	Alex Taylor (Sales Director, Uppercross Enterprises)
Immediate Past President:	Brendan Maher (General Manager, McDonogh Trade Centre Ltd.)
Kieran Burke	(Purchasing Director, Grafton Merchanting ROI)
Charlie Hamilton	(Managing Director, Canada Distributors Ltd.)
Paddy Kingham	(Managing Director, Daly Brothers N/E Ltd.)
John Murphy	(Chief Executive, Allied Merchants Buying Association)
Kevin Myers	(Purchasing Officer, Dairygold Agribusiness)
Seamus O'Donoghue	(Sales Director, Dulux Paints Ire Ltd.)
John Phelan	(Proprietor, J Phelan & Co (Durrow) Ltd.)
Paul Thompson	(Chief Executive, Associated Hardware Ltd.)

A willingness to experiment and to take calculated risks on new ideas has helped the Graham Family and their forty-strong team, to emerge from the downturn with a leaner, more sustainable and efficient business.

A TOUCH OF SAVOIR FAIRE



The unexpected and tragic death of Maurice in June 2008 left a huge void not just for the family but also in the company and the direction it might take in what had become a very challenging time for the business. "The downturn was just beginning to bite and many people doubted whether we could carry on as before. As a family, Mum, Alastair and I knew we had to rise to the challenge, as Dad would have done."

A transformation

Initially, things got a lot worse, with the business losing half its turnover in 2009, and being forced to cut costs and make some redundancies. "By the end of 2009, we realised we were, in effect, starting a business all over again. We basically had a total reboot, rethinking every aspect of the entire business. And I believe Dad would have



The late Maurice Graham.

HOW IT ALL STARTED

The business was founded by Maurice & Joyce Graham in 1988. Heather recalls: "My father had been with David Patton Ltd since he left school but decided in 1988, with Mum's support, that it was time for a change. The day after he left, one of his former customers asked him if he could sell him a roof for a house. Dad explained he was no longer working with Pattons to which the customer responded, 'I know but could you get it for me anyway?' So my father had to find a roof quickly and it was actually Tegral who became the business's first supplier." As the saying goes "from little acorns mighty oak trees grow".

The business originally known as Maurice Graham & Son, worked out of existing farm buildings. The calf store stocked hardware products while the slatted units provided shelter for timber and building products. The first real purpose build store was erected in 1997. Maurice believed in the practicality of using pre-existing buildings and, he bought the steel structure of Irwin's Bakery in Portadown, which now supports the hardware section of the current business. Nestled between the Blackwater River and the Ulster Canal, it's a convenient location that has allowed plenty of scope for expansion and Maurice continually developed the site. The major development of the entire site started in 2006 and resulted in the modern facilities that the business now operates from. Unfortunately Maurice never got to enjoy the finished premises as he suddenly passed away while at work on the 12th of June 2008 just before his 66th birthday. "Everything that Maurice Graham Ltd has become was built on the foundation that my father and mother put in place over many years of hard work, commitment and passion for the building trade," Heather states. "Thankfully his love of the trade, he passed to us and we are proud to continue on his work."



The entrance to SAVOIR FAIRE.

been disappointed if we hadn't. He loved this business, the relationships with customers and suppliers, the haggling – all of it! I like to think he would have been proud of the transformation that the business has undergone."

Today, Maurice Graham Ltd is a multi-faceted store that offers customers an immersive shopping experience. Front of store, the customer encounters the innovative SAVOIR FAIRE Department. Above it, there's a friendly first floor coffee shop with large glass windows providing a great view and lots of natural light that adds to its relaxed atmosphere. Behind both of these strong consumer draws, is the expansive Home Improvement and DIY Department with an exhaustive product range. Finally, there's the backbone of the business, the Builders Merchants yard itself. They all combine to make Maurice Graham Ltd a destination-shopping venue for a whole family. This strategic development and reorganisation of the business has evolved steadily over the past six years. "We introduced the Homewares and Gift Department as a separate unit within the main store in 2008. We were determined to get the product mix and location right from

the very start to make sure that SAVOIR FAIRE had its own distinct identity and appeal. Initially I handled all the purchasing and we employed one new member of staff to assist with sales. The SAVOIR FAIRE department covered an area of 1,500 sq feet to start but today we have 5,000 sq. feet and three staff members "

Heather's advice to anyone who wants to diversify into this or similar product ranges is to:

- keep the diversified unit separate;
- give the new department a separate identity
- dedicate staff specifically for that purpose, and,
- avoid credit

"SAVOIR FAIRE definitely helped us through the difficult years and enabled us to attract new customers. While the new business could never replace the building business from the boom years, it enhanced our footfall, helped us to attract a new customer profile and gave us the confidence to re-build and develop other new ideas."

By chance customers starting suggesting we should have a coffee shop and again we decided to explore the possibility by trialing a pop-up version in the run up to Christmas 2011. Now three years on and the

coffee shop has added a great dimension to the business. In addition it has allowed us to provide eleven full time and part-time jobs.

Both SAVOIR FAIRE and the coffee shop are eye-catching and distinctive in every sense of the word. Heather sees them working hand in hand with the longer-established areas of the business in a way that's mutually beneficial. "Each department can attract a different customer profile but once inside the store, customers can discover other products and services in addition to what brought them through our doors in the first place. We aim to have something for everyone."

Wedding list sales have proved a strong performer for the store and are a good example of the destination venue strategy in action. The wide range of products and services available under one roof, from the gift shop to the building and home improvement departments, allows for an extensive list of gifts to be compiled.

Vouchers are available that facilitate purchases in all areas of the business and are carefully designed to be the same shape and size as currency notes. "This makes them more likely



to be kept in a wallet or handbag and therefore be used, rather than placed behind a clock on the mantelpiece and forgotten."

There's no doubt that Maurice Graham Ltd remains strongly committed to building and home improvement with 20,000 sq feet devoted to DIY while the Builders Merchants department incorporates a store of 55,000 sq. feet and a yard of 2 acres " Builders merchanting remains at the heart of what Maurice Graham Ltd is about and it's what helped drive our passion for the business in the first place and we are always looking at ways to develop it." according to Alastair.

Heather's husband Michael Fitzpatrick, joined the business in 2009 and played an important part in the reorganisation of the business. "Coming to work with us, Michael had an extra objectivity that allowed him to take a more clinical point of view of how the business was run. Having previously

worked in the public sector, he's of the view that family businesses have to be commended for the energy, passion and determination that are invested each day."

Changing consumer

Heather sees the post-recession customer as different. "These days customers' expectations are higher and they are much more concerned about value for money and pricing. The raft of new taxes means that most customers feel under financial pressure and inevitably that means they are cautious about how they spend their money."

The growth in online shopping and the nature of the online experience is also having a profound effect on consumer attitudes. In response to these changing attitudes we have recently introduced an online service at www.mgraham.ie which is continually developing. Initially it is targeted at the Savoir Faire consumer but we plan to include other departments over the next 2 years"



"In store, we put a strong emphasis on establishing a personal rapport with the customer. Many of the store's customers are looking for advice as much as for a specific product: "We have very experienced people in each area from paint to plumbing, giftware to gardening, slates to steel. Our team is happy to spend time with customers giving them advice on what suits their particular needs"

"We now have a team of forty staff and all have supported us through the changes over the past 6 years. Each individual has particular strengths and we look to build on those strengths while at the same time we encourage them to try out new skills. While many of our staff are expert in their own particular departments we also require them to be flexible. Christmas seems to bring out the creativity in many of our staff. Jev who works in our steel department has constructed many of the large displays for the Christmas Shop while William who manages our Plumbing Department gets involved in setting up the displays and can regularly be found at the top of a tree. Some of the best ideas come from that kind of interplay and interaction among the team. We are very proud of all our staff and they are a pleasure to work with."

Convenient location

The business is situated on the N2, Dublin/Derry road and therefore helps attract many customers from beyond Monaghan town and its catchment area, Heather notes: "Being located on the N2 and within eighty miles of Dublin and Belfast, both of which have a great road network, makes us very accessible. In addition, our customers have commented that our large free car park is a major attraction for them" Proximity to the border, though, requires careful financial management to cope with the fluctuations of sterling and euro currencies. "With VAT being 3% lower across the border, we have to watch our pricing carefully. In addition, we tend to do most of our buying in sterling and most of our selling in Euros so we have to track exchange rates to keep an eye on shifts



Imaginative displays are a signature feature of the store.

in value between the two currencies." However this is part of everyday life for all businesses along the border and unfortunately the constant abuse of VAT numbers make competition very difficult.

Communication is vital

In 2011, John Murphy, contacted Heather about getting involved in the setting up a new group, the

Allied Merchants Buying Association. "Becoming one of the founder members of AMBA was a big step but one that has made a real difference for Maurice Graham Ltd. We work with like-minded retailers, improving our purchasing power while retaining control of our supplier accounts and rebates. We now work as a group with 100 partnered suppliers and a turnover of €48million, a growth this

year of 22%. We are fortunate to have an excellent CEO, Keith Giblin who works very closely with each member and runs a very professional administrative structure. I believe that the success of AMBA is due to the transparency within the group. 2015 will bring further growth for the group with some exciting developments ahead" Heather's belief in the importance of networking with other merchants is also what drives her involvement with HAI: "As merchants, we can sometimes become a little bit cocooned. I would encourage merchants to use HAI to

communicate with each other more. It's a great way to keep up with new ideas and new opportunities and is a great resource for information and advice."

In conclusion, she says that constant change is an inescapable fact of business life. "There are so many significant changes happening in our sector right now, including diversification and the impact of online browsing and purchasing. As merchants we have to continually be aware of it and respond in a way that helps us to retain and grow our customer base and drive the profitability of our businesses."



SANTA DAY

Heather sees Maurice Graham Ltd as being very much a part of the local community. The annual Santa Day at the store is one of the best fun days of the year. Customers on that particular day join with us and our staff in making the day a real treat for the children, both young and old.

"We thought it would be nice to put on an event for regular customers, their families and their extended families in the run up to Christmas. Our Santa Day allows everyone – mum, dad, grandparents and children – to relax and have a good time. So each year, Santa comes to the store, meets all the local boys and girls and gives each child a gift. For that day, our focus is not on sales but on creating an enjoyable family day out. There's a great buzz of excitement on the day. Santa has a purpose-built log cabin and there's face painting and activities galore. "When families go into Santa's house, of course, Santa knows most of the Mums and Dads, so there's great fun and banter. And at the end of the day, Santa spends some time with our team and everyone joins in a singalong."

On the day the Journal visited, staff were busy constructing a six-foot tall book with leather cover. The hands-on construction of the giant book is an example of the creativity and pragmatism that the Maurice Graham Ltd team brings to their work. Michael and Heather had seen a giant prop book at a Christmas Fair in Frankfurt and thought they could go one better. "We thought what if the book opened up and inside it were shelves of toys and games?" Deciding to build the large book themselves, the 'What if' is now a reality and the larger-than-life book will be just one of many special surprises children will enjoy at Santa Day in Graham's.

This year's event takes place on Saturday, December 6th and proceeds from the day will go to a local charity, the Monaghan Cancer Support Group.

MAKING YOUR WEBSITE WORK

Did you know that 92% of Irish online retail transactions are purchased outside the country, with Irish businesses only taking about 8% of the total purchases? Did you also know that 50% of online traffic will leave a website within eight seconds, or that 70% of online searches are specific? These were just some of the revelations at a recent digital marketing event organised by Hardware Association Ireland (HAI) and facilitated by digital expert John Coburn from Praxis Now.

The event was organised in response to HAI members' desire to bridge a gap between having a website and equipping that website to cater for business-to-business (B2B) and business-to-customer (B2C) users. It was also acknowledged that the hardware sector is lacking digital media capabilities in some areas, with much room to improve.

The interactive session, held at the Red Cow Moran Hotel, was attended by hardware industry representatives (supplier companies) who are members of HAI and it was one of a series of events that the group attends throughout the year, dealing with non-competitive issues in the hardware sector.

John Coburn guided attendees through the extensive digital marketing platform addressing areas such as content, search engine optimisation, social media, blogging and more.

Jim Copeland, HAI's Head of Member Relations, said this 'excellent event' was very important for the sector.

"It is important for us all to understand the power of digital marketing and how it can be best used for our sector," he said.

He added that HAI help companies devise a digital marketing plan for the future tailored to their specific needs. One of the challenges identified was how to find a happy medium between developing a website that suits retail merchants and the individual retail consumer.

"No one size fits all, we are probably light years behind other sectors, but it is important for us to understand the difference between business-to-business websites and business-to-consumer websites and the need to straddle both, known as 'click and brick'."

"Our supplier members are not selling directly online, but they can build

websites to service their merchants, and the consumer too."

"So the person at home can do their research online, getting all the information they need from the supplier's website, while actually buying the product in-store."

"The challenge for our members is to make their websites amenable to businesses and consumers."

Whether B2B or B2C, or both, there are a number of common rules to follow to ensure your website works for you, and more importantly, your customers.

Content and responsibility



Responsivity ensures that your website is accessible on any device.

Ensuring your website is responsive will enhance your visibility on Google and makes your website accessible on any device.

Website content takes the form of stories, news, blogs, product description and images. But if your website is not responsive then any content, regardless of how good it is, will suffer. Responsivity ensures that your website is accessible on any device - that it adjusts and reformat itself to fit the device in question, whether that is a smart phone, notebook or tablet. If this does not happen, potential customers will turn off. Not only that, but if a website is unresponsive then Google will overlook it in the mobile search

results which means that anyone searching for your website from a mobile device will not see it.

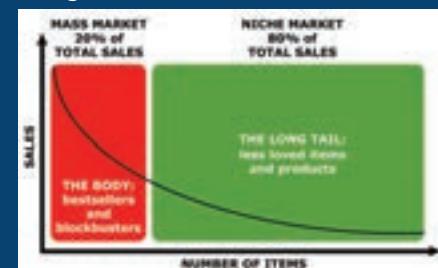
Conversion

Conversion refers to the process of turning a website visitor into a paying customer.

This will be different depending on the company, according to Mr Coburn: it could be an eCommerce sale when someone has bought something; it could be an order placed, perhaps from a retailer; or it may be targetting traffic that is not ready to buy and redirecting them to a retail channel digitally. The latter can be tracked and those redirects can be considered conversions, so you can measure the performance of your website that way, explains John Coburn. "Don't spend any money with any digital agency or anybody else until you know what you want your buyer to do and how to arrive at that conclusion – that is a conversion," he explains.

"And you ought to know what the type of buyer he/she is, how they can be targetted and filtered out from the excess who won't be buying from you."

Long-tail



Long-tail marketing reflects higher buying intent.

70% of all online searches satisfy what is known as long-tail criteria. This simply means, they are specific, detailed, one-off searches.

Long-tail marketing is advantageous because often, more specific phrases reflect higher buying intent. For example, someone searching for a drill is less likely to purchase than someone searching for a Black & Decker 500W Percussion Hammer Drill.

"A very good strategy to filter out those who can buy from you, from those who can't is to target the long-tail, to hoover up all of those big search queries whereby people have pre-qualified themselves as buyers of what you sell," explains John.

This is where website content comes to play, and blogging, in particular, is a useful and popular way of adding content to your site and attracting people who want to buy from you. Alternatively it can help customers find out all the information about the product from your site, before they purchase in-store (the click-and-brick effect).

"This is content on your website that can help you to hoover up the long-tail and the more content you have, the more long-tail you have," explains John.

Social media

Social media can be a useful tool to engage with your customers, but beware.

"Social media can be extremely effective but can often be a complete sink for resources with no clear return on it," John warns.

"It can generate a huge amount of traffic to your website, but it is very

unusual for a lot of social media traffic to come to your website to convert," he says.

If you decide to go down the social media route, his advice is to do it right. "The way to use social media is to engage interactively, to talk to them and learn from your audience. If you know why you are doing it, then you can structure editorial control around that engagement, if you don't know why you are doing it, then you are asking for trouble."

Reputation management

When companies embrace social media, they are opening themselves up to public comment – good and bad. "Negative feedback has caused the emergence of what is known as reputation management," says John. "If something negative is being said about you on any of the social channels, then the first thing is that you need to know about it very quickly. You need to respond very quickly, in a short and assertive way and take it offline, meaning that you invite the person to engage with you directly by email or by phone.

"Never ever engage in further discussion on a negative comment on that social network."

If there is a positive outcome, then John advises that you should ask that person to clarify online that the issue has been addressed.

HAI is always looking for members to get involved in these events.

If you are interested in finding out more information, you can contact Jim Copeland on jim@hardwareassociation.ie

Thumbs up for digital day

There was an overwhelmingly positive reaction to the digital marketing conference. Here's a sample of some of the responses.

"We found attending the recent HAI conference on digital marketing a great benefit that allows our business to plan appropriately for the inevitable developments in our market."

**Cillian Molloy,
John Murphy
Castlerea.**

"Thanks to the Hardware Association for organising the recent Digital Marketing Presentation. It's great to meet up with colleagues and share valuable insights.

It's clear from our experience that digital marketing is an important enabler to allow us strengthen our brands, develop our products and drive more footfall and sales to our customers stores."

**Tom Cleary,
Chief Executive Officer
B & G Ltd.**



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DELIVERING SAFELY

Deliveries and collections are an essential part of the hardware business, but can be some of the most dangerous activities you and your staff have to deal with. Here we outline the legal responsibilities and the sort of practical steps you can take to minimise the inherent dangers of deliveries and collections as recommended by the Health and Safety Authority.

Road traffic legislation requires that vehicles are maintained in a roadworthy condition and are safe when in use on the public road. Whether you own, lease, hire or borrow a vehicle for work purposes, you must make sure that it is fit for purpose and safe for use on public roads.

Employers have duties under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of their employees and others who may be affected by their work activities (such as drivers, loaders/unloaders, warehouse operatives and members of the public).

Under the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work [General Applications] Regulations 2007, where two or more employers share a workplace, even on a temporary basis, they must cooperate with each other to make sure they both comply with their legal duties. Note: Vehicles are defined as a Place of Work under the Act. For more details on the legal framework visit: www.hsa.ie/eng/Publications_and_Forms/.../delivering-safely.pdf

Who is responsible?

Individuals are often unfairly blamed for workplace incidents that could have been prevented if the persons in control of the the Place of Work (PCW) had consulted, cooperated and coordinated with one another. PCWs commonly involved in the delivery of goods or materials are:

- supplier or consignor – the person sending the goods;

- transport operator – the person (company or owner-driver) carrying the goods; and,
- recipient or consignee – the person receiving the goods.

Joint Responsibility

A common factor in delivery/collection incidents is the absence of an agreement between supplier, transport operator and recipient about who is responsible for what in terms of safety.

In most work situations, the safety of a worker is primarily the responsibility of the PCW that they work for. The safety of everyone at these places of work, including people visiting the site, is the responsibility of the PCW. All PCWs must consider the risks related to the delivery and collection of materials and goods and eliminate them or, if this is not reasonably practicable, minimise them so far as is reasonably practicable to prevent harm to workers, and others affected by the work activities.

Duty holders must assess delivery and collection risks and reduce them as far as reasonably practicable.

Arrangements for preventing vehicle incidents during deliveries and collections should be reviewed in consultation with safety representatives, drivers and employees as appropriate.

Safe System of Work

In order to ensure deliveries and collections are carried out safely there must be effective co-operation

between the main duty holders. Risks must be assessed and safe systems of work planned implemented and supervised. Key measures include:

- ensuring vehicles and equipment are safe, suitable for job and in good repair;
- ensuring staff are competent and drivers are trained;
- providing personal protective equipment (PPE) appropriate to the work activities and training in the safe use of same;
- avoiding/managing work at height activities; and,
- avoiding/managing people accessing vehicle and load platform.

Safe Delivery Plan

The general principles that suppliers, transport operators and recipients should follow include:

- sending out safety information on deliveries and collections to other parties in the delivery chain;
- requesting safety information on deliveries and collections from other parties in the delivery chain; and,
- including information on how the vehicle was loaded if this is needed for safe unloading.

The above is just a brief introduction to the topic, you can find essential additional detailed information on controlling workplace vehicle risks and on managing workplace transport safety at:

http://www.hsa.ie/eng/Vehicles_at_Work/Workplace_Transport_Safety/Managing_Workplace_Transport/

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If you are a builders merchant but are not already part of this EVO-STIK marketing drive, but would like to be, then talk directly to your EVO-STIK sales representative to find out how to get on-board.

Alternatively, contact **Peter Morrissey** on Tel: (086) 6476 123 or email: peter.morrissey@bostik.com.

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The adhesives and sealants market has been experiencing a modest upturn in 2014, in line with the broader boost in the construction industry, and the gentle surge in retail activity.

STICKING IT TO THE RECESSION

In early November, the EU Commission said that Ireland is set to become the fastest growing country in the European Union, as the economy is expected to grow by 4.6% this year. Growth projections for next year have also been upgraded.

While Ireland's strong exports market is fuelling this growth, the news is good for the country as a whole and consumer confidence is growing, as the adhesive and sealant sector is finding out.

New building regulations, an increasing demand for efficient and better-built homes, and a demand for housing across Ireland, and Dublin in particular, are contributing to this growth.

This month *The Hardware Journal* speaks to some of Ireland's best known companies about what adhesive and sealant products are in high demand, what new product developments there have been, and what kind of year they have had in 2014.

Contech Building Products, based in Co. Kildare, specialises in supplying high quality construction products for professionals and DIY enthusiasts. One of the company's most popular products is Tec7, a hybrid polymer with unique bonding abilities. Tec7 seals, mounts and bonds all common building materials, eliminating the need to carry an assortment of adhesives and sealers to each job. But there has been a noted increase in

demand for a number of other products also, according to Andrew D'Arcy, of Contech Building Products.

"We have seen significant growth in other products such as Roof7 over the last 12 months. Other significant growth is in our Pur7 Expanding foam range, because of their B1 and B2 fire ratings. These products are proving very popular with trade users," he says. "This year has been a good year, with signs of slight growth in sales forecasted for the first time in a number of years. There is a definite change in the mindset of our customers with very positive attitudes from merchants looking to the future and discussing revamps of their stores, something that has not happened for a while," says Andrew.

The company has a new products on the horizon but Andrew isn't giving anything away just yet.

"As always we endeavor to introduce new products to our range and 2015 will be no different so watch this space!"

As sales are increasing Contech is conscious that now is an appropriate time to advertise their products.

"We are in the process of revamping our TV advert and are not just focusing on our Tec7 product as in the past, but also on our unique Multi-Clean7 all-purpose foam spray cleaner product which has proven very popular and available nationwide.

Larsen Building Products has a range of adhesive products that are currently proving to be very popular.

"The company has a comprehensive product range from floor levellers, tile adhesives and grouts to wood treatments, concrete sealers and sealants available in Irish hardware stores. Our wood preservatives and tile adhesives are very strong performers also," says Jason Pierce, area sales manager for Larsen.

Recently, Larsen repackaged its Water Resistant Wood Glue, a product which is ideal for DIY and joinery works as it is a ready-to-use, general purpose adhesive for wood which gains strength quickly.

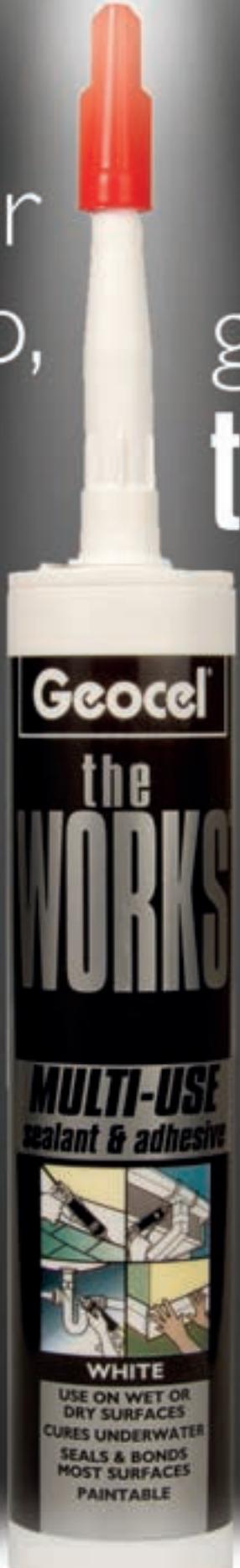
F1X Ultra Grab and Crystal Clear are new advanced heavy-duty adhesives and sealants. These are high quality formulations based on MS-polymers with high initial grab and adhesive strength, to provide a single-part, long-lasting and elastic product.

F1X ensures excellent grip, bonding and sealing for virtually every material involved in the construction industry, and beyond. This high performance sealant and adhesive can be used on both dry and wet surfaces, including under water. It cures odourless through atmospheric moisture to form a durable flexible, solvent-free seal.

Watch out for Larsen's point-of-sales display stands available for F1X sealants. The company has seen a gradual improvement in 2014. "There has been a gradual improvement in trading for our customers in Ireland with hardware stores focussed on securing proven performance at a good price," says Sean Moohan, the company's



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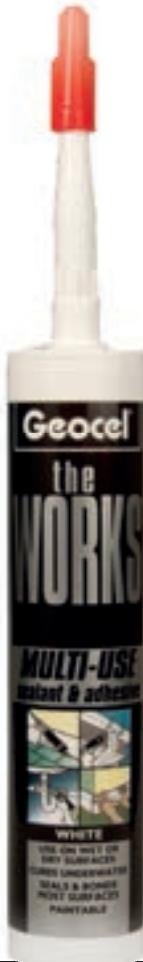
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Geocel

commercial director. He explains that the company has made efforts to position itself to meet expected increased demand.

"Larsen's investment in a high technology powder manufacturing plant, capable of producing 2,000 25kg bags per hour means we are well positioned to meet increased demand.

"Larsen has continued to recruit additional staff in recent years despite the lower activity within the local construction sector and coupled with



increased sales in England and Wales, this has meant our local supply chain has benefitted especially now from the improved trading volumes," he says.

Geocel Limited is one of the leaders in the development, formulation, manufacture and marketing of quality sealants and adhesives. One of the company's top sealant products is theWORKS, which claims superiority over traditional solvents

and water-based adhesives. The product can be applied in wet or dry conditions on virtually any substrate and a secure fix and seal are quickly achieved. It can be used on most surfaces and substrates where a seal or bond is needed including, wood, metal, glass, stone, plastics, polystyrene, concrete, tiles mirrors, plasterboard and more.

theWORKS has many benefits: no shrinkage; no staining; applicable in wet and dry weather; and can be used in any weather conditions. The product is also environmentally friendly, non hazardous, non flammable and odourless.

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Innovation and investment are essential for any business to prosper and gain market share, particularly in leaner economies and highly competitive markets. The fasteners, fixings and ironmongery sectors are no different and, in Ireland, have been working extremely hard to ensure their future is a secure one.

FASTENING A BRIGHT FUTURE

Research and development (R&D), investment in technology and a new focus on digital marketing are all features of the fasteners, fixings and ironmongery sectors now. They are experiencing an improvement in overall activity as the construction industry starts to respond to a need for more housing in Dublin and in areas around the country.

Currently experiencing 'very welcome growth' managing director of **Tucks Fasteners & Fixings**, Gary Hogan, says the company is ensuring that it is



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well placed to meet the demands of its customers. It has made significant investments in its warehouse, IT systems, catalogues, personnel and working capital in order to take full advantage of the growth in the market. It also has a new advertising campaign aptly entitled 'You'd be nuts to go anywhere else'. Not only that but the company's product

range has expanded rapidly over the last number of years with a fantastic range of fasteners and fixings, power tools and power tool accessories and associated products.

"We have always been renowned for our extensive range of fasteners and fixings but we also have an extensive range of ancillary products that are not automatically associated with those," says Gary.

"We have added Dewalt, Black & Decker and Stanley Bostitch in the last couple of years but in 2014 we were delighted to add many new ranges also. The **TRUFIX** range of masonry nail products have been extremely well received within the industry and exceeded our expectations," he says.

"We have now also launched the fantastic range of Posamo chains and ropes and a new range of BE petrol pressure washers with a Power Ease Engine, as well as a Honda powered option. Both of these pressure washers are supplied with an Anovi Reverberi pump and a 30m hose to draw water from a barrel or a water butt."



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Hardware Ironmongery

Cillian Molloy, managing director of **John Murphy (Castlerea) Ltd** spoke to *The Hardware Journal* about some of the things the company is doing to capitalise on the growth that the market has experienced this year. "There is a noted improvement in overall activity in the market with a particular emphasis on construction and house-building related



Round Head Metal Insulation fixing

products," says

Cillian.

"While there is still intense competition in the sector our company is well placed to prosper because it has invested in good stock holdings and is constantly focused on improving service levels to its customers."

In this regard, the company is planning some significant investment.

"Further investments in the next 12 months include the installation of a new IT system, scanning in the warehouse and a focus on digital marketing through a revamped website," explains Cillian.

"This comes on top of the recent move to Android tablet technology for our sales representatives which has resulted in time-saving in sales processing and an improved ability to promote the features and benefits of product ranges to customers."

While there has been little product innovation in the area of fasteners, according to Cillian, he believes the real win will come for companies that can continue to innovate on their service offering.

John Murphy (Castlerea) Ltd, is a leading distributor and stockist of fixing and fastener products for metric, imperial, UNF, UNC and stainless steel products. The company was founded in 1991 as a wholesale supplier of Allgrip fixings and fasteners but has expanded its catalogue over the years and now supplies a large range of general hardware products. The company continues to invest in its own brand and has stocked a number of related product lines including wire netting, polypropylene rope and agricultural tools all under the Allgrip logo. However, fixings and fasteners very much remain the core of the business.

One of the UK and Ireland's largest independent supplier of screws and fixings, **TIMco**, has experienced



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WALL & CEILINGS

ROOFING & GUTTERING

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C2 Screw Box

'impressive growth' in 2014, having increased market share throughout Ireland, according to the company. It has also launched the C2 Twin Cut Screw and TIMco's team has been out and about, demonstrating how its new design advantages can reduce torque, which not only benefits battery life of the power tool, but also extends the actual life of your power tool.

Commenting on the success of the C2 Twin Cut Screw TIMco Ireland's business manager John Mackin said: "I have seen many product launches over the years but what has surprised us about this launch is how quick we have seen repeat orders for the C2 Twin Cut Screw. This product has been designed from the ground up to meet the demands of the modern tradesmen using battery-operated power tools."

As a result of its successes TIMco has been able to invest back into Ireland by offering expanded employment opportunities. TIMco Ireland also recently launched a new website (www.TIMco.ie) and has published all CE approvals, not only for the C2 but for the entire range of products that are packaged with the CE logo. TIMco says it will be unveiling exciting developments in the product range at The Hardware Show in Dublin in February 2015.

Basta have been manufacturing high quality locks, hinges and handles for timber, PVCu, steel and aluminium doors and windows for almost 60 years in Ireland.

The company has experienced a positive 2014 and believes that the market is showing definitive signs of recovery. In 2015, Basta will celebrate its 60th birthday and will also launch a number of new products.

"In recent years, like many businesses, we experienced the economic downturn and it was a challenging period for us, many ideas and developments were put on the backburner waiting for the right time," the company explained.

But it believes that now is the right time to plough ahead with these new developments including new display and packaging options for all of the company's lever products. Popularity continues to grow for the lever on rose handles, particularly Roxton and Ashford, the company says.

Roxton is Basta's ultra chic, modern lever on rose handle, finished in brushed satin nickel. This product is so popular that the company is adding a brass finish in 2015.

The Ashford lever on rose handle is a statement piece in the Basta range and the company has recently included a matt nickel finish that

is being very well received, it



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Rawlplug, one of the world's leading manufacturers of specialist anchoring and fixing systems, has reported a more positive 2014 with growth throughout the country.

Recently the company has been granted ETA accreditation for its SafetyPlus and Rawlbolt anchors.

SafetyPlus is a torque-controlled high performance expansion anchor made of zinc electroplated steel, suitable for use in non-cracked concrete in the most demanding safety-critical applications.

The Rawlbolt is an all-purpose expanding shield anchor for approved use in cracked and non-cracked concrete, as well as use in brickwork and stone. Made of zinc, electroplated steel, the anchor is inserted into a drill hole and anchored by torque-controlled expansion. R&D has been to the fore in recent years, according to Paul McCormack, commercial director.

"At Rawlplug we have always upheld a policy to maintain the highest quality for our safety critical products, as demonstrated when we became the first UK manufacturer to be granted an ETA. Our European approvals are the result of extensive investment in R&D and they reflect our focused efforts and vision of becoming a global company of choice."

THE RIGHT FIT – FINDING JOB-READY RECRUITS

THE DEPT OF SOCIAL PROTECTION OFFERS A SUITE OF SERVICES THAT COULD HELP HARDWARE INDUSTRY EMPLOYERS FIND THE RIGHT RECRUITS



For the Department of Social Protection the focus is not just on job creation but on making sure that those currently on the Live Register are in a position to take up newly created jobs and to fill existing vacancies.

In line with that focus on helping the unemployed back to work the Department of Social Protection offers a suite of services to help businesses expand and employers to find the right recruits. These include:

1. Job advertising and job matching services;
2. An internship scheme - JobBridge;

3. Financial supports for recruiting long-term unemployed people – JobsPlus; and,
4. Workplace Supports for Employees with Disabilities.

Job advertising and job matching service

The Department of Social Protection's recruitment service can provide job-ready candidates to help employers fill vacancies and give instant access to the Department's national database of skilled and job-ready candidates. These services are

provided at no cost to employers. Employers advertised over 106,000 job opportunities nationally during 2013 on the www.jobsireland.ie website and have advertised 50,000 so far in 2014. Company vacancies can also be advertised on the Jobseeker App and through the Department's nationwide network of Intreo Centres. The Department of Social Protection also offers tailored services to companies that are seeking employees with specialist skills or experience or with large-scale recruitment campaigns. This can include assistance advertising across Europe through the EURES service.

For more information or assistance with filling vacancies in your company, call the Jobs Ireland National Contact Centre Freephone 1800 611 116, your local Intreo Centre, or go to www.welfare.ie.

JobBridge

JobBridge can help companies to access potential future employees, tap into fresh new talent, fresh ideas, and fresh new thinking, as well as accessing newly trained and skilled workers. The scheme also helps jobseekers gain work experience and acquire new skills through internship opportunities. Independent evaluation of the scheme shows that three in five participants in JobBridge secure employment within five months of completing their internships. This is one of the best progression rates for such a scheme anywhere in the EU. JobBridge provides internship opportunities of either six or nine months duration and interns receive an allowance of €50 on top of their existing social welfare payment for the duration of the internship. The extra €50 payment is paid by the Department of Social Protection. Over 32,700 interns have been placed on the JobBridge scheme with over 12,000 employers. Further information about JobBridge is available at 046 9738080, Freephone 1800 303 515, at your local Intreo Centre or go to www.jobbridge.ie.

JobsPlus

JobsPlus is an employer incentive which encourages and rewards employers where they employ people who have been on the Live Register for more than 12 months. Under the scheme, cash payments are made to employers each month. JobsPlus provides 2 levels of payment:

- €7,500 is paid to employers for each person recruited who has been unemployed for more than



- 12 months; and
- €10,000 is paid to employers for each person recruited who has been unemployed for more than 24 months.

The main eligibility criteria for JobsPlus are:

- Jobs must be 'full-time' employments of over 30 hours per week, spanning at least four days per week;
- Employers must be compliant with Irish tax and employment laws;
- Eligible jobs must not displace any other employee
- Recruits must have been unemployed for a period of at least 12 continuous months.

There is no limit on the number of eligible recruits per employer and the incentive is available to employers filling new vacancies as consequence of natural turnover. Since its launch in July 2013, JobsPlus is supporting some 2,385 jobseekers in full-time employment with 1,811 employers nationally. Detailed information and guidelines and Frequently Asked Questions are available at www.jobsplus.ie or email jobsplusinfo@welfare.ie.

Workplace Supports

The Department recognises that those with disabilities have more barriers to returning to employment. For this reason there are a range of supports available that are designed specifically to support the employment of people with disabilities. One of the key supports offered to employers is the Wage Subsidy Scheme which provides financial incentives to employers to employ people with disabilities who work between 21 and 39 hours per week.

Under the Wage Subsidy Scheme there is a general subsidy of €5.30 per hour giving a maximum subsidy, per employee, of €10,748 per annum based on a 39-hour week. Beyond the wage subsidy scheme there are a range of other supports available for employers under the Reasonable Accommodation fund which aims to cover the cost of employers adapting their workplaces to facilitate a disabled member of staff. Further information about the workplace supports available can be found on www.welfare.ie and at your local Intreo Centre. or go to www.jobbridge.ie.

ANOTHER SIDE OF Paddy McGuinness

Paddy McGuinness is best known as an astute businessman, hard worker, and lover of the great outdoors. But with a little more time on his hands these days, Paddy is using them to create something very special indeed, writes Bernie Commins.



Samples of Paddy's beautifully hand crafted blackthorn walking sticks.

"For my sticks, nature has provided the handle," says Paddy, referring to his beautiful, one-piece, handmade walking sticks.

As co-founder of Albany, home décor specialists, Paddy may be better known for his business, paint and décor expertise. But now, semi-retired, he has turned his hand to crafting unique and beautiful walking sticks.

Paddy and his wife Maureen live in Castlebar, Co. Mayo, and three of their grown-up children, Sean, Niamh and Aisling, all run the family Albany shop in Castlebar. While Paddy is still involved in the business, the past three years have seen him delve deeper into a hobby, creating bespoke Derryhick Sticks, named after the townland where the sticks are made, and more importantly where they have grown.

Originally from Co. Monaghan, Paddy is a descendant of four generations of

gamekeepers. Using a stick (or beating stick in the hunting world) is something he has done from a young age.

"Traditionally you associate walking sticks with old age, but for us, the stick was an accessory, especially when we were going outdoors," he explains. As the years went on, Paddy would have always taken a stick with him while out walking, even while out with Rocky his dog.

Now aged 70, Paddy has a healthy work-life balance and his stick-making fills in any empty time that he has. He enjoys the whole process from start to finish. "It is almost like fishing," he explains. "You cut the sticks from November to February when the sap is down. You develop an eye for them, so you would just be out in the fields looking out for a suitable one," he says. The most commonly used wood for these walking sticks are blackthorn, hazel or holly. The sticks are hand-selected by Paddy who then works with nature's gift to create a functional stick, while maintaining the integrity of the piece.

"These are one-piece sticks, there is nothing added. Most are made from hazel as it grows very straight but mine are where nature has provided the handle," he explains, referring to the knob-like handle that is so characteristic of these sticks.

"These are not billiard cues," he adds.



Paddy pictured at work, shaving one of his sticks with his loyal friend Rocky by his side.

Making one walking stick takes approximately a day-and-a-half according to Paddy, incorporating selection, seasoning, shaving and straightening, shaping the handle, oiling or varnishing. All these processes take place in Paddy's workshop at his renovated country cottage near Pontoon.

Derryhick Sticks are very popular with a growing American market, but Irish and other Europeans find them very appealing also. Taoiseach Enda Kenny has his very own Derryhick Stick.

"I climbed Kilimanjaro in 2003 with Enda Kenny. We shared a tent on the way up," says Paddy.

"I gave him one of my walking sticks, and I was happy to do so," he laughs. For more information about Paddy's walking sticks see

www.derryhicksticks.com



Paddy pictured with An Taoiseach Enda Kenny.

GOLF SOCIETY NEWS

Society President Jim Cuddy and Captains Jim Copeland and Barbara O`Connell wish all members and friends a very happy Christmas and peaceful new year.

This has been another excellent year for the Hardware Association Ireland Golf Society. Outings took place at Athy Golf Club on 25th April for HAI President Paddy Kelly's Prize (sponsors - Crown Paints). Next up was the Denis Burke Memorial Cup played at Ballykisteen Golf Course on Friday 30th May, (sponsors - Bostik).

Captains Jim Copeland and Barbara O'Connell had their Captain's Prize at Lucan Golf Club on Friday 27th June, (sponsors - Irish Abrasives), and finally President Jim Cuddy had his Golf Society President's Prize on Friday 29th August at Carton House Golf Club, (sponsors - Tucks O'Brien).

The Golf Society would like to thank all our kind sponsors for their ongoing support and indeed for sponsoring the very successful overseas tour to Spain in October. Overseas trip organiser and incoming HAI Golf Society President, Frank McKeon, said that the trip was again a great success and sentiment from those attending was that it should be an annual event.

Frank would also like to thank all of those who helped in the organising and running of the overseas tour, which helped to make the event the success it was, and indeed a thank you to Frank and Paul Curran at Killester Travel for all their hard work in organising same. Both Ladies and Gents societies would welcome new members, so please don't be shy and join your friends and colleagues for the events in 2015 listed here. Dates for next year's outings begin with incoming HAI President Hugh O'Donnell's Prize at Carlow Golf Club on Friday 24th April 2015. All are welcome and you can contact Honorary Secretary Willie Dillon on 01 298 7159/086 070 8761 regarding membership.

2015 OUTINGS

HAI President Hugh O'Donnell's Prize

Venue: **Carlow Golf Club. <http://www.carlowgolfclub.ie/>**
 Date: **Friday 24th April**
 Sponsor: **CROWN PAINTS**

Denis Burke Memorial Cup

Venue: **Druids Glen Golf Club, Wicklow. <http://www.druidsglenresort.com/>**
 Date: **Friday, 29th May**
 Sponsor: **BOSTIK / EVODE**

Captain Martin Rowe's Prize

Venue: **Castlecomer Golf Club, Kilkenny . <http://www.castlecomergolf.ie/>**
 Date: **Friday 26th June**
 Sponsor: **IRISH ABRASIVES**

HAI Golf Society President Frank McKeon's Prize

Venue: **Venue to be confirmed**
 Date: **Friday 28th August**
 Sponsor: **TUCKS O'BRIEN**



Golfers at the presentation night on the annual society trip away in October.



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