



Ask the Expert: Cleaning & Hygiene

The BOSS Ask the Expert series provides dealers with practical, commercially useful insight into key diversification opportunities across the workplace supplies industry. This edition focuses on **Cleaning & Hygiene**, helping dealers better understand the breadth of the category, recognise opportunities within their existing customer base and approach customer conversations with greater confidence. The aim is not to turn dealers into category specialists, but to provide clear guidance, useful starting points and an understanding of how supplier and partner support can help them develop sales in this area.

For this edition, we asked **Andrew Stacey Managing Director, StaceyWay Ltd**, to answer our questions and share their perspective on **Cleaning & Hygiene**. Drawing on extensive experience in this area, Ross provides practical guidance to help dealers identify opportunities, have more informed customer conversations and develop their offering with confidence.

Meet the Expert: Andrew Stacey

Andrew Stacey is Managing Director of StaceyWay Ltd and has more than 35 years of experience in the workplace supplies industry, including senior roles with Spicers, VOW/EVO Group, Commercial Group and Interaction. While at VOW, Andrew identified the opportunity for a comprehensive own-brand Cleaning & Hygiene proposition and led the team responsible for developing and launching the 2Work range. More recently, he has worked directly with resellers to strengthen their product propositions, identify gaps and develop their Cleaning & Janitorial ranges.

Andrew's wider expertise spans commercial and category strategy, procurement and sourcing, supplier and reseller strategy, margin improvement and business growth, giving him a detailed understanding of both the supplier and reseller sides of the industry.

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Q&A questions

Cleaning & Hygiene represents a substantial and still underdeveloped growth opportunity for the dealer channel. The wider UK Cleaning, Hygiene and Waste industry contributes almost £72 billion to the economy, although this includes facilities management, waste and landscaping. For dealers, the immediate opportunity lies in capturing more of the repeat workplace spend generated by customers they already serve. These responses explore how dealers can turn product availability into active category development by asking better questions, focusing on customer needs and using supplier expertise where required.



Why should Cleaning & Hygiene be on a dealer's radar as a growth category?

Cleaning & Hygiene has probably been described as a growth opportunity for the office products dealer channel for at least 15 years - yet I still believe it remains one of the biggest underdeveloped opportunities available to dealers. The attraction is straightforward. Dealers already supply the customer, deliver to their workplace and have an established commercial relationship. Cleaning & Hygiene provides an opportunity to capture a greater share of that customer's overall spend.

It is also a highly repeatable category. Toilet tissue, hand towels, soap, refuse sacks and cleaning products are consumed continuously, creating recurring revenue.

The traditional office products market has changed enormously during my time in the industry. Successful dealers have increasingly moved from supplying the office to supplying the workplace.

Cleaning & Hygiene fits naturally into that transition. The opportunity is not putting thousands more products online. It is actively going after spend that often already exists within customers dealers already serve.

What would you say to dealers who feel this category is too specialist or technical for them?

Don't try to become a cleaning expert overnight.

I think one of the barriers to developing Cleaning & Hygiene has been the perception that salespeople need specialist knowledge before they can credibly discuss it. They don't.

Start with products everyone understands: toilet tissue, hand towels, soap, refuse sacks and everyday cleaning products. In many cases, your customer is already buying these products from somebody else.

The dealer's strengths are understanding the customer, asking good questions, consolidating supply and providing reliable service. Those are exactly the skills that have made successful dealers successful in office products.

Where specialist advice is required, use the considerable expertise available from manufacturers, wholesalers and specialist suppliers.

You don't need to know every answer. You need enough knowledge to recognise an opportunity, ask the right questions and know where to obtain specialist support. That makes Cleaning & Hygiene far more accessible than many salespeople perhaps imagine.

Where are the most natural starting points for dealers looking to introduce Cleaning & Hygiene to customers?

Start with existing customers rather than looking for a completely new market.

The easiest question is: 'Who supplies your washroom and cleaning consumables today?'



A dealer might already supply stationery, paper, catering products, PPE or furniture but receive virtually none of that customer's spend on toilet tissue, hand towels, soap, refuse sacks or cleaning chemicals. That is the immediate opportunity.

I would particularly look at customers with physical workplaces and significant numbers of employees or visitors - manufacturing, education, care, hospitality, leisure, distribution and multi-site organisations are obvious examples.

Start with a relatively small basket of frequently purchased products rather than presenting thousands of SKUs.

Understand what customers currently buy, where they buy it, how frequently they order and whether they experience problems with service, stock, storage, multiple suppliers or emergency purchases. The starting point is not a catalogue. It is a conversation about how the customer currently buys and manages the category.

What are the best ways for dealers to uncover whether a customer has an opportunity in this category?

Ask questions rather than immediately presenting products.

Find out who currently supplies the customer's cleaning and washroom products, what they regularly buy, approximately what they spend and whether different sites, cleaners or departments purchase independently.

Also ask about problems. Do they experience stock-outs? Are there too many products? Are they receiving multiple deliveries? Do they have sustainability objectives? Are employees making emergency purchases because something has run out?

One particularly useful approach is a basket comparison. Ask for a representative selection of products or several months' invoices and analyse what the customer is actually buying.

But don't restrict that exercise to unit price. Look at pack sizes, consumption, number of products, suppliers, deliveries and ordering processes.

The dealer should be looking for opportunities to reduce cost and complexity. That is a much more valuable conversation than simply saying, 'We can supply your toilet rolls more cheaply.'

How can dealers move the conversation away from price alone?

This is critical because competing purely on unit price ultimately turns Cleaning & Hygiene into another commodity category.

Instead, talk about cost in use.

The cheapest product is not necessarily the lowest-cost solution if the customer uses significantly more of it. Concentrated chemicals, controlled dispensing systems, paper products and correctly specified refuse sacks are examples where simple purchase-price comparisons can be misleading.

Then consider the wider purchasing cost. Can suppliers be consolidated? Can deliveries be reduced?



Can the number of products be rationalised? Could dispensers reduce consumption?

Could better stock management eliminate emergency purchasing?

Sustainability is increasingly part of the discussion too, although dealers should avoid vague 'green' claims and concentrate on credible evidence around areas such as packaging, concentration, recycled content and reduced consumption.

The conversation therefore moves from 'What does this case cost?' to 'What does it cost you to keep this workplace clean, hygienic and properly supplied?' That is a far more valuable commercial conversation.

What do dealers need to do differently to move from listing Cleaning & Hygiene products to genuinely developing the category?

For me, this is probably the most important question.

For many years the dealer channel has added Cleaning & Hygiene products to catalogues and websites and then described itself as being in the category. Product availability is not category development.

Developing the category requires active selling.

Identify existing customers that should be buying Cleaning & Hygiene from you but are not. Give salespeople a manageable core range and enough knowledge to confidently start conversations rather than expecting them to understand thousands of products.

Most importantly, measure the opportunity. If a substantial customer spends £20,000, £50,000 or £100,000 a year with you but virtually nothing on Cleaning & Hygiene, that should trigger a conversation. Then use supplier expertise - customer audits, joint visits, samples, product comparisons and training.

The biggest change required is mindset. Cleaning & Hygiene should not sit at the back of the catalogue as another product category. It should form part of a deliberate share-of-customer strategy.

What kind of supplier support can make it easier for dealers to sell Cleaning & Hygiene confidently?

The best suppliers make the category simpler rather than more complicated.

Dealers need clearly defined core ranges, straightforward product training and simple explanations of where different products should be used.

But the most valuable support is often customer-facing: site or product surveys, samples, product comparisons, dispenser advice, sustainability information, cost-in-use calculations and, where appropriate, joint customer visits. Manufacturers and specialist suppliers possess technical knowledge that most dealers could never economically replicate internally. Dealers should take advantage of it.

They should also work with credible suppliers that can demonstrate product quality and compliance rather than simply pursuing the cheapest source. The ideal relationship combines two strengths: the dealer owns the customer relationship; the supplier provides the specialist category expertise.



That means a salesperson can confidently tell a customer, 'I don't know the answer to that particular technical question, but I have someone who does.' In my view, that is credibility rather than weakness.

If dealers take one action after reading this, what should it be?

Pick your 20 largest existing customers and look at what each currently buys from you in Cleaning & Hygiene.

Don't start by adding hundreds of products, producing another catalogue or launching a marketing campaign. Create a simple customer/category matrix.

If a significant customer buys stationery, paper, catering, furniture or PPE from you but virtually nothing in washroom, cleaning or refuse products, highlight them.

Then ask one question: 'Who supplies your cleaning and washroom consumables?'

You may find some customers have specialist contracts that you realistically are not going to displace. That is fine.

But others will be buying from multiple suppliers, cleaning contractors, local cash-and-carries or online simply because their existing dealer has never asked for the business.

That is why I remain convinced Cleaning & Hygiene represents such a significant opportunity for the dealer channel. In many cases the customer is not new. The spend is already sitting inside an account the dealer already owns.

How can sustainability help dealers develop the Cleaning & Hygiene category?

Sustainability gives dealers another valuable reason to review how a customer buys and uses Cleaning & Hygiene products - but the conversation needs to be practical and evidence-based.

A new generation of products is coming to market that can offer materially lower environmental impact than many traditional alternatives. These include highly concentrated or accurately dosed chemicals, products using newer biological formulations, dispensing systems designed to reduce consumption, paper products with credible recycled or responsibly sourced content, and packaging that uses less virgin plastic.

The opportunity is not simply to replace every existing product with one carrying a 'green' label. Dealers should look at the complete result: how much product is consumed, the packaging and transport involved, whether waste is reduced and whether performance and hygiene standards are maintained.

Dealers should also avoid vague or unsupported environmental claims and use credible supplier evidence and recognised certification where appropriate.

The strongest question is therefore: can we help the customer consume less, waste less and simplify their supply arrangements without compromising hygiene, performance or cost?



After 15 years of talking about the Cleaning & Hygiene opportunity, why haven't dealers captured more of it?

I think this is an important question because the dealer channel has discussed diversification away from traditional office products for many years, and Cleaning & Hygiene has consistently been identified as an obvious adjacent category.

Yet simply adding products has not been enough.

The traditional dealer model became exceptionally good at transactional office products: extensive ranges, next-day delivery and competitive pricing. Cleaning & Hygiene often needs a slightly different approach – understanding consumption, looking around the customer's workplace, asking who supplies what and sometimes bringing specialist expertise into the conversation.

There can also be a confidence issue. Salespeople who know office products extremely well can understandably be reluctant to discuss a category they perceive as technical.

The answer is not turning every salesperson into a cleaning specialist. Give them a simple proposition, a core range, good questions to ask and access to specialists when required.

The opportunity has been there for years. The difference now needs to be execution.

*BOSS would like to thank **Andrew Stacey** for contributing to this Ask the Expert resource and sharing his experience and insight. We hope his practical guidance helps dealers approach **Cleaning & Hygiene** conversations with greater confidence, identify new opportunities within their customer base and take practical steps towards developing the category.*