

# "We're seeing the strongest demand ever"

There's money to be made in cleaning wipes – but many hardware independents are missing the opportunity, say suppliers

**C**leaning wipes are still a relatively young market. Sycamore launched its Big Wipes in builders merchants and DIY stores in 2000, Everbuild unveiled Wonder Wipes in 2004, and since then many other suppliers have joined in. The proposition is a simple one: a cleaning wipe that removes everything – even hard-to-shift things like silicone, bitumen and polyurethane adhesives.

The sales pattern has been one of steady year-on-year growth, says Nigel Dibbo of Sycamore. "Once the consumers tries the product we very seldom lose them, and they become Big Wipes ambassadors, recommending the product to others," he says. Everbuild reports that it took a lot of advertising and encouraging DIY stores and merchants to put the product on display, and sales were slow for the first year. "But Wonder Wipes is now a £2m brand and is growing at over 20% a year," says Everbuild's David Seymour. "And we saw particularly high growth last year."

Guy Malam of Tembe, maker of Trade Wipes, agrees: "The rate of sales increase has made this one of the biggest growing categories of the last decade – and there still seems to be double-digit growth," he says.

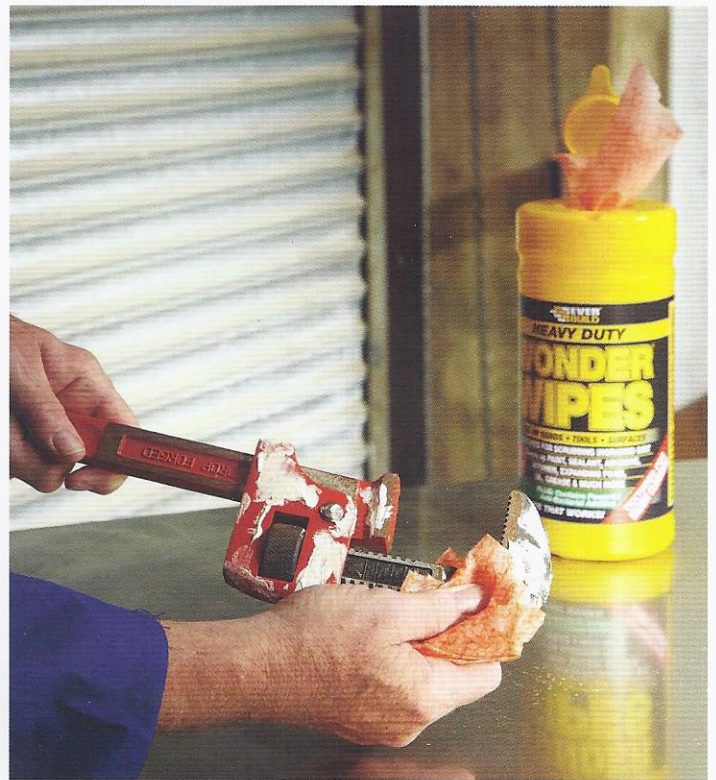
And the market has by no means exhausted its potential. "We are seeing the strongest demand ever as if suddenly the consumer has grasped the real benefits of the product," says Nigel Dibbo. "Demand from all sectors has increased dramatically,



and in terms of opportunity it still remains massive."

But he sounds a warning note too: "The multiples have been much more open to the concept and embraced it with much more enthusiasm," he says. "Builders merchants have been the biggest winners – they have used their 'counter selling' approach to sell wipes as the perfect add-on to every sale." Hardware independents could also do this, he claims: "Consumers buying paint, silicone and especially expanding foam are far more likely to get themselves in a mess than a professional. The retailer simply needs to ask the question 'have you used silicone before? Because if you're not confident, I suggest you also buy a tub of wipes so you can clean up and start again if it goes wrong.'"

The key thing is to get the customer to try the product. "We spend lots of time doing demonstrations – in fact every sales call we make includes a demo as you always meet somebody who hasn't seen the product working," says Nigel Dibbo. "And we often run in-store demos with new stockists to get the sales rolling." Guy Malam agrees, recommending tubs open on counters for customers to try,



and secondary sites everywhere in the store trying to tempt the user. Everbuild regularly distributes Wonder Wipes samples with adhesives and sealants. "This really builds interest," says David Seymour. "It was a key reason for the success of Wonder Wipes – and perhaps many other companies' wipes as well."

On-screen demonstration helps: Everbuild supports the Wonder Wipes range with an infomercial video which many stockists use in store, and which runs on the Everbuild website and on YouTube. Sycamore is going down the same road, and is about to use YouTube to launch a series of how-to videos which will also be available for in-store use.

Impulse purchase is critical, according to Nigel Dibbo. "If you think about the last time you bought WD40, it was probably from a dump bin on impulse," he says. "We are great believers in getting the product in among linked products, or ideally near the checkout, and we locate more than 5,000 POS displays every year. If the customer is heading to the till with paint, silicone, adhesive or PU foam, he is a prime target – it's the perfect 'Do you want fries with that?' add-on sale."

There's unanimity on this: "Wipes are very much an impulse sale, and you

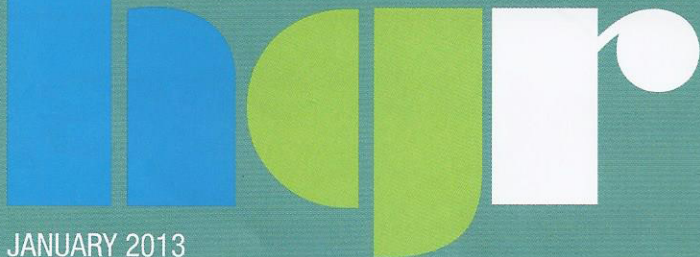
need to get them right in front of the customer," says David Seymour. And Guy Malam puts a hard figure on it: "70% of our business has been achieved through secondary sites and impulse buys," he says.

There's another plus: it's not one of those markets where margins are constantly under pressure from discounting. "We don't see wipes as particularly price sensitive," says David Seymour. "The better formulas are more expensive than some of the commodity labels around, but our experience is people are happy to pay a bit more for the better quality."

Nigel Dibbo agrees: "Price awareness is low," he says. "In fact we have started promoting them as a '£10 insurance policy' to the building trade – the idea is that if you have a spill, a tub of wipes can fix the problem immediately for £10, rather than face a damages claim of much more."

So it's a dream market: growing demand, lots of impulse sales, decent margins. But, says Nigel Dibbo, hardware independents are missing out. "Some do it very well, but most of them seem to miss the opportunity completely," he says. "Yes, space is an issue, but in most cases wipe sales are 100% incremental sales. And every customer who walks through the door should have a use for them."





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