

THIRD QUARTER / 2021

HARDLINES HIQ

HOME IMPROVEMENT QUARTERLY

FEATURE STORY

MANAGING ALL OF THE MOVING PARTS

Tony Hurst, president of Lowe's Canada, shares his vision for fine-tuning and growing the company in an exclusive interview.



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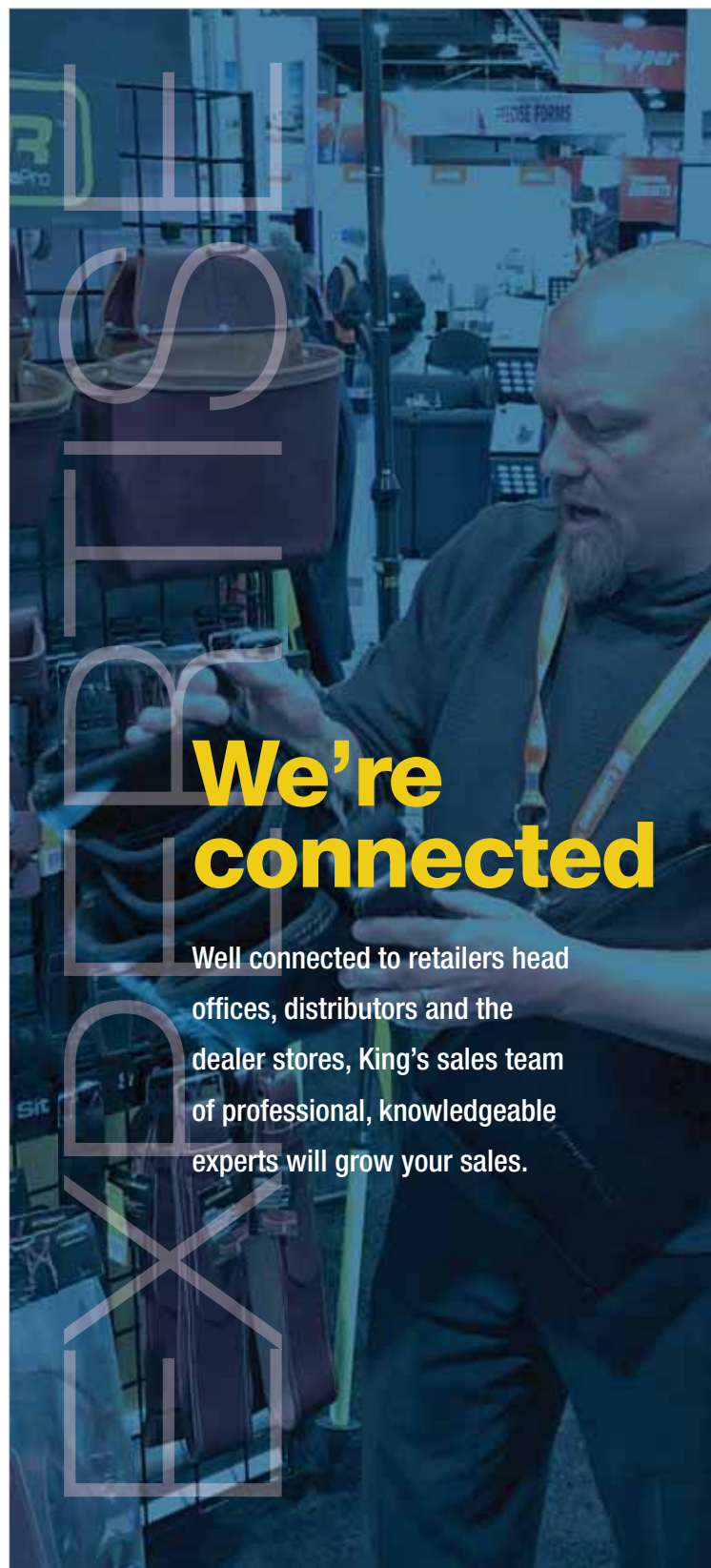
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BMR

Product shortages lead dealers' concerns



Personnel changes continue at BMR's head office under new CEO



U.S. moves to double tariffs on Canadian softwood, causing headaches



Canadian Tire takes on Amazon with premium membership program



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Our annual ranking and analysis of the major retail home improvement banners explains who the key players are and how they differentiate themselves.

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NEW JIGSAW BLADES

METAL AND WOOD CUTTING

Diablo's bi-metal and carbide teeth jig saw blades are specifically designed to deliver maximum durability, superior cutting life and speed in a variety of applications ranging from wood to metal, laminates and specialty items like PVC and plastics. These high-performance blades feature an ultra-hardened cutting edge to deliver longer life than standard blades and the optimized blade design makes for fast and effortless cuts. T-shank design fits all combo and most U-shank cordless and corded jig saws.

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CHRISTINA MANOCCHIO, EDITOR

KEEPING UP WITH THE INNOVATORS

The home improvement industry may be coming around to innovation and technology in a big way.



Lumber and the home improvement industry has always been a strong sector for the Canadian economy, but this past year was unprecedented.

No other channel has seen growth and demand this year like retail home improvement (though grocery is a strong contender). That success has its roots in the pandemic, as people are doing plenty of home projects.

Hardlines' Annual Retail Report really underscores the success of the business. While going through previous reports, I noticed one important trend. Every company had increases in 2020 sales, which goes to show how important this industry is for the economy.


But one thing I have noticed is the home improvement industry struggles with adapting and modernizing. As technology grows, the industry can't seem to grapple with the idea of innovation.

Some companies have seen this problem and they have pushed innovation. In John Caulfield's article "Outside in: virtual meetings sustain contractor sales" on page 52, one company decided to put

their staff online due to the pandemic. This led to their sales staff being remote full time. This is a small and easy change, as the company recognized that office life has been altered and can be remote.

This small investment in technology can be a benefit to any company. Being flexible and forward-thinking will help companies become more progressive, which in turn will appeal to a younger workforce.

It will also help the industry appeal to more tech-savvy individuals with the ability to connect with the entire nation from their home office.

These are just some small examples of innovation, or just simply keeping up with the times. Pandemic or not, this sector needs to stay up to date in order to thrive in a modern society. 

christina@hardlines.ca

// But one thing I have noticed is the home improvement industry struggles with adapting and modernizing. As technology grows, the industry can't seem to grapple with the idea of innovation. //

DESPITE RECORD ONLINE SALES, MANY DEALERS SLOW TO ADOPT E-COMMERCE

Online and e-commerce sales are a big concern for dealers, according to a survey by Hardlines.

In the 2021 Business Conditions Survey, we asked dealers what their biggest concerns are. The survey went out to dealers and store managers across Canada earlier this spring. During uncertain times, they are facing new challenges at a frightening rate, including rising prices and uncertain product availability.

The surge in online sales over the past year represented a huge shift in consumer habits. For dealers and managers responding to the survey, almost 20 percent cited this as one of their biggest concerns. Through the pandemic, the shift to online sales has grown exponentially. And independent dealers are struggling to keep up.

Retailers with established platforms, such as Canadian Tire, Lowe's Canada, and Home Depot Canada, fared well over the past year as their online sales soared. But the move was often a difficult one for



they were just beginning to realize returns from online business, others were only just getting started. However, the uptick in e-commerce among hardware and home improvement retailers is growing, if grad-

under COVID developed their online business, even if sales levels online remain a fraction of overall sales.

About one-third of respondents reported that e-commerce sales generated five percent or less of their overall sales. Barely 10 percent indicated they were generating more than five percent of their sales through online channels.

The survey invited comments from respondents about what they think is important now.

"My largest concern is online shopping and being able to compete. I have bought and paid for a product that is on my shelf while online sellers don't necessarily have that same issue. They can order or pull from another location on demand," one dealer wrote.

// But the move was often a difficult one for independents, putting them at a disadvantage, especially as this trend will only continue, even after the worst of the pandemic is behind us. //

independents, putting them at a disadvantage, especially as this trend will only continue, even after the worst of the pandemic is behind us.

While many respondents last year said

usually. In our spring 2020 survey, fully 60 percent of dealers indicated they were not selling online. But the overall number of holdouts has shrunk to just over half (54 percent) in 2021 as more and more dealers

PRODUCT SHORTAGES LEAD DEALERS' CONCERNS

Dealers are complaining about product shortages and it remains their biggest business challenge, according to a new survey by Hardlines.

In the 2021 Business Conditions Survey, we asked dealers what their biggest concerns are. The survey went out to dealers and store managers across Canada earlier this spring.

Availability of product was the No. 1 response, with almost 89 percent of respondents citing this challenge as their leading business concern. A related issue, sourcing and product shortages, was indicated by 71 percent of respondents.

The shortage of supply, especially of lumber and building materials, has driven up prices to new levels as both consumers and contractors scramble to get renovations done during the lockdowns. The price of lumber

has almost tripled over the last year, with SPF (spruce-pine-fir) two-by-fours reaching \$1,040 per thousand board feet—up from \$445 a year ago.

Comments by dealers, submitted anonymously to ensure confidentiality of the results, including concerns about product shortages and the need for young people to look to this industry for career opportunities. “Keeping product on our shelves is my biggest concern. Our sales would have been up far higher if we had stock,” said one respondent.

“Product availability is extremely concerning. It seems to be a problem with most suppliers,” noted another response. “We have lots of customers looking to quote future jobs and we can’t say with certainty that products will be available.”

BRIEFLY

HOME HARDWARE NAMES ROB WALLACE TO NEW ROLE

Rob Wallace was appointed VP, store operations and eCommerce at Home Hardware. This expanded new role follows the announcement that Darrin Noble will step back from the business. Home Hardware’s manufacturing operations at Beauti-Tone Paint and Home Products and W.D. Packaging will transition to its logistics team under an expanded role for VP John Dyksterhuis.

TORBSA JOINS WELL MADE HERE

TORBSA has joined the Well Made Here initiative as a major partner. The organization, which campaigns to encourage consumers to buy Canadian, was founded by AQMAT president Richard Darveau. Among other participating companies are Castle, Home Hardware (including Patrick Morin), and Lowe’s Canada. TORBSA president Paul Williams will hold a seat on Well Made Here’s board of directors.

HOME DEPOT INCREASES PAY FOR TOP EXECUTIVES

The Home Depot’s top five executives received a combined total of \$35 million in compensation in 2020, up 43 percent from \$24.5 million in 2019. The increase follows a surge of nearly 20 percent in revenues during 2020. None of the five individuals received bonuses last year; the company said the increases were largely in non-equity incentive plan compensation.

M-D BUILDING PRODUCTS ACQUIRES CARDINAL

M-D Building Products has acquired the assets of Cardinal Aluminum Co. and its subsidiaries, Cardinal Architectural and Designer Moulding. Cardinal Aluminum Co. provides custom aluminum extrusion, fabrication, and finishing to customers across North America. Like M-D, Cardinal is privately owned.

PERSONNEL CHANGES CONTINUE AT BMR’S HEAD OFFICE UNDER NEW CEO

Changes continue at BMR Group as it settles in under its new CEO, **Alexandre Lefebvre**. He came over from Lefebvre & Benoît, of which BMR is a major shareholder, and replaced Pascal Houle in the top job. Houle, who had led BMR since 2015, moved back to the parent company, Sollio Cooperative Group, as COO.

Since then, a series of hires and shuffles have occurred at BMR. The latest round of appointments was to its merchandising and vendor relations department.

The company said in a release that the appointments “optimize our organizational structure to be more efficient in supporting

our dealers and suppliers in their day-to-day operations and to provide them with more effective and customized support.”

The recent promotions are Paul Philippe Boucher, director, forestry products; Nancy Metsos, co-ordinator, sales office; Isabelle Perron, manager, analysis and merchandising; Audrey Lemay-Poirier, director, Agrizone; and Jérémie Brunelle, director, innovation.

Barely a week earlier, BMR announced the appointment of François Grenier as VP of human resources. He was previously BMR’s senior director of labour relations and occupational health and safety.



Alexandre Lefebvre

U.S. MOVE TO DOUBLE TARIFFS ON CANADIAN SOFTWOOD, CAUSING HEADACHES

The U.S. Commerce Department issued a decision recently raising countervailing and anti-dumping duties for most Canadian softwood lumber to 18.32 percent. The current rate is 8.99 percent.

However, the rate is not consistent across the industry. Canfor Corp. and Resolute Forest Products Ltd. will be charged even higher tariffs.

The rates, which are subject to further review before going into effect later this year, were set based on data from 2019. Lumber prices have risen steeply since then.

The nine percent tariff is a recent development. Tariffs had been almost 20 percent until they were lowered in December 2020. The only groups that appear to applaud the increase are the U.S. lumber producers—and their lobbyists in Washington. They hope to make domestic U.S. production more feasible and profitable without the steady influx of Canadian timber pouring across the border.



The move has been met by opposition on both sides of the border. The B.C. Lumber Trade Council deplored the ruling. Council president Susan Yurkovich said in a statement that it “will ultimately further hurt American consumers by adding to their costs.”

In the U.S., the perennial softwood issue divides homebuilders, who are pressing the Biden administration for a negotiated

settlement, and lumber lobbyists who hope the tariffs will encourage domestic manufacturing.

The National Association of Home Builders found the hike yet another way to make houses more costly—and less affordable—for average Americans, where soaring lumber prices have already driven up the cost of a new home.

RICHELIEU'S ACQUISITION OF TASK TOOLS FIRMLY ENTRENCHES IT IN HAND TOOLS, PTA

Well known for its range of fasteners, decorative hardware, and cabinet hardware, Richelieu Hardware is positioning itself in new categories with its latest acquisition.

Richelieu purchased the shares of Task Tools in a move announced earlier this year. Task is a Delta, B.C.-based hand tool and power tool accessory company, which also has a facility in Brantford, Ont.

It represents brands such as Task Signature and Tuf-E-Nuf.

The family-owned business has been in the hands of Craig Caplan, son of company

founder Michael Caplan, who established Task Tools in 1968. Craig Caplan will stay on to continue managing operations under Richelieu, while the Caplan family will hold on to the properties in Delta and Brantford.

Since the Task deal, Richelieu has gone on to acquire Uscon Industrial Fasteners, an importer and distributor of screws, bolts, and industrial fasteners. It was founded in 1970 in Montreal, where it operates a distribution centre serving the retail market, mainly in Eastern Canada.





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CANADIAN TIRE TAKES ON AMAZON WITH PREMIUM MEMBERSHIP PROGRAM

The first quarter turned strong results for Canadian Tire, despite the restrictions of continued lockdowns. Much of that growth came from online sales, making CTC look hard at how it can compete against the likes of online giants like Amazon.

In a call to analysts, Canadian Tire president and CEO Greg Hicks admitted the period “had its share of unique challenges, including significant restrictions across our store network.” He noted that only 40 percent of the Canadian Tire Retail stores were open at the start of the year. “Even though full operations were restored across the business in March, many strict restrictions continue.”

With an early start to spring in many parts of Canada, Canadian Tire saw its

customers shift to purchases of outdoor sports equipment, outdoor living products, and bikes. That shift drove sales of items such as patio sets and other products from Canadian Tire’s gardening categories, which drove an increase of more than \$100 million across the retailer’s seasonal, living, and playing divisions.

E-commerce sales were up by almost 300 percent in the quarter. That kind of activity has the company looking at ways to take on the likes of Amazon Prime and Walmart, including a premium membership program. For a flat fee, subscribers will earn bonus loyalty rewards for purchases made in-store and get free delivery for online orders. They’ll also be able to stream TV series and movies through Bell Media’s Crave platform.



BRIEFLY

LOWE’S CANADA SUPPORTS CHILDREN’S HOSPITALS

Lowe’s Canada donated more than \$1.2 million to Children’s Miracle Network and Opération Enfant Soleil. Teams from Lowe’s, RONA, Réno-Dépôt corporate, and affiliated stores collected donations and sold tickets. Lowe’s Canada also made a corporate donation. Since 2018, Lowe’s Canada has presented more than \$3.3 million to the two organizations.

BMR EXPANDS CONSULTING SERVICE

BMR Group is partnering with RénoAssistance, a subsidiary of Desjardins Group, to offer customers in the Montreal region access, free of charge, to a pool of more than 1,200 contractors. Customers who consult with the BMR Reno Squad can look to the team of 35 professionals at RénoAssistance for help identifying their needs and completing their projects. All participating pros have been screened for quality and pricing.

CANWEL PARENT COMPANY GETS NEW NAME

CanWel Building Materials Group Ltd. has changed its name to Doman Building Materials Group Ltd. CEO and chairman Amar Doman says the new name reflects the growth of the company, whose operations now extend beyond Canada into the U.S., including Hawaii. The name of CanWel Building Materials Division, which wholesales LBM to Canadian dealers, remains unchanged, however.

LOWE’S COS. NAMES ELLISON CHAIRMAN

The board of directors at Lowe’s Cos. elected CEO and president Marvin Ellison, a sitting director of the company, as chairman of the board. Ellison succeeded Richard W. Dreiling, who has shifted from the role of chairman to lead independent director.



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BMR LAUNCHES PRIVATE-LABEL PAINT WITH QUEBEC MANUFACTURER LAURENTIDE

BMR Group has partnered with Société Laurentide to launch a house brand of paints under the Splendi and Splendi Supreme brand.

The new line of acrylic paints was developed at Laurentide's labs and designed to offer affordable, quality paints suitable for both DIY and contractor customers. The new initiative has created about 30 jobs and driven investments to modernize the plant in Shawinigan, Que., for the Quebec-based family business, whose roots go back 70 years.

Paint represents BMR's best-selling category after building materials. In addition, its paint sales are up more than 15 percent so far this year. Across Quebec, industry sales are close to 13 million gallons (or 52 million litres), following a growth of more than 10 percent in 2020.

As part of a recycling program with Laurentide, BMR stores have recovered



Left to right: André Buisson, president and CEO at Société Laurentide; Félix Buisson, VP sales at Société Laurentide; and Marc-André Lebel, co-owner of BMR Pierre Naud Stores, one of the BMR dealers carrying the new Splendi line of paint.

more than 200,000 kilograms of paint over the past 25 years by allowing consumers

to bring back their empty or partially empty containers.

HOME DEPOT PILOTS SAME-DAY DELIVERY SERVICE FOR ITS PRO CUSTOMERS

The Home Depot Canada continues to ramp up its services for pros and contractors. The pilot of a same-day delivery service exclusive to pros that is being tried out in some Toronto-area stores is just the latest example of this.

The new service can deliver orders of any size, including bulk items, within two hours. Delivery rates are based on the delivery postal code. Four stores in the Greater Toronto Area currently offer the service, each with its delivery team of two drivers.

Each crew uses Sprinter vans, which are the same vans used in Home Depot's rental service. Home Depot can also provide its

flatbed service as required for larger orders.

The company has plans to expand the service to other Home Depot stores over time.

You won't find the program online; right now, it's an in-store service only, managed through each store's pro desk staff. This lets Home Depot associates enter pro customers' orders onsite and then direct those orders to the delivery crews.

The pilot program has been in place since February and the retailer is working to expand the volume within the four pilot stores. Based on feedback from both the stores and the contractors themselves, Home Depot plans



to tweak the service before expanding it. That rollout will include additional urban areas first, before moving to other markets.

Home Depot Canada says it will then get the service online, which will enable the giant retailer to leverage any store for product and delivery.

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ProductSPOTLIGHT

BY GEOFF McLARNEY



◀ New colours for NovikShake

Novik has added three new colour options to its NovikShake RoughSawn Cedar, Hand Split, Half-Round, Northern Perfection, and RoughSawn eight-inch Shake lines. Brunswick Green is a deep shade of green with hints of sage. Coventry Gray is a strong medium grey. Windsor Blue is a majestic blue inspired by sea and sky. All NovikShake profiles deliver the warmth and charm of wood-grain texture, without the maintenance and upkeep of wood.

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MANAGING A LOT OF *MOVING* PARTS

BY MICHAEL McLARNEY

Photography: Normand Huberdeau / NH Photographes Ltd

As president of Lowe's Canada, **Tony Hurst** has a lot on his plate: four banners, 238 corporate stores, 240 affiliate dealers, and two official languages. He joined us for an interview, where he shares the company's plans for growth in Canada, his insights into the importance of the pro customer, the value of the multi-banner model, and much more.





The pandemic caused Lowe's Canada to move quickly and think outside the box.

Early 2020, Tony Hurst was put in place as president of Lowe's Canada. Based in the company's head office and distribution centre in Boucherville, Que., Hurst reports directly to Lowe's president and CEO Marvin Ellison.

Hurst most recently served as Lowe's senior vice president of enterprise and strategy transformation, while holding the position of Lowe's division president for the west region. His background includes executive positions at J.C. Penney and Home Depot in the U.S.

Hurst has spent the past year getting used

to the business—and Canada. That has been complicated by a year of coping with the ravages of COVID-19.

Lowe's Canada had to move quickly to deal with changing conditions, as everything from product supply to worker safety took on new dimensions. Lowe's Canada implemented a number of employee benefits to help its employees. These included a temporary \$2-an-hour wage premium and a series of discretionary bonuses. Corporate store managers even got grocery money to stock the staff fridges to further help workers.

"Since March, our teams have worked tirelessly to meet the needs of our customers and communities, showing tremendous dedication and resilience along the way as we continue to face a situation that is changing the way we work and support one another," Hurst said.

In the stores, that has meant innovation. Paint was one of the first categories to take off as lockdowns began and people were being confined to their homes. Adjusting to curbside pickup proved especially challenging for the paint category, which typically involves a visit to the store, a

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review of paint chips, and advice from an associate.

“We developed an online paint selector, which was really the first in our space up here. Then helped us to continue to drive that business.”

More recently, Lowe’s Canada launched contactless pick-up lockers in the spring at various Lowe’s stores. Installed near the entrance of the stores, the lockers are equipped with Bluetooth technology and a touchscreen so customers can pick up their online orders without interacting with staff. The technology brings the advantages of self-direction in a contactless environment while maintaining the security of the orders within each locker.

DIFFERENT THAN THE U.S. BUSINESS

When asked what differences he identified between Canada and U.S. home improvement markets, Hurst noted that there are many similarities, especially in terms of the customer and how to go to market. But he did add that the Lowe’s model, with its multiple banners and ownership models, is “drastically different than the U.S.”

“Even within RONA, it’s drastically different. You have proximity stores, you have dealer stores, you have building centre stores, so there are different formats and sizes that are drastically different than that of the U.S. And then we also have five stores under our Dick’s banner,” he adds.

“We have different assortments that you don’t see in the U.S., and a different business model from a delivery standpoint as well, which I think is an advantage for us.”

That, he admitted, is the big distinction between Lowe’s Canada and the U.S. parent. “I get asked this question a lot about, ‘what is our long-term banner strategy?’ My answer would be that I’m not as concerned about the name on the front of the building as I am about the experience and the brand recognition for the customer.”

The focus now, he added, is on making life easier for that customer. “A lot of our



Lowe’s Canada’s main focus is customer experience.



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work and our attention has been around making sure that we have a better experience in-store—a more frictionless experience, especially as we focus more on omnichannel amid these times of the pandemic.”

EYE ON THE PROS

That pro-business remains a central focus of Lowe's Canada's strategy. It has been developing programs and services to strengthen its relationship with its contractor customers.

In September 2020, it introduced VIPpro, an app-based program to give pro customers an improved and integrated purchasing experience. In addition, the company provides flexible credit options for pro and commercial customers that include account receivables management, a commercial credit card, and charge accounts available at RONA and Réno-Dépôt stores.

Hurst believes that the many aspects of the Lowe's Canada store formats offer a range of categories and ideas that can be



shared with the other banners.

“While there’s a lot of similarities when you think about the DIY customer, I think in the pro segment our go-to-market strategy is a lot different.”

This, he notes, is where Lowe’s Canada’s diversity of banners offers some advantages.

“I think that’s been a strength for us that we’re continuing to lean into—to figure out how we grow our reach to all of our corporate stores with an offering that’s differentiated to that pro segment so that we can serve them better,” he says.

The differences have to be balanced, to

a consistent experience, regardless of the name on the front of the building.”

Hurst identified the varied store formats as an advantage when selling to contractors.

“We also have our building centres, which allows us to really expand our reach as far as our pro focus segment, with goods that you wouldn’t necessarily carry in a corporate store.”

// There’s growing your square footage, and I don’t think we’re there yet. But I think my focus is really on organic growth. How do we grow within our current footprint within Canada? //

In the case of, say, Réno-Dépôt, Lowe’s Canada’s big box banner that targets pros and heavy DIYers specifically, the ability to tailor assortments beyond the corporate offering is something Hurst hopes to flow back to the other big stores.

meet customers’ expectations of any of the Lowe’s bannered stores. “We’re really focused on how we expand the best of each banner into our other stores, and really give a more consistent experience as well. At the end of the day, it’s about how we get

ROOM TO GROW

Hurst envisions lots of room to grow the business. That growth can occur in a couple of ways, including both increased market penetration and greater incremental growth.

“There’s growing your square footage, and I don’t think we’re there yet. But I think my focus is really on organic growth. How do we grow within our current footprint within Canada?”

Those efforts won’t be at the expense of physical growth, but he sees an immediate opportunity addressing what he calls “retail



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fundamentals” within the existing stores, regardless of the banner.

“We’ve got a lot of work to do there to make sure that the way our stores are operating, the operational and merchandising processes and systems, are all harmonized,” says Hurst. Those processes will help standardize expectations for customers to help drive footsteps into the stores.

That includes working with merchants and field teams to “make sure we’ve got the right products in the stores,” as well as

looking at pricing strategies. “We’re getting more focused on everyday low prices so that our customers know what to expect when they come into our doors, from a pricing standpoint.”

When asked to share what he’s learned about bringing the company through a pandemic year, Hurst recapped some of the achievements he had already talked about: DIY initiatives such as the online paint selector and in-store lockers, and the rapid focus on expanding the Lowe’s

omnichannel strategy.

In the end, however, his observations turned to the human side of the business.

“I think, the thing that I’m most proud of is the resiliency of our associates. Our associates were there the whole time with this pandemic, even when there were so many unknowns. There was a lot of anxiety about what it means to work and serve our customers and our communities. Our associates were there for each other. Our associates were there for our communities.” 🇨🇦



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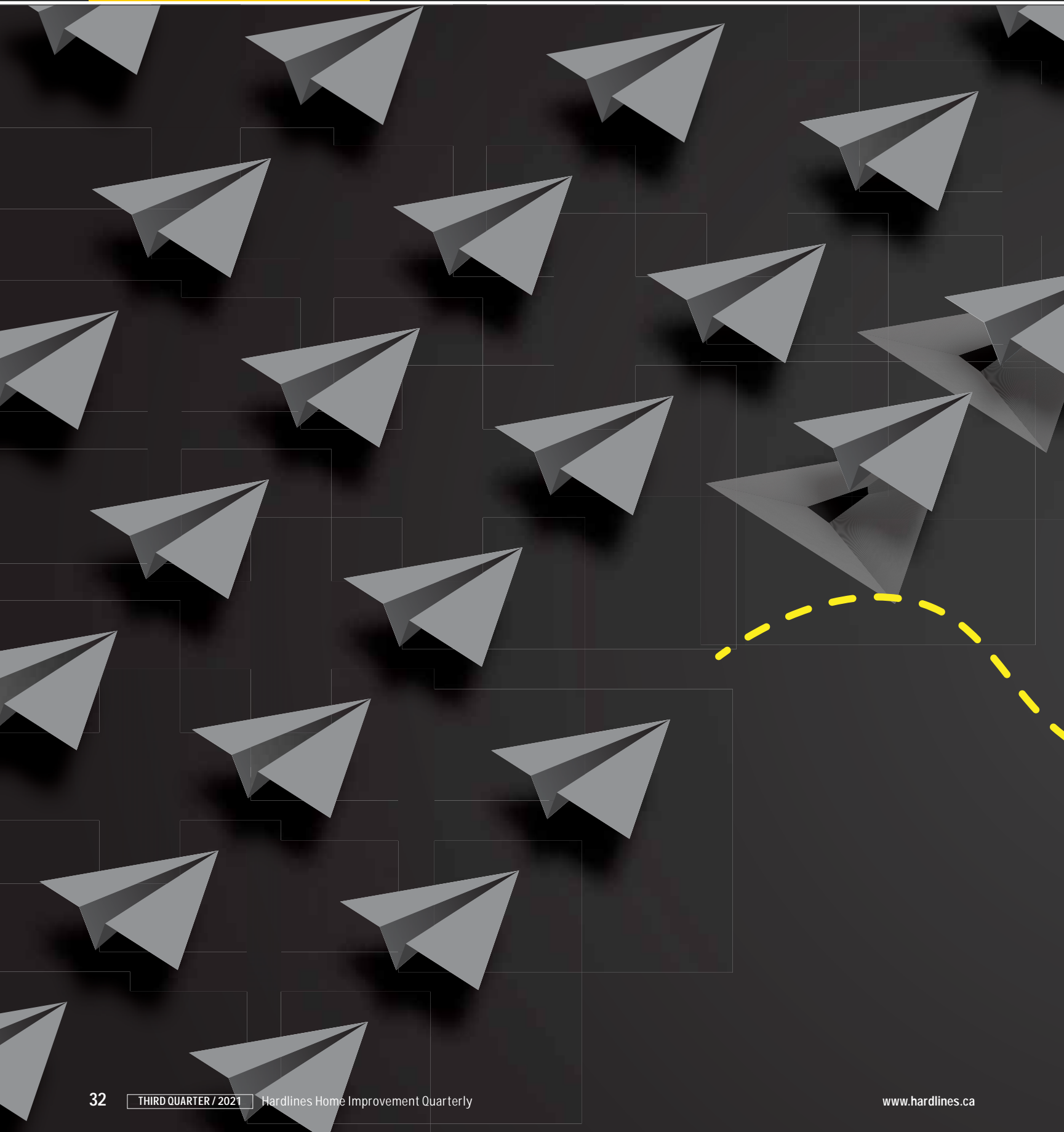
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KEEPING UP WITH CANADA'S TOP 20



Keeping up to date with the market can be complicated.
That's why Hardlines has compiled the information for you
(collected data from our surveys, annual reports, and news items).

The pandemic has caused a lot of unknowns, but the industry had a strong year. Canada's retail home improvement industry has grown an estimated 15.5 percent since 2019. Every retailer in the list saw an increase in sales, mostly in the double digits. This wasn't the case in the 2019 report. This article will provide some insight into the industry and give you a snapshot of our Annual Report. Sales and store counts are effective year-end 2020, and some sales are estimates according to Hardlines data.



1. The Home Depot Canada

LOCATION: Toronto, Ont.

SALES: Over \$10 billion

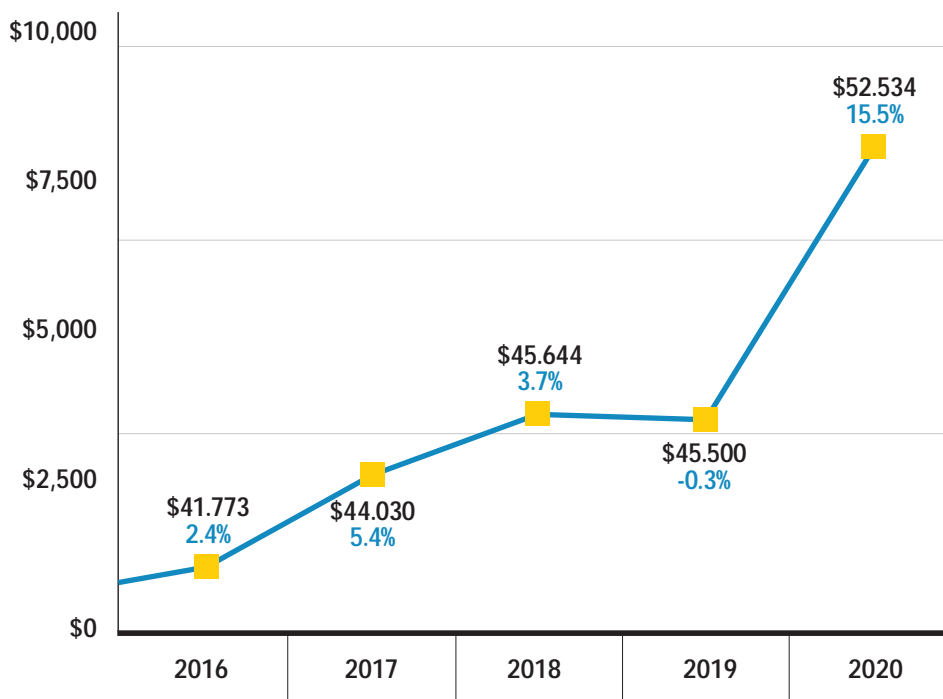
STORES: 182

The Home Depot Canada has ranked at the top of the list for yet another year. In 2020, its parent company, Atlanta-based The Home Depot, had net earnings of \$12.9 billion on sales of \$132.1 billion, which were up 19.9 percent from last year.

A classic big box retailer, with stores averaging 120,000 square feet in size, Home Depot has been growing its online sales, and like most retailers over the past year, that side of the business has become more important than ever. The pandemic has forced retailers to focus on an online strategy. Online sales continued to be strong for the retailer, which grew by approximately 86 percent in fiscal 2020. The increase was due to limitations on in-store shopping due to COVID-19 restrictions.

During the DIY boom through 2020, Home Depot made a major investment in home décor e-retail. Home Depot supports an "inter-connected strategy," which relies

Size of the industry year over year (sales \$billions)



on online and in-store sales, with its 182 stores in Canada acting as pick-up points for many of those online sales. The company continues to focus on sales to contractors and builders, with dedicated house brands, plus services such as same-day job site delivery and heavy equipment tool rentals.



2. Lowe's Canada

LOCATION: Boucherville, Que.

SALES: \$7.9 billion


STORES: 478

Lowe's Canada holds its spot at number two for 2020 with \$7.9 billion in sales, a 14.2 percent increase from last year. Lowe's business in Canada is quite different from

that of its U.S. parent. Here, it manages a range of banners. Lowe's, Réno-Dépôt, and some of its RONA stores are traditional big boxes, while its other stores are building centres and hardware stores. Under the Dick's Lumber banner, the company operates five stores in western Canada that cater to contractors.

Lowe's Canada also operates like a traditional wholesaler for 240 RONA affiliated dealers and, up until early this year, for Ace-bannered stores. Until early 2020, Lowe's Canada had the license for the Ace banner in Canada until it was sold to Peavey in March. The company acted as the wholesale supplier and banner manager for a group of more than 100 independents across the country.

In 2020, Lowe's Canada introduced a program, VIPpro, for pros and contractors. The program ties pro customers in digitally with a corresponding app, and reflects the company's ongoing efforts to grow this customer base.

A high-angle, top-down photograph of a person fishing in a stream. The person is wearing a light-colored long-sleeved shirt, a grey fishing vest with orange accents, and a light-colored cap. They are holding a fishing rod with both hands. The water is dark and rippled, and several large, smooth rocks are visible in the stream. The overall scene is serene and outdoorsy.

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3. Home Hardware Stores Limited

LOCATION: St. Jacobs, Ont.

SALES: \$7.7 billion

STORES: 1,071

Home Hardware sits in the same spot as last year at number three. This year the company saw an estimated 17.3 percent increase in sales, with \$7.73 billion in sales. Home Hardware stores are typically focused on hardware and housewares, often serving as the “general store” for a local community. Two banners represent the company’s building supply stores: home centres (Home Hardware Building Centre) and building centres (Home Building Centre).

The company has expanded into several product categories in recent years, notably heavy appliances and maintenance, repair, and operations (MRO). Paint is another key category. Home has its paint factory.

Home Hardware expanded its market share in Quebec when one of its members, Groupe Turcotte, acquired Patrick Morin in early 2021. The deal involved all 21 Patrick Morin stores and a distribution centre.



4. Canadian Tire Retail

LOCATION: Toronto, Ont.

RELATED SALES: \$7.32 billion

STORES: 504

Canadian Tire Corp. is a major Canadian retailer with total sales over \$12 billion. In

the hardware and home improvement sector, its Canadian Tire Retail stores (CTR) are dealer-owned, with sales and merchandising managed by head office.

Canadian Tire Retail saw a 17.8 percent increase in sales for 2020, putting them at number four. (Note: for purposes of measuring the industry and ranking retailers fairly, we estimate Canadian Tire’s related hardware, housewares, and home improvement sales only.)

This hardlines mass merchant has 504 stores across Canada in 2021. Canadian Tire has remained focused on developing a strong and sustainable portfolio of national and private-label brands.

Due to COVID-19, the company served customers online, offering curbside pickup, and delivery-to-home across its retail banners. For 2020, e-commerce sales by Canadian Tire retail stores were up by 250 percent. A big part of its online strategy is its digital loyalty program. The company had 1.8 million new members sign up for the Triangle Rewards credit card and loyalty program in 2020. Of that, 600,000 members joined the Triangle points program and contributed \$168 million in sales.



5. Independent Lumber Dealers Co-operative

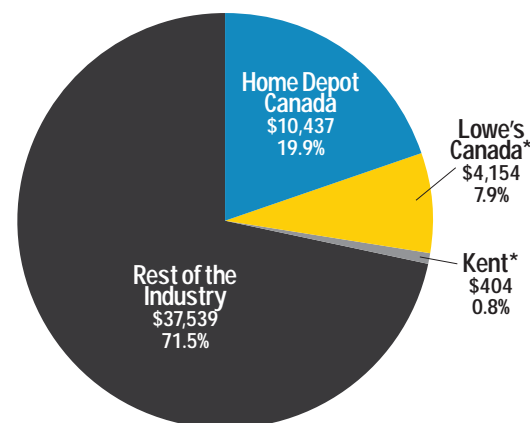
LOCATION: Ajax, Ont.

SALES: \$4.4 billion

STORES: 526

ILDC holds its spot at number five with \$4.4 billion in sales, an eight percent increase from last year. It has a core of 21 independent chain members, comprising more than 500 outlets. Many of the retailers are multi-outlet, independent operations,

Market share of big box stores



* Sales from these retailers' big box stores only.

represent some of the leading independent dealers in their respective markets, such as Kent in Atlantic Canada, London, Ont.-based Copp's Building Materials, and McMunn & Yates on the Prairies.

The buying co-operative has other large retail groups in its membership, namely Saskatoon-based Federated Co-operatives Ltd. and BMR Group, which is itself both a wholesaler and a buying group.



6. TIMBER MART

LOCATION: Ajax, Ont.

SALES: \$3.5 billion

STORES: 600

TIMBER MART has bannered and non-bannered stores that have an estimated annual of \$3.5 billion in 2020 for its 600 members. TIMBER MART has been strategically expanding its commercial division, which provides important volume for the buying group.

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// The communication between the TORBSA office and members is exceptional. //

With the market always changing, it is nice to know we have the TORBSA team with us to navigate through the market. Having the ability to call any member at anytime when help is needed is a huge advantage when competing against multinational companies. Keeping our independence and working with the TORBSA group is a great mix.



Blaine Carter
GENERAL MANAGER
WOOLLATT BUILDING SUPPLY

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According to president Bernie Owens, TIMBER MART has the highest volume of drywall purchases of any buying group in Canada. In April 2020, RenoRun Inc. joined the buying group. RenoRun is a building materials delivery business that offers residential contractors and builders over 20,000 building material products through its app.



7. Sexton Group

LOCATION: Winnipeg, Man.

SALES: \$2.4 billion

STORES: 436

Sexton Group saw an 11 percent increase in sales last year. Sexton has stores across the country but has a primary focus in western Canada. Ace Canada, a division of Peavey established a business arrangement with Sexton. Under the joint supply agreement, Ace dealers, who now get their hardware supplied through Peavey, will have access to the LBM offerings of Sexton's programs. Sexton members will likewise have access to the hardware products and programs of Ace Canada.



8. Castle Building Centres Group

LOCATION: Mississauga, Ont.

SALES: \$2.35 billion

STORES: 293

Castle saw a little over a 10 percent jump this year in sales. The increase was the result of a combination of dealer recruitment, price increases, and same-store sales

Buying group sales and market shares

Buying Group	2020	Market Share
BMR Group*	\$1,364,250,000	2.6%
Castle Building Centres	\$2,354,800,000	4.5%
Delroc Industries	\$811,000,000	1.5%
Home Hardware**	\$5,567,112,000	10.6%
ILDC*	\$3,052,123,000	5.9%
Sexton Group	\$2,430,000,000	4.6%
TIMBER MART	\$3,526,000,000	6.7%
TORBSA	\$650,000,000	1.2%
Rest of the Industry	\$32,753,375,000	62.4%
Buying Groups	\$19,781,285,000	37.6%

* BMR's sales have been backed out of ILDC's total, as BMR is also a member of ILDC. Therefore, the total of ILDC's market share will be a combination of BMR and ILDC; ** Sales by Home Hardware's building centre and home centre members only.

increases. Castle members rely on Orgill, the Memphis-based hardware distributor, for their hardware needs. The group has managed to secure many smaller dealers, including many startups, effectively providing a supported program for home improvement retail in many smaller, rural centres, including with First Nations dealers.



9. BMR Group

LOCATION: Boucherville, Que.

SALES: \$2.35 billion

STORES: 273

BMR Group is owned by Sollio Groupe

Coopératif (formerly La Coop fédérée). It claims to be the largest home improvement retailer held exclusively by Quebec interests. BMR started many new partnerships over the last year. BMR partnered with Société Laurentide to launch a new house brand of paints under the brand Splendi and Splendi Supreme. It also partnered with RénoAssistance, a subsidiary of Desjardins Group, to offer customers in the Montreal region access to a pool of more than 1,200 contractors.

Earlier this year, Alexandre Lefebvre, president of Lefebvre & Benoît, became CEO at BMR Group. BMR reached in 2019 to acquire a stake in Lefebvre & Benoît and has remained its main shareholder ever since. Lefebvre replaced Pascal Houle, who has led BMR since 2015. Houle moved back to the parent company Sollio as COO.



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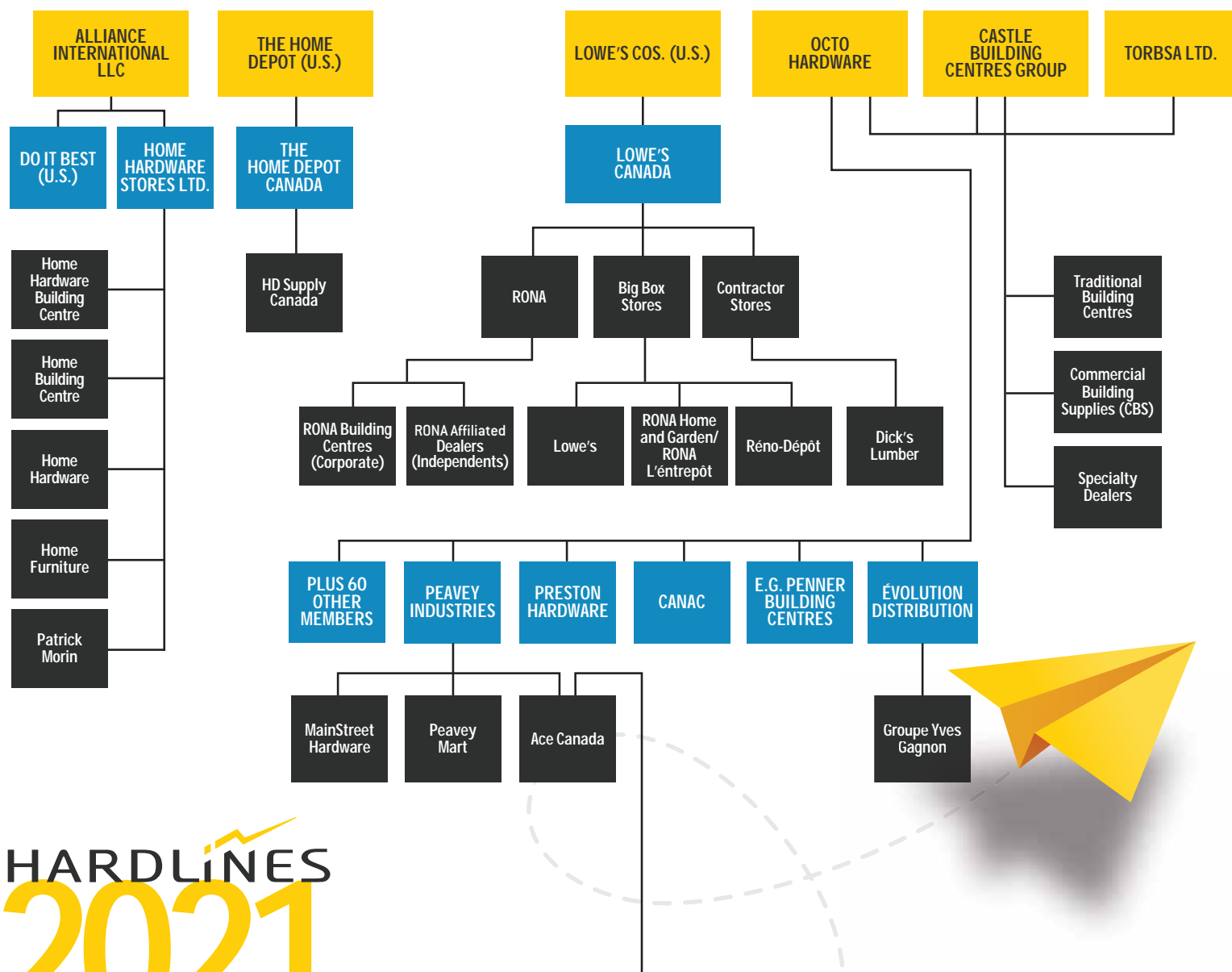
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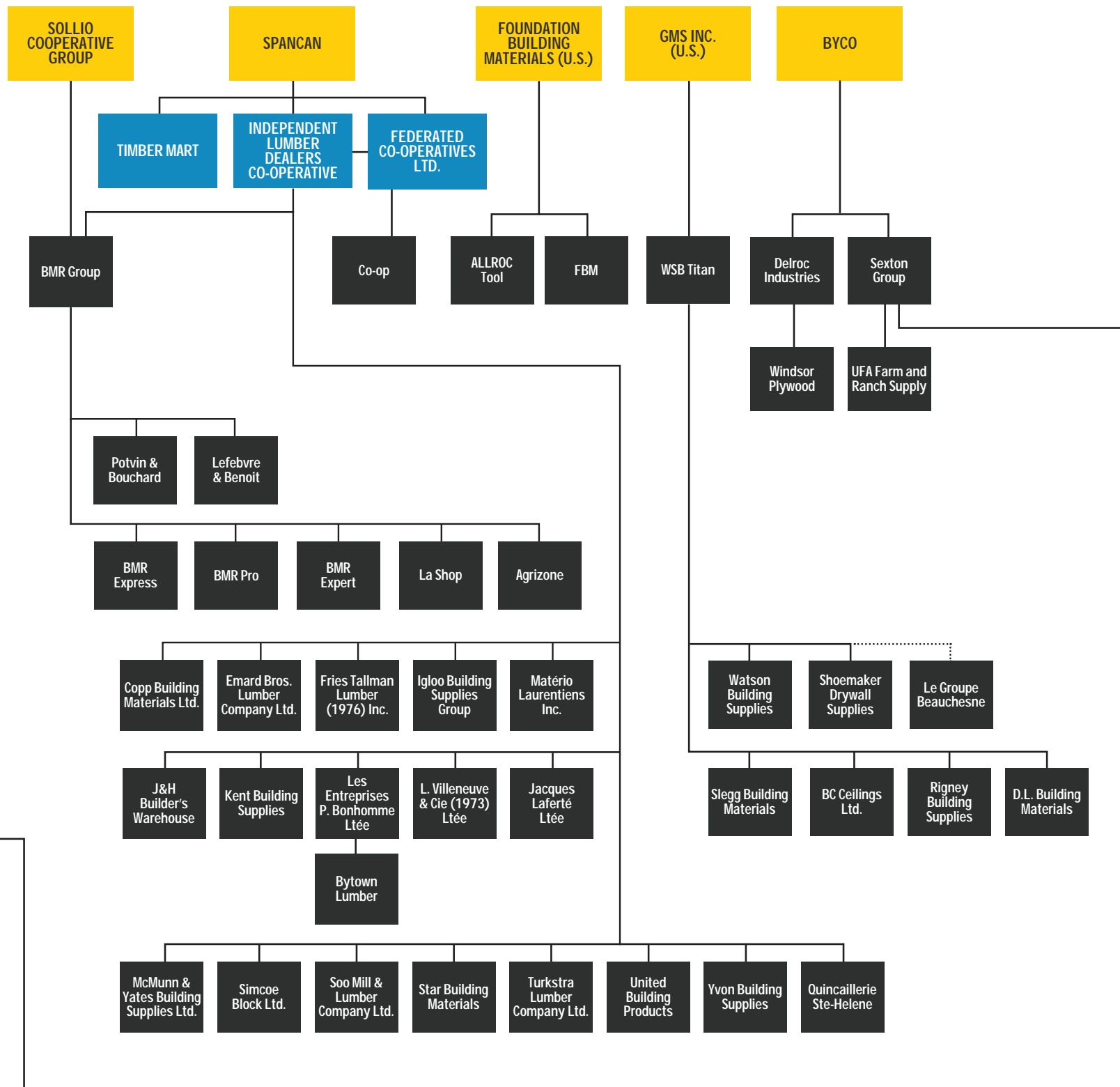
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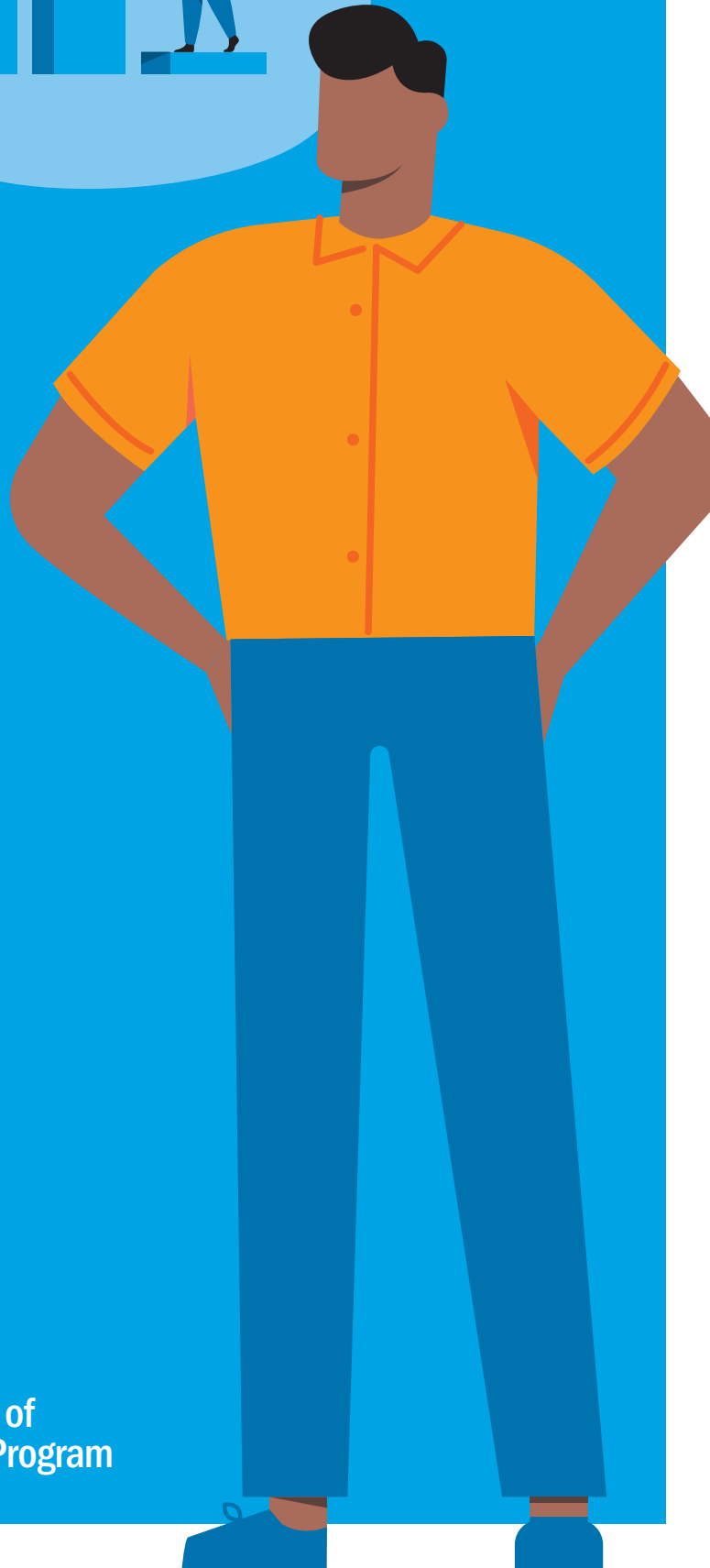


HARDLINES 2021 BANNER MAP

As part of our annual coverage of the Canadian home improvement industry, here we break down the major banners and how they're connected.

NOTE: The placement of the groups in this chart does not intend to rank them in any way, but merely to show how they are related.





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10. Kent Building Supplies

LOCATION: St. John, N.B.

SALES: \$1 billion

STORES: 49

Kent is a major brand in Atlantic Canada and part of J.D. Irving family of companies. It saw a 14.2 percent increase in sales this year, putting it halfway through the list at number 10. In February 2020, a report presented to the Moncton city council revealed Kent has plans to open a 10th big box store in the city. Kent is aiming to open a 100,000 square-foot store by 2022, replacing a truck terminal. Exchange Solutions partnered with Kent Building Supplies to develop an online loyalty program.



11. Canac

LOCATION: Quebec City

SALES: \$1.1 billion

STORES: 31

Canac is a family-owned chain of large-format home centres that goes to market as a low-cost retailer. Ongoing expansion, along with its presence in the buoyant Quebec marketplace, last year resulted in sales climbing by 22.9 percent, reflecting the buoyancy of the Quebec market overall as well as the appeal of the low-price model Canac sells under and the addition of new stores. The company is primarily in the Quebec region but it has ambitions for growth. It announced two new store openings in 2021 and plans to build its first store in Ontario, in the Ottawa region, within the next year.



12. GMS – WSB Titan

LOCATION: Surrey, B.C.

SALES: \$855 million

STORES: 40

WSB Titan is a Canadian subsidiary of Gypsum Management & Supply Inc. (GMS), a large chain of gypsum supply outlets based in Atlanta. WSB Titan, the Canadian subsidiary of GMS, is a commercial dealer group, consisting of a union of three dominant regional gypsum supply dealers. In Canada, GMS represents more than 40 locations, and it continues to acquire independents, including most recently D.L. Building Materials, which has a location in Gatineau, Que., and another in Kingston, Ont. The acquisition also marks GMS's first location in Quebec.



13. Delroc Industries

LOCATION: Langley, B.C.

SALES: \$811 million

STORES: 136

Delroc saw a six percent increase in sales from last year. The privately-owned buying group, founded in 1974 by Bruno Mauro, focuses on LBM purchases and prides itself on its lean operations. It's strongest in British Columbia, where it has 69 dealers, followed by Alberta with 27. Its presence lessens in Eastern Canada. It has 19 dealers in Ontario, but in Atlantic Canada, it has only four dealers. Key members include Dryco Building Supplies—also owned by Mauro—and Windsor Plywood, which specializes in moulding and millwork.



14. TORBSA

LOCATION: Bolton, Ont.

SALES: \$650 million

STORES: 39

TORBSA focuses on commercial yards and GSDs. The buying group saw a 12.8 percent jump in sales this year. Due to its smaller size, the group is well known for the fellowship among its members. Most of those members are in Ontario, specifically in the Greater Toronto Area, except for its largest member, Crown Building Supplies, in Surrey, B.C.

The group has become more focused on growing its membership, especially in Quebec, adding four new members since the beginning of 2021. In addition, it joined the "Well Made Here" initiative, which campaigns to encourage consumers to buy Canadian, as a major partner this year.



15. Federated Co-operatives

LOCATION: Saskatoon, Sask.

SALES: \$ 556 million

STORES: 108

FCL is a Saskatoon-based dealer-owned co-op farm, feed, fuel and retail hardware and grocery store wholesaler with a network of retail co-op members throughout Western Canada. They operated under the Co-op banner. While FCL supplies members that sell everything from farm and feed to groceries, sales included here are from their home centre stores through

its Home and Building Solutions division (HABS).

Over the past few years, these stores have undergone refurbishing of their front ends. More recently, investments have been made to streamline the back end to accommodate contractors and heavy DIYers more effectively.



16. Peavey Industries

LOCATION: Red Deer, Alta.

SALES: \$ 475 million

STORES: 94

Peavey Industries operates a chain of

more than 90 farm and ranch stores. Most operate under the Peavey Mart banner. Another three stores are branded MainStreet Hardware. Based in Red Deer, Alta., where it has a 200,000-square-foot distribution centre, Peavey has stores that range in size from 10,000 to 35,000 square feet. They feature a wide assortment of hardware, farm and pet, automotive and home improvement products.

After acquiring Ontario-based TSC Stores in 2017, Peavey converted these to the Peavey Mart banner by early 2021. In early 2020, it acquired the licence for Ace Hardware in Canada and now serves as the wholesale supplier for almost 100 of these stores across the country.

In November 2020, Ace Canada, a division of Peavey Industries LP, established an arrangement with buying group Sexton

Group Under the joint supply agreement, Ace dealers, who now get their hardware supplied through Peavey, will have access to the LBM offerings of Sexton's programs. Sexton members will likewise have access to the hardware products and programs of Ace Canada.



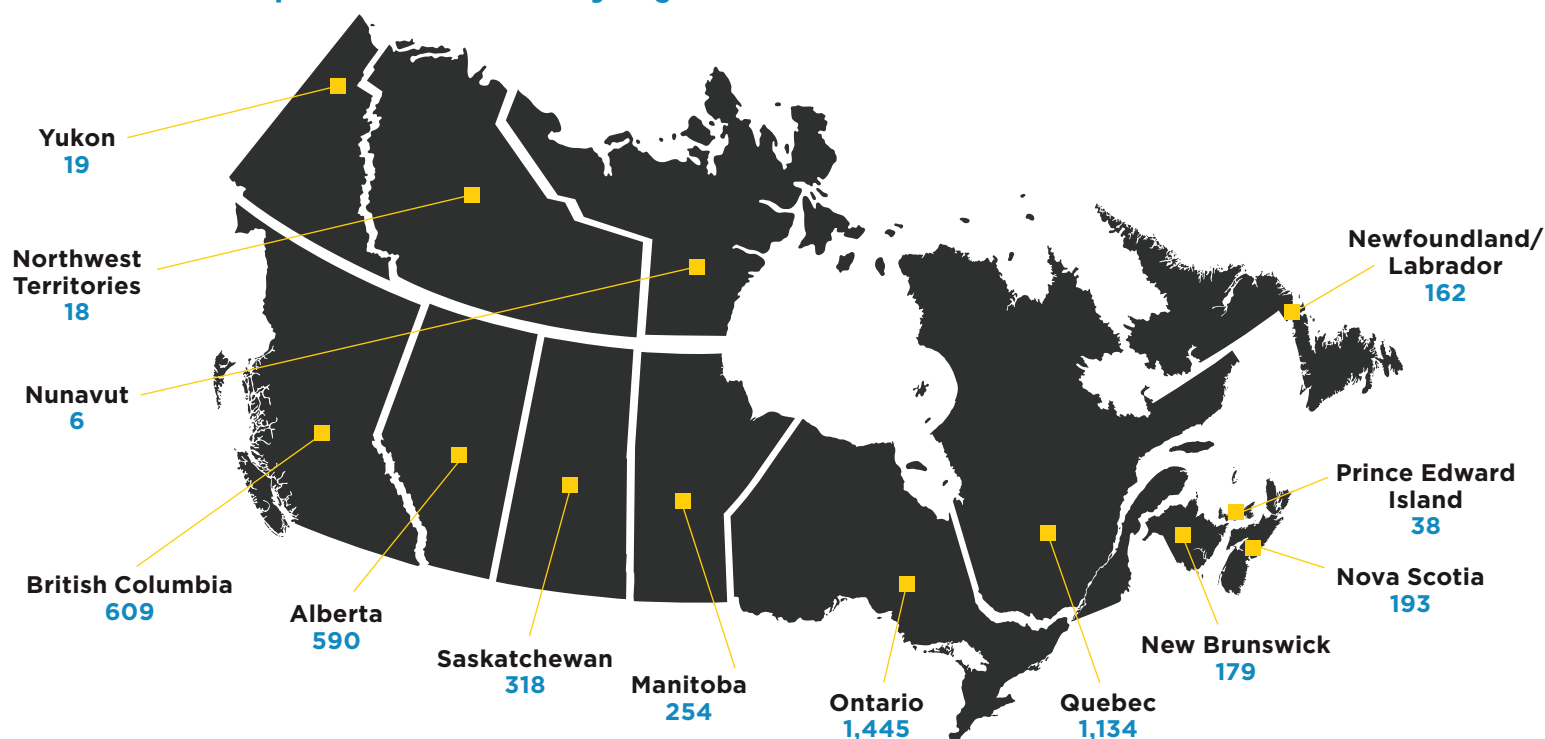
17. United Farmers of Alberta Co-operative

LOCATION: Calgary, Alta.

SALES: \$367 million

STORES: 34

Total home improvement stores by region



UFA is a co-operative retailer meeting the needs of more than 120,000 member-owners, as well as non-members, and is one of the significant hardlines players in the West. A member of Sexton Group, the Calgary-based co-op business has 34 UFA Farm and Ranch Supply stores throughout Alberta. These stores specialize in farm supplies, hardware and lumber. UFA saw a 4.6 percent increase in sales from 2019. Under COVID, UFA has enjoyed the move by customers to shop local, combined with an influx of people to smaller communities.



18. Foundation Building Materials

LOCATION: Santa Ana, Calif.

SALES: \$351 million

STORES:

FBM specializes in wallboard and accessories, suspended ceilings systems, metal framing, and commercial and industrial insulation. Canadian sales in 2020 are estimated at \$350.6 million from just over two dozen locations. FBM is growing in Canada, mainly through the acquisition of independent commercial dealers.



19. Patrick Morin

LOCATION: Saint-Paul, Que.

SALES: \$ 346 million

Patrick Morin is one of the leading retail

Top 20 (sales \$millions)

Rank	Company	2019	2020	Change
1	The Home Depot Canada	\$8,845	\$10,437	18.0%
2	Lowe's Canada	\$6,911	\$7,891	14.2%
3	Home Hardware Stores	\$6,590	\$7,732	17.3%
4	Canadian Tire Retail ¹	\$6,220	\$7,327	17.8%
5	ILDC	\$4,087	\$4,416	8.0%
6	TIMBER MART	\$3,029	\$3,526	16.4%
7	Sexton Group	\$2,190	\$2,430	11.0%
8	Castle Building Centres	\$2,135	\$2,355	10.3%
9	BMR Group*	\$1,300	\$1,364	4.9%
10	Kent Building Materials*	\$945	\$1,079	14.2%
11	Canac	\$875	\$1,075	22.9%
12	GMS/WSB Titan	\$762	\$855	12.2%
13	Delroc	\$765	\$811	6.0%
14	TORBSA	\$576	\$650	12.8%
15	Federated Co-operatives*	\$516	\$556	7.8%
16	Peavey Industries	\$433	\$475	9.7%
17	UFA Ltd.**	\$351	\$367	4.6%
18	FBM/Winroc	\$325	\$351	8.0%
19	Patrick Morin*	\$313	\$346	10.5%
20	Windsor Plywood***	\$262	\$306	16.8%
TOTAL		\$43,743	\$50,331	15.1%

¹ Excludes automotive, sporting goods, and other non-related products; * BMR, Kent, FCL, and Patrick Morin are included with ILDC, so their sales have been backed out of the total to avoid double-counting; ** UFA is included with Sexton, so its sales have been backed out of the total to avoid double-counting; *** Windsor Plywood is included with Delroc, so its sales have been backed out of total to avoid double-counting.

home improvement chains in Quebec and a popular DIY destination. Formerly a member of ILDC, it was bought out in February 2021 by Groupe Turcotte, a group of seven Quebec Home Hardware stores. Under the new ownership, Daniel Lampron was reinstated as Patrick Morin's VP and COO. Lampron previously served as the company's managing director from 2011 to 2018.




20. Windsor Plywood

LOCATION: Langley, B.C.

SALES: \$306 million

STORES: 26

Windsor Plywood is a privately held

chain of mid-sized building centres based in Langley, B.C. It specializes in plywood and specialty woods and trim, as well as doors and flooring. It has a sizeable North American presence with 26 stores in Canada and five stores in the American Pacific Northwest. With a handful of exceptions, the Windsor Plywood outlets are owned and operated by independent dealers on a franchise basis. 

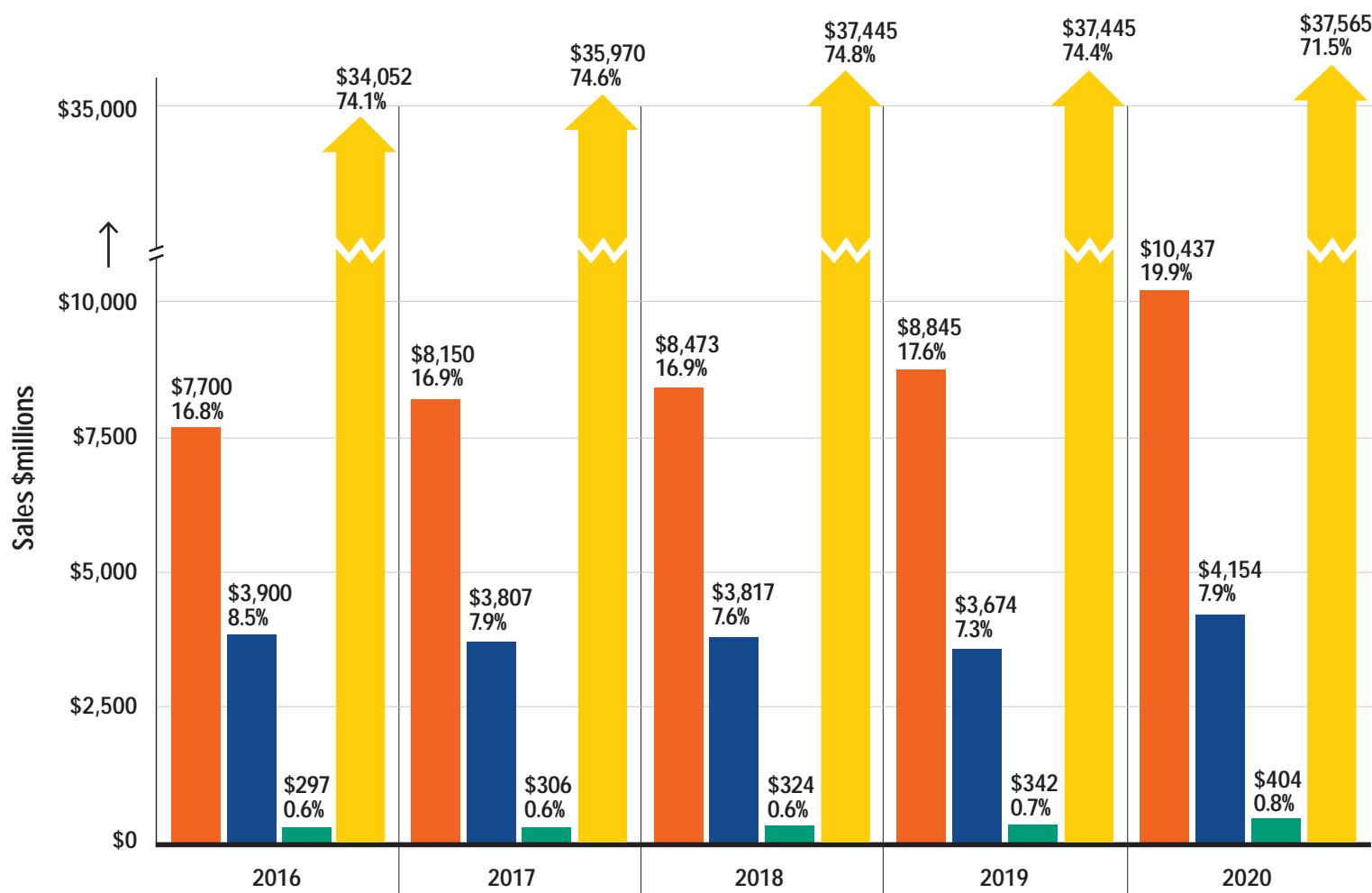
Big box sales (\$millions) and market share (%)

■ Home Depot Canada

■ Lowe's Canada*

■ Kent*

■ Rest of the Industry



* Sales from these retailers' big box stores only.

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BY MICHAEL McLARNEY

AS COVID SPURS EXODUS FROM CITIES, UFA FINDS GROWTH IN RURAL WESTERN MARKETS

The pandemic has disrupted markets and triggered a moving boom among homeowners. Through it all, this Alberta farm and ranch retailer holds the course, with investments in e-commerce, procurement practices, and its supply chain.

UFA is a co-operative retailer meeting the needs of more than 120,000 member-owners, as well as non-members, and is one of the significant hardlines players in the West. With the surge in growth in the farm and ranch sector, business has been solid. At this year's annual general meeting, delegates approved a patronage dividend of \$14.2 million.

Glenn Bingley is vice president, agribusiness and supply chain at UFA. The agribusiness division has 34 retail Farm & Ranch

supply stores, which sell a large variety of agricultural-related products to agriculture—farms and ranches—and acreage customers. That includes everything from feed to fencing and livestock supplies.

The retail side includes UFA's commercial business. More than 50 customer account managers provide expertise on commercial crop and livestock production. Crop inputs (seed, chemicals, and fertilizer), grain storage and equipment, and farm structures are all sold through the retail stores.

That retail presence has been focused more in recent years on its core business—the rural customer. In 2017, UFA closed down its sporting goods business, Wholesale Sports Canada Ltd., which had 12 retail locations in Western Canada. Recently, UFA invested in a new enterprise resource planning (ERP) platform. The system was adopted to tie in all the company's various systems, including purchasing, inventory, and order processing, replacing an existing POS system.



INVESTING IN EXISTING STORES

While the co-operative has not added to its retail footprint for a few years—in fact, two years ago it offloaded a separate building centre it had owned in Fort McMurray—it has been investing in refreshes of existing stores to keep up with the trends in customer preferences. As a result, organic growth continues to drive same-store sales and sales per square foot.

Bingley is excited about what the future holds. Trends by customers to shop local, combined with an exodus of people from the big cities, make for good business at UFA.

“There’s been a whole revitalization of the rural markets. Whether that means people moving to a farm or people getting a second home in a rural location, we’ve seen real growth,” he says.

A STRATEGY FOR ONLINE GROWTH

At UFA, developing an integrated online strategy for its bricks-and-mortar stores has been an important part of the company’s agenda during the past year. Glenn Bingley, vice president, agribusiness and



supply chain at UFA, says e-commerce has become a big driver for the company.

“We went live with buy-online, pick up instore at all our stores last year. We are committed to giving customers personalized options for how they do business, whether it’s in-store or online, and we will continue to invest heavily in our e-comm platform and technology,” he says.

“In fact, since the very beginning, UFA has continuously adapted to changing

Under VP Glenn Bingley, UFA’s Farm & Ranch Supply stores have been focused on getting closer to the rural and acreage customer.

times and technology by expanding our product and service offerings, so that we can provide our members and customers with what they need and where they need it.”

The business has been focused on a whole range of areas, Bingley adds. “These include improving our supply chain and our logistics, as well as our distribution and procurement. We’ve actually streamlined our supply chain and we’re going to be making investments to strengthen our supply chain even further.”

REFINED ASSORTMENTS

On the procurement side, UFA is refining its assortments.

“We’ve added more products related to livestock health and feed. For example, we’re proud to have introduced ProStock, UFA’s brand of minerals, forage seed, and milk replacers,” says Bingley. “ProStock provides a range of products to ensure the health and well-being of animals. We are



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always looking at new offerings for our members and customers.”

He adds that the company has performed a series of category reviews over the last couple of years to improve assortments for core customers—the farmer, rancher, and the acreage owner.

“Another area that has grown rapidly for us has been lawn and garden and outdoor living to support the rural lifestyle.”

This past year has demonstrated the importance of UFA being open and ready to serve customers.

“Agriculture is essential, and we needed to be there to help the business of agriculture move forward,” says Bingley. “We’ve been around for over a century, we were there this past year, and we will be there in the future.”



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BY JOHN CAULFIELD

OUTSIDE IN: VIRTUAL MEETINGS SUSTAIN CONTRACTOR SALES

*Retailers note that more pros are ordering online, too.
But as sales climb, so do receivables.*

Watson's TIMBER MART's two locations, in Courtright and Wyoming, Ont., get more than half of their annual sales from remodelers and home builders. So when the pandemic was declared in March 2020, Watson's owner, John Dobson, admits he was "scared."

Dobson was scared that his four contractor salespeople and three other employees who take measurements for homeowners' installation projects, would be prohibited by safety protocols from performing their jobs, and therefore lose contact with their customers.

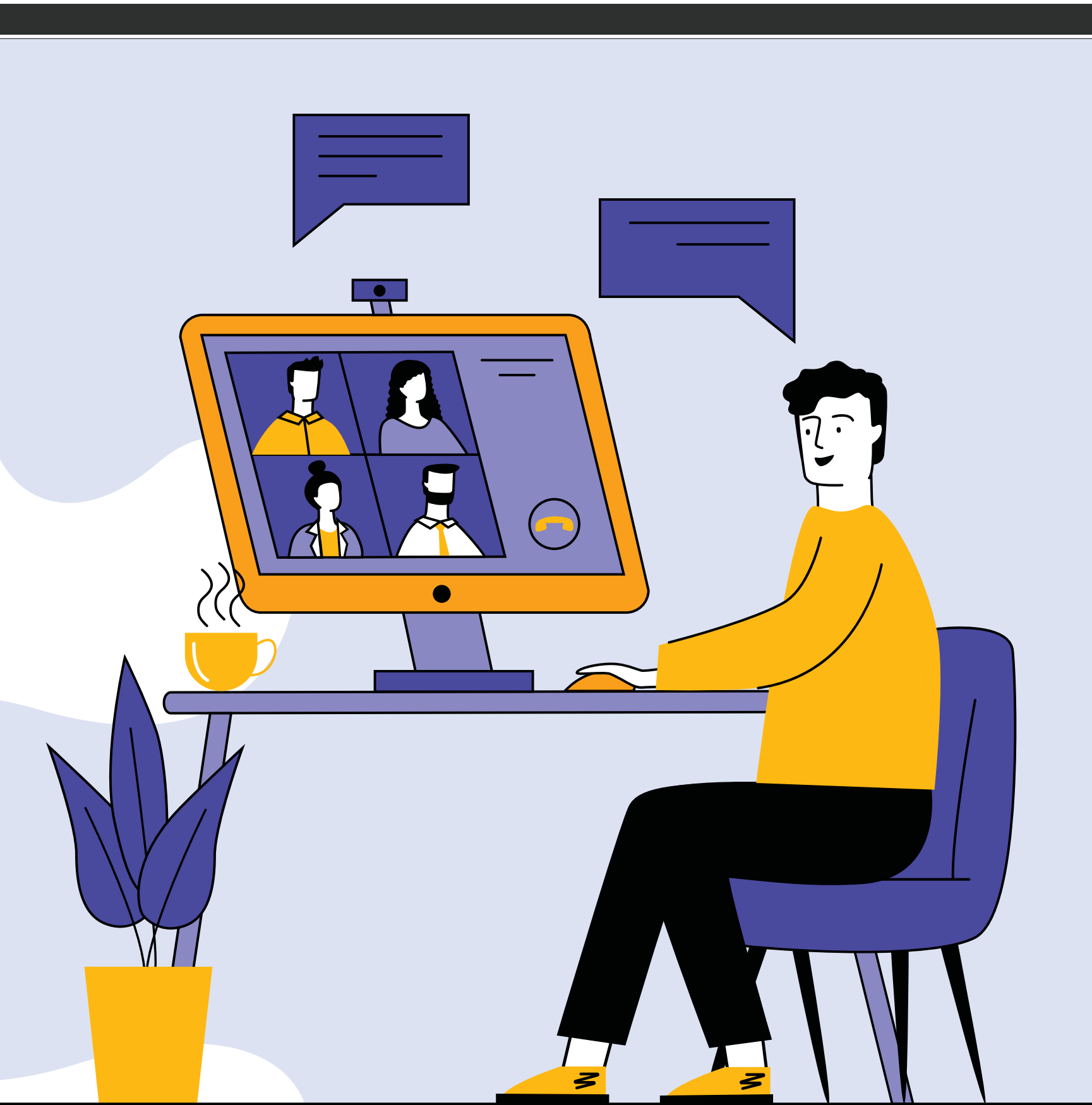
That didn't happen. Watson's sales rose by 21 percent in 2020. And safety protocols turned out to be less inhibiting than expected. "Our outside salespeople didn't have to change much, and they went right to job sites early every morning," says Dobson.

Watson's TIMBER MART was more the exception than the rule, though, as other home-improvement retailers chose to limit their outside salespeople's face-to-face interactions with pros.

"They still go to job sites, but a lot of their contact with customers is now virtual or electronic," says Jake Draper, director of

contractor operations for London, Ont.-based Copp's Buildall, about the 10 to 12 outside salespeople who support Copp's four locations.

To keep those salespeople connected with the field, Copp's equipped each of them with cameras so they could conduct Zoom calls with clients. The Quebec-based retailer Patrick Morin is still sending its people out to job sites for major projects. But it also supplied new laptops to its district and regional managers, who double as outside salespeople for the company's 20 locations, so they could communicate with pro customers via Zoom, Microsoft Teams,



and other platforms without having to go onto construction areas.

“We’re trying to use the latest communications and messaging software so our people can contact customers directly and respect social distancing protocols,” says general manager Daniel Lampron. “It’s worked pretty well so far.”

Prior to the pandemic, the 11 outside salespeople who support Standard Building Supplies’ two locations were working primarily out of offices at the company’s headquarters in Burnaby, B.C. But now, “they are 100 percent on the road or home-based,” says owner Majid Tasharofi.

Standard provided the salespeople with

Copp’s customers now mostly order via email or text, which Draper says has made order management a bit more complicated. Copp’s delivers many of those orders, but customers who choose to pick up products at Copp’s stores are asked to stay in their vehicles and let store employees load the orders to minimize contact.

Before the pandemic, Standard Building Supplies had set up a dedicated email address and phone line, staffed by two or three people, to handle orders. The company’s stores are self-service, so its customers can pick up products and avoid having contact with employees.

Like many dealers, Patrick Morin experienced a “huge” increase in online sales last

When his company opens an account for a pro customer, it used to be for \$50,000 to cover the initial purchase of materials for a particular job. Now, that account opens at \$100,000 to \$125,000.

“My accounts receivables have doubled,” says Cyr. Consequently, he’s put more of the onus on his salespeople to vet customers’ creditworthiness. Fortunately, his bad debt has been minuscule: on about \$40 million in annual revenue from supplying construction and renovation projects, Fraser Valley has written off less than \$100,000.

The other dealers interviewed say their customers aren’t having trouble paying their bills, at the moment when home improvement activity is bustling. “And our accountant keeps an eye on them,” says Dobson.

But Tasharofi of Standard Building Supplies concedes that credit is always a concern when prices on some building products have tripled. His salespeople are part of Standard’s effort to rate customers based on their payment histories. Over the past year, Standard has had to say no to some “C” and “D” rated customers when they’ve asked for credit line extensions.

“Our inventory value and cost of inventory rose 60 percent last year, and we’ve projected a 50 percent increase this year.”

new laptops for Zoom meetings and to stay in touch with the company’s centralized purchasing and shipping departments.

This investment in new technology, which the pandemic compelled dealers to make, is likely to pay off in the long run, especially for selling to younger, more tech-savvy pros and homeowners, predicts Ray Cyr, who owns the six-location Fraser Valley Building Supplies in British Columbia. The new equipment that Fraser’s provided its 14 contract salespeople so they could work from home also allows them to tie into the company’s “robust” Enterprise Resource Planning system, says Cyr.

ELECTRONIC ORDERING PICKS UP

The dealers interviewed report that more of their pro customers have been ordering products electronically, a trend they say was evident even before the pandemic hit.

year that has carried into 2021. Lampron observes that customers these days expect quick delivery, regardless of what they’re ordering, “so products need to be well managed.” That’s been a challenge during the pandemic, which created shortages in many commodities, most notably lumber.


Patrick Morin has used electronic communications to keep customers informed about product availability or shipment delays. Dealers also expect their outside sales teams to let customers know as soon as possible about any problems with their orders. Draper says Copp’s outside salespeople do this mostly by email.

Product shortages often instigate price increases. Cyr says Fraser Valley’s unit sales were flat last year, and that revenue increases were attributable to price inflation. “Our inventory value and cost of inventory rose 60 percent last year, and we’ve projected a 50 percent increase this year.”

RETAILERS ENTER THE 21ST CENTURY AND LIKE IT

Until the coronavirus finally dissipates, some of the changes that dealers have made to their outside selling strategies are likely to stick, they say.

Tasharofi intends to keep his salespeople out of the office and in the field as much as possible. Other employees have picked up the paperwork slack, he says. The consensus among retailers is that electronic communications are here to stay, at least for a while. “We could have person-to-person meetings, but why risk it?” says Draper of Copp’s Buildall.

Moving dealers and their customers to greater reliance on virtual communication “is a really big deal because the construction industry has been late to using technology,” says Lampron of Patrick Morin. 



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BY GEOFF McLARNEY

IF THESE WALLS COULD TALK

Since she started working at her family's store as a teenager, Delphine Grégoire has seen plenty of changes, from a new banner to a less male-dominated industry.

It's rare enough to find a hardware store that's been around for a century. Rarer still, one that hasn't moved so much as a block in that time. But BMR Quincaillerie J.R. Grégoire in Montreal has occupied "these four walls," as owner Delphine Grégoire puts it, since her grandfather established the business in 1920.

The store marked the 100th anniversary in the summer of last year when public health restrictions precluded most public events. At the same time, it was passing another milestone with the transition to a new banner. Grégoire says she was attracted to BMR by its "cooperative values" as part of Sollio Cooperative Group.

The working-class, primarily francophone neighbourhood of Hochelaga has seen dramatic changes to its economic life in the past few decades. The industrial players that once drove it have been outsourced by the multinationals that bought them up, leaving high levels of poverty in their wake. In this setting, J.R. Grégoire's durability is even more outstanding.

Grégoire's roots at the store run deep, starting when she was just 17. She represents the third generation at the helm of the business, which was founded by its namesake Joseph-Raphaël Grégoire, Delphine's grandfather. She is also its second female owner, after her mother (an aunt managed the store, but was never owner).

In that time, she has seen the place of women in the industry evolve too. "In my mother's time, it was a strictly male milieu," she says. "Today, the hardware world is pretty mixed."

Grégoire notes that her experience differs



from that of her mother, who came into the business as an adult and had to adapt to its realities. "I was very young, so I integrated myself more easily."

"There still aren't enough women as owners, but we're getting there."

Grégoire has continued her grandfather's tradition of deep involvement in the community. Joseph-Raphaël helped to found a local credit union under the umbrella of the Mouvement des Caisses Desjardins, a critical institution at a time when Montreal's banks were largely off-limits to the French-speaking majority. "He was someone who was always very involved in the community."


For her part, Grégoire has served as president of the local business development council and participates in the Carrefour

jeunesse-emploi, which aids young job seekers in the district.

She has also helped out at Le Chic Resto Pop, a local organization that serves low-cost meals in a converted church and offers training in food service and handling to individuals seeking to re-enter the job market.

Like many independent dealers, Grégoire sees uncertainty around succession. "After me, it's probably the end," she says, optimistic about the prospect. Since she doesn't have children of her own, her nearest heirs are the children of her cousins.

"One of them came to work last summer but he is young, it's too early to say."

Whatever happens, after a century in the same spot, JR Grégoire's place in hardware history is already assured. 



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