

Business

Screwfix quick off the blocks with expansion in DIY boom

Ashley Armstrong Retail Editor

A boom in demand for speedy deliveries is encouraging Screwfix to open a further 350 shops, increasing the hardware retailer's UK chain to 1,000 outlets.

The retailer started trialling its Screwfix Sprint service in June with Gohr, a courier firm, to deliver items to tradesmen on the job.

John Mewett, chief executive of Screwfix, said that the Sprint service had proved popular with builders, electricians and plumbers who typically charge about £80 an hour and have to take time off a job if they don't have the required tools or material.

"Often they don't know what they need to fix a job until they get to a customer's house, so this way they can carry on working while they wait for an item to be delivered," Mewett said.

The company charges £5 for the speedy service, which is currently only available through its app, with a delivery time average of 44 minutes although Mewett said the fastest time has been 14 minutes.

Screwfix is owned by Kingfisher, the listed DIY chain that employs 62,500 people and has 1,390 shops in Europe including B&Q, Castorama and Brico Dépôt.

Screwfix had already invested in its online business prior to the pandemic to offer tradesmen a one-minute click and collect service.

Unlike homeware stores that customers walk around, most Screwfix shops operate as a counter with a warehouse behind them filled with shelves of stock that staff can pick.

Because the stores are already set up like distribution centres, they can be used as "dark stores" for speedy deliveries, the only difference being handing over a product to a scooter driver rather than a trade customer.



The hardware retailer said it needed to open more stores in city centres

Mewett said the most popular products ordered were typically items required at the end of a fitting, such as sealant and rubble bags to tidy away mess caused during a refurbishment.

The service has been rolled out to 30 cities across the UK, while Screwfix will have opened another 70 stores this year, higher than its original 50-store aim.

The Screwfix boss said that there was still appetite for more of its stores, particularly in city centres, because "time is money for our customers. They're not going to drive past a competitor's shop to get to ours if they need a job finished."

Screwfix recently launched as an online brand in France and has plans to open a store there next year. Kingfisher has been called a "pandemic winner" after enjoying soaring sales during the crisis as people used lockdowns to renovate their living spaces and turn spare rooms into home offices.

Shares in Kingfisher are 53 per cent higher than before the first lockdown and on the back of strong sales the group recently said that it expects profits to be as high as £950 million for the year.