# THE HARDWARE Connection™

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## THE INDUSTRY'S DIGITAL LEADER

HARDWARE & TOOLS

## Seeking the Best New Products

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**Hardware Products Review From Tom's Shop**

*By Fred Fischer*

# Are You a Hardware Professional?

How well do you measure up to being a true Hardware Professional? Do you manage your store like a Hardware Professional? In today's modern world, how do we know if someone is a Hardware Professional?

The reality is that there are no hard and fast definitions of a Hardware Professional. In the good ol' days we supplied product. When a customer came into our store we would listen, and then show the product we knew was the solution to their problem, educate them and in the process, sell them the product that fixed their problem.

As a part of that process we would suggest other related items (add-on sales) and provide the additional services and knowledge to build that ongoing relationship. Hopefully over time that customer continued to shop our store and maybe even told their friends about our outstanding and personalized service. By offering great service, our customer base would then expand.

It is now 2015 and the world is changing. One of the first things that comes to mind is the vast knowledge at our fingertips. Google, Bing and Ask are a few product names that represent this unlimited access. With just a few clicks, you can figure out how to fix a faucet, paint a house, trim a tree, patch concrete, slow cook ribs and even find a nearby hardware store or lumberyard.

Your customer can not only get all the answers to their questions without leaving their home, they can now find multiple places to purchase the products to resolve their problem. So, how do you get those customers to come to your business location and look to you to be that Hardware Professional?

The sad part of the story is that some hardware wholesalers tell us that as many as 30 percent of their dealers do not use a point-of-sale (POS) system. And the retailers that do have POS are not using all the functionality and data that is available to them.

The days of running your business from your gut are long past. Do you know who your best customers are or what the top 25 sellers are in each of your departments? Do you spend less than one to two hours each week doing ordering? Do you know which items are not selling in your store?

If you answered "No" to any one of those questions, then it is time to take a hard look at how you are managing your business. The definition of insanity is "Doing the same thing over and over and expecting different results." Is this how you manage your store? If we are going to compete in 2015, all

of us need to take a close look at how we are performing each day.

There are only two things you have any real control over with your business: inventory and labor. How aware are you of your inventory and how smart are you and your staff working? Too many times the early conversation on whether to adopt POS is fixated on cost. How much is the system followed by how much is support?

The Hardware Professional mindset should be focused slightly more progressive, so that a better first question to a POS company is: "How can you, Mr. POS Company, help me be more successful, more profitable and more professional." In 23 plus years in the point-of-sale business I have never had a potential customer ask those questions. The closest I have heard is a prospective customer at a show asked me "Why is your point-of-sale product better than anyone else here?"

Being a Hardware Professional starts with your mindset and thought process, which should lead to key questions. What are your core business values? What effect do you want your management of your store to have?  What are your biggest aspirations for your business?

Instead of having tunnel vision on how much is it going to cost upfront, start thinking like a Hardware Professional and ask how the investment in a point-of-sale system makes you a better Hardware Professional. Everyday independent hardware and lumber

dealers point out the value in the quality of the products they are selling. Yet, when it comes to point of sale, low price is the focal point of the conversation.

If you want to be a Hardware Professional, look at every corner of your business. Think of your actions from the time you put your key in the door in the morning until the time you leave or lock the door as well as what happens when you are not in the store.

Are you doing repeated tasks that require too many people hours? Can you take the data in your point-of-sale system to the product to know what is or is not there? Are you managing your margins? Do you offer a Reward program? Can your customers find out about your store online by seeing your store website? Can you support Chip and Pin (EMV) or Apple Pay or a Virtual Wallet? Is your store a Wi-Fi hot spot? This can be a very long list.
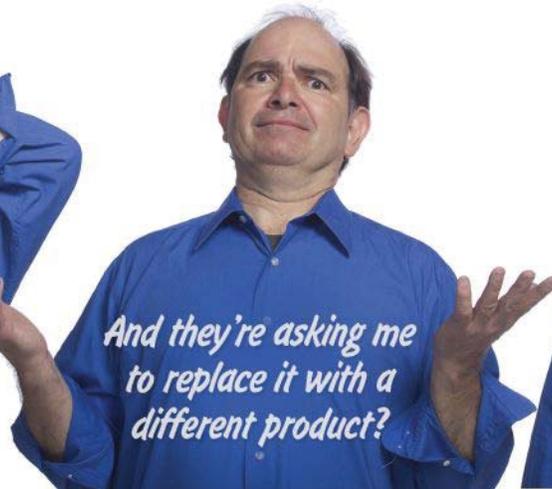
To be a Hardware Professional as a store owner, a manager or a staff member, you have to change how you view and approach your business or job. You need to take a fresh look at what you do each day. You need to get out of your comfort zone. Most importantly, you might need to make some changes, not for the sake of change, but to drive more success in your store or job by being a Hardware Professional. Are you willing to take a look and make those changes? ■

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