



## Ask the Experts: 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 the **VOW Facilities Supplies Team**, to answer our questions and share their perspective on **Cleaning & Hygiene**. Drawing on extensive experience in this area, they provide practical guidance to help dealers identify opportunities, have more informed customer conversations and develop their offering with confidence.

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### Meet the Expert: VOW Facilities Supplies Team

The VOW Facilities Supplies team, (L-R: Donna Brophy, Liam Thompson and Megan Firth) forms part of VOW Wholesale and brings together extensive experience across the workplace supplies, facilities and business supplies sectors. Working closely with customers and suppliers, the team supports businesses at different stages of their Facilities Supplies journey, from identifying initial opportunities to developing established product ranges.

The team's expertise spans Cleaning & Hygiene, Catering, Health & Safety, Packaging, Personal Care and wider Facilities Supplies. This includes category and range development, product selection, sustainable alternatives and understanding changing customer requirements. By combining specialist product knowledge with practical commercial insight, the team helps customers identify gaps, explore new opportunities and build their Facilities Supplies offering with confidence.

Contact VOW Wholesale: [hello@vowwholesale.co.uk](mailto:hello@vowwholesale.co.uk)

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## Q&A questions

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

Cleaning & Hygiene represents a strong opportunity for dealers looking to grow their existing customer relationships and increase basket spend. One of the big attractions is that these are essential, repeat-purchase products. Customers will always need toilet roll, paper towels, hand wash, cleaning chemicals and other



hygiene products, regardless of what is happening in other parts of the office products market.

It is also a relatively non-digitalised category compared with traditional office products, which means there is still a real opportunity for dealers to add value through product knowledge, advice, service and solution selling rather than simply competing on online price.

Many dealers already have relationships with customers who are buying Cleaning & Hygiene products elsewhere. That creates an opportunity to bring more of their existing requirements into one relationship and increase basket value.

Diversification is key to long-term sustainability. As some traditional categories compress and decline, Cleaning & Hygiene gives dealers another route to grow revenue, increase repeat business and reach customers outside their current customer base.

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

Don't let the technical side put you off. There are some very simple places to start.

*Everyone uses toilet roll, so why not start there?* The same applies to paper towels, hand wash, dishwasher tablets and other everyday products. You don't need to know every product specification before you start talking to a customer.

The important thing is to ask questions and understand what the customer is currently using, what they are buying and whether they are happy with the solution they have.

As the conversation develops, VOW can support you with the technical detail.

We have a dedicated Facilities Supplies category team with specific industry knowledge and expertise who can help with product selection, recommendations and training. Our supplier partners can also provide product and brand training.

So don't think you need to become a Cleaning & Hygiene expert overnight. Spot the opportunity, ask the question and use the expertise around you to build your knowledge and find the right solution.

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

Start with your best customers, those where you already have a good relationship. Look at what they currently order from you, what they may be buying elsewhere and who they are buying it from.

There are some very straightforward products to start with. Everyone needs toilet roll, for example, and products such as hand towels, hand wash, cleaning products and dishwasher tablets are regular requirements.

Once you've opened the conversation, you can build from there. If the customer is buying one product elsewhere, ask what else they buy and whether you can help with that too.



Customer visits can also make a big difference because you can understand the environment and requirements first-hand.

And don't forget to engage with VOW. Our Facilities Supplies team can help identify products, alternatives and opportunities within the customer's requirements.

Start with the basics, get that right and grow the category from there.

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

Customer visits are key *and* sometimes you just need to pay a trip to the toilet!

It is a very simple way of seeing what products the customer is actually using. Look at the toilet roll, paper towels, soap, dispensers and other products. Who supplies them? Are they happy with them? Could there be a better or more cost-effective solution?

It is also important to understand the type of customer you are dealing with. Look at their sector and think about what Cleaning & Hygiene requirements they are likely to have. A school, care home, hotel, manufacturer, hospitality business and office will all have different needs.

Ask questions about their current products, suppliers, service, consumption and any issues they are experiencing.

Don't just look at what the customer currently buys from you. Look at the whole requirement and identify what you could potentially bring into the relationship.

That is where a customer visit and a good conversation can uncover opportunities that an order history alone won't show you.

### **How can dealers move the conversation away from price alone?**

This is where solution selling and cost in use become really important.

The cheapest product isn't necessarily the cheapest solution. Dealers should look at what the customer is trying to achieve and whether they are using the right product for their environment.

Cost in use can be a particularly powerful conversation. A product that lasts longer, performs better or uses less can potentially reduce overall consumption and cost, even if the individual unit price is higher.

Time is another factor. If a product needs replenishing less often or is easier for staff to manage, there can be a saving in staff time as well as product cost.

There may also be opportunities for product consolidation and rationalisation. Sometimes one product can have multiple uses, reducing the number of products a customer needs to purchase, store and manage.

**VOW and our suppliers** can help dealers demonstrate these benefits.



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

There is plenty of support available, so dealers don't need to feel they have to become experts overnight.

Product training is a great starting point, particularly for specific ranges or solutions. VOW can also provide support around category knowledge and product selection through our dedicated Facilities Supplies team.

Free-on-loan dispensing solutions are another good example. These have been very popular and can provide a valuable solution for customers rather than simply selling a consumable. Training and support can help dealers understand how to identify these opportunities and demonstrate the benefits to customers.

Cost-in-use training can also make a big difference. Understanding how changing a product can reduce consumption, improve performance or save staff time gives dealers a much stronger customer conversation.

Where the opportunity warrants it, suppliers can also join dealers on end-user visits. This brings specialist knowledge into the conversation while the dealer maintains ownership of the customer relationship.

Use the expertise around you - VOW and our suppliers are there to support you

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

Talk about toilet roll!

It might sound simple, but commodity lines such as toilet roll will always be required. They are a great way to start a conversation and can open the door to a much wider Cleaning & Hygiene opportunity.

Pick one of your existing customers and ask a simple question:

"Who currently supplies your Cleaning & Hygiene products?" You may be surprised by the answer.

Don't be afraid to ask the question. The more conversations you have, the more knowledge you will build and the more opportunities you will start to see.

You don't have to sell the whole category at once. Start with one or two everyday products, understand the customer's needs and build from there.

Diversification is key to long-term sustainability, particularly as some traditional core categories continue to compress and decline. Cleaning & Hygiene can help dealers increase basket spend, develop repeat business and become a more important supplier to their customers.

***Start with the toilet roll, ask the question and see where the conversation takes you!***

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*BOSS would like to thank the **VOW Wholesale Facilities team** for contributing to this Ask the Expert resource and sharing their 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.*