



DIGITAL TRANSFORMATION

In his 25 years in wholesaling, Lincs Electrical Wholesalers' MD Andy Johnson says now is the most exciting time to be working in the sector for both suppliers and contractors

Electrical wholesalers have a wealth of knowledge and skills that can help contractors select the right products with confidence, across multi-channel platforms, explains Andy Johnson, managing director of LEW Electrical Distributors

The electrical industry is an extremely fragmented one and getting our message to a broad range of customers has been poor historically. But by integrating a digital strategy for sales and marketing into our business we have a great opportunity to reach them more effectively.

The retail sector has been revolutionised by the Internet and is constantly having to adapt to survive. Those that have embraced multi-channel marketing and sales – using big data to tailor their offering – are the successful ones. A 'clicks and mortar' approach is the direction that many business's have adopted so that customers can access products and services online, by tablet and mobile devices or face to face.

Electrical wholesalers are still largely failing to communicate a tailored offering. The data is

there, I'm convinced, but like many others, we are not using it to best effect. We must follow the retail trends to maximise the opportunities.

In my 25 years in wholesaling, now is the most exciting time to be working in the sector. The digital transformation is helping to make it so and electrical wholesalers will need to operate in this arena to stay commercially viable.

Our vision for the next five years, is to continue opening new branches and integrating a digital strategy into our business. Creating a central distribution warehouse to offer extended ordering hours to 9pm with goods ready for collection or delivery at their local branch by 7am the next day.

So how can electrical wholesalers interact better with electrical contractors? First, they have to feel confident we understand their needs, that we add value to the supply chain and that our interactions are meaningful and consistent.

As I stressed earlier, our communication is generally poor. Wholesalers must embrace the technology at our disposal to tailor our

communications to customers. Opportunities arise every day to engage with them face to face on our trade counters to give them the confidence that we are the experts in our field but we can only do this through a sustained programme of learning and development.

Our trade association, the Electrical Distributors' Association (EDA) can play a pivotal role in supporting learning and development through apprenticeship schemes for new recruits and existing staff, while industry-backed product modules are available to improve knowledge on topics we all deal with daily.

Every electrical wholesaler wants to be the go-to guys for our customers but we have to earn this accolade and it does not come easy.

Upskilling our workforce consistently is critical to enable them to handle what is becoming a complex portfolio of products, due to the advent of the Internet of Things.

Providing solutions to problems is increasingly within our sphere of expertise. In today's market, even a product as simple as domestic smoke detectors hold many options and connectivity to become a smart device.

The key is to demonstrate to contractors that we can help unearth the right solution for any given application.

What services can an electrical wholesaler offer contractors that they do not currently know about or utilise enough?

We have to look at the changes that have begun to revolutionise the retail sector and consumer expectations and consider what



ABOUT

Established in 1993, LEW Electrical Distributors run 11 branches across Lincolnshire, Yorkshire, Nottinghamshire and the North West.

They joined the AWEBB buying group in 2000 and have won its Member of the Year nine times, seven of those consecutively in the last seven years.

Membership of AWEBB has brought significant commercial benefits to LEW and gives them the ability to compete with the Nationals and has been integral to their expansion and success.

relationships with customers.

Also, we keep an eye on the future, which means watching our retail counterparts, immediate competitors and new market disrupters, spending time networking, gathering market intelligence from the EDA and listening to our customer base. Armed with such information, we can try and stay in touch, if not ahead, of the game and ensure our commercial offer is relevant for the current market.

Choice of supply chain partners is important and we choose ours carefully and we accept we cannot be all things to all people. The vast majority of our supply chain partners are affiliate members of the EDA and are among the best-known brands within the electrical supply industry.

Given the speed of change in product development and product lifecycle, it is vitally



challenges lie ahead in the market.

LEW has spent the last two years developing a multi-channel approach for customer ordering 24 hours a day. Our vision is to provide trade account customers with a seamless experience whether they are visiting our trade counters, ordering by phone or browsing and shopping online from a desktop or mobile device. Our LEW app is already available and used increasingly by growing numbers of customers.

So what's our strategy for firming relationships with electrical contractors and how can the supply chain be strengthened and streamlined?

Our approach is simple. We want to offer customers the best possible service, product choices, quality and value and to deliver these with individual pride and company spirit.

That's easier enough to state of course. Strengthening customer links has to start internally. Everyone at LEW has to believe and support the company ethos. If we deliver on our promise, we can start to develop long-term

important to choose a partner that has the ability to invest in R&D, can predict the market to some degree and bring relevant products on stream on time. Product training is crucial to maintaining relationships that customers have with brands and for them to make informed choices on selecting the right products.

Our industry is inundated with product that in many cases is unfit for purpose. I believe it is the task of every electrical wholesaler to take responsibility to eradicate non-compliant products from our supply chain – the EDA is working with associated industry bodies to reduce the impact this huge problem is posing to our sector.

THREE KEY MESSAGES FOR ELECTRICAL CONTRACTORS

1. Important to find a supplier that embraces new technology that can support your business to become more efficient, more productive and ultimately more profitable
2. There is a huge range of product in the marketplace and a considerable amount is non-compliant. Choose carefully, use a trusted brand for peace of mind.
3. LEW has pledged to support and raise money for the Electrical Industries Charity (EIC) during 2018. We will be holding events at our branches and taking part in various fundraising activities during the year. You can find out more about LEW at lewelectrical.co.uk

