FUEL

CHECKLIST FOR NZ TRADE SUPPLIERS

12 things that break B2B online ordering

A practical checklist for New Zealand trade suppliers, wholesalers and distributors putting their catalogue online.

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Who this is for

You sell to trade customers. Builders, sparkies, plumbers, engineers, resellers, councils, other manufacturers. You have hundreds or thousands of SKUs, account customers on terms, pricing that changes by customer, and a sales team that still takes a lot of orders by phone, email and PDF price list.

Why this list exists

Most trade suppliers who try online ordering do not fail because of the design. They fail on the plumbing: pricing, stock, units of measure, account terms, freight and internal ownership. We have built ecommerce for New Zealand businesses since 2002, and the same twelve problems come up again and again. Every one of them is solvable, and most are cheaper to solve before you build than after.

How to use it

Read each point and mark it green, amber or red for your business. Anything red is a scoping conversation you want to have before a single page gets designed. There is a scoring page at the back.

01 Customer-specific pricing is not in the site

WHERE IT BREAKS

Trade customers do not pay list. They pay their price, negotiated over years, sometimes per product group and sometimes per SKU. If the site shows retail pricing to an account holder, they stop trusting it immediately and go back to ringing their rep. Worse, showing your trade pricing publicly hands your margin structure to competitors.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Pricing is pulled per logged-in account, including contract prices, volume breaks and promotional pricing, with the same logic your ERP uses. Guests see either no price or an indicative price with a clear note that account pricing applies.

QUICK CHECK

Can a logged-in customer see the exact price they would be invoiced, including their discount and volume breaks?

02 The whole catalogue sits behind a login

WHERE IT BREAKS

Locking every page behind a login feels safe, and it makes you invisible. Google cannot index products, new buyers cannot research you, and you lose the searches where somebody types a part number at 7pm. You end up with a site that only serves customers you already have.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Product pages are public with specifications, images, data sheets and stock indication. Pricing, availability by branch and ordering sit behind the account login. You get found on part numbers and product names, and gate the commercial detail.

QUICK CHECK

Search Google for one of your part numbers. Do you come up, or does a competitor?

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03 Product data never syncs with the ERP

WHERE IT BREAKS

The catalogue is exported once, loaded into the website, and starts rotting the same week. Prices change in the ERP, the site does not know. New products take a month to appear. Somebody in the office is re-keying orders from the website back into the accounting system by hand, which caps how many online orders you can afford to receive.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

A scheduled sync, or a live integration, moves products, prices, stock and customer accounts out of the ERP and moves orders back in. One source of truth. Nobody re-keys anything.

QUICK CHECK

If a price changed in your ERP this morning, when would the website show it?

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04 Stock availability is missing or dishonest

WHERE IT BREAKS

Trade buyers are usually buying to a job date. A site that says nothing about availability forces a phone call, which defeats the point. A site that says In stock when the item is on a container from Shanghai does more damage than saying nothing.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Real quantities or honest bands (In stock, Low stock, Indent, 3 to 5 days), stock by branch where you have branches, and an expected date on anything not on the shelf. Partial shipping and backorder handling agreed before launch, not after the first complaint.

QUICK CHECK

Does the site tell a customer whether they can have it tomorrow, and is it right?

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05 Units of measure and pack quantities are wrong

WHERE IT BREAKS

This is the most common silent killer in trade ecommerce. Cable sold per metre but stocked in 100m drums. Fittings priced each but sold in boxes of 50. Minimum order quantities and multiples that only live in a rep's head. Get it wrong and you ship a customer one washer, or fifty drums of cable.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Every product carries its selling unit, pack size, order multiple and minimum. The site enforces multiples in the cart and shows both the unit price and the pack price so nobody is guessing.

QUICK CHECK

Take your ten most-ordered lines. Is the selling unit on each of them recorded anywhere other than in a person's head?

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06 Search does not work the way trade customers search

WHERE IT BREAKS

Your customers do not browse categories. They search a part number, a competitor's code, an abbreviation, or a half-remembered description with a typo in it. Default website search matches whole words in a title, returns nothing, and the customer leaves.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Search that handles part numbers with and without dashes, supplier and competitor codes, common misspellings and synonyms, and that filters by the attributes people actually buy on: size, material, voltage, thread, grade.

QUICK CHECK

Search your own site for a product using the code your customer uses, not the one your system uses. Does it find it?

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07 There is no fast way to reorder

WHERE IT BREAKS

The same customer orders the same forty lines every month. If your site makes them find each product again, they will keep emailing the order instead. Reordering, not discovery, is where trade ecommerce actually earns its money.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Order history you can repeat in one click, saved lists and templates per customer, quick order by part number, and bulk upload from a spreadsheet or a scanner file. This is the single feature that moves repeat buyers off email.

QUICK CHECK

How many clicks does it take a regular customer to place last month's order again?

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08 Account customers cannot buy on their terms

WHERE IT BREAKS

Forcing a credit card on a customer with a 30-day account is the fastest way to kill adoption. Their accounts person is not going to put a $14,000 order on a company card. If there is no purchase order field, procurement customers cannot use you at all.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Pay on account for approved customers, with credit limit checks, a mandatory purchase order or reference field, and statements and invoices available in the portal. Card and internet banking offered for cash accounts and new customers.

QUICK CHECK

Can your biggest account customer complete an order without touching a credit card?

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09 Freight rules are too simple for what you actually ship

WHERE IT BREAKS

Flat rate shipping works until somebody orders three lengths of 6m steel to a rural address. Bulky, heavy, dangerous and oversize goods break generic shipping calculators, and the loss lands on you quietly, one order at a time.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Freight calculated on real weight and cubic dimensions, with rules for rural delivery, dangerous goods, oversize items, branch pickup and split shipments. Where it is genuinely unquotable, the site says freight to be confirmed rather than guessing.

QUICK CHECK

Work out the freight cost of your most awkward product to Kaitaia. Would the website get it right?

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10 One login per company, no roles

WHERE IT BREAKS

Trade accounts are not one person. There is a buyer, an approver, someone in the yard, three sites and a head office. A single shared login means no order approvals, no visibility of who ordered what, and a password that gets passed around until it leaks.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Multiple users under one account, with roles and permissions, spending limits, an approval step where the customer wants one, and per-site or per-branch delivery addresses and order history.

QUICK CHECK

Could a customer let an apprentice order consumables but not $5,000 of tooling?

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11 No path between a quote and an order

WHERE IT BREAKS

Plenty of trade orders start as a quote. If quoting lives entirely in email and the website only does add-to-cart, big orders never touch the site, and the sales team keeps doing manual work that the system should carry.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

Customers request a quote from a cart, the rep prices it, and the customer accepts it online. It converts to an order with the quoted pricing intact. Quote history sits alongside order history in the same portal.

QUICK CHECK

What percentage of your revenue starts as a quote? That is the share your website currently cannot touch.

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12 Nobody inside the business owns it

WHERE IT BREAKS

The site launches, everyone claps, and then it is nobody's job. Reps see online ordering as a threat to their commission, so they never mention it to customers. Nobody loads the new products. Six months later the conclusion is that our customers do not buy online, when the truth is nobody ever asked them to.

WHAT GOOD LOOKS LIKE

One named owner internally. Reps paid the same on an online order as a phone order, so they actively push it. A launch plan that onboards your top fifty accounts personally, and a monthly review of adoption, order value and lines per order.

QUICK CHECK

Who in your business gets measured on online order volume?

Score yourself

Count your reds. Zero to two means you are close, and the work is mostly integration and onboarding. Three to six is normal for a first move online, and each one is a scoping decision worth making deliberately. Seven or more means do not start with a website build. Start with the data: pricing, units of measure and stock, in that order.

The pattern we see is simple. Trade suppliers who fix pricing, stock and reordering get adoption from their existing account base within a few months, and the online channel starts pulling in new buyers who found a part number on Google. Suppliers who buy a nice-looking catalogue site without touching the plumbing end up with a brochure.

If you want a second opinion

We have been building ecommerce for New Zealand businesses since 2002, including trade suppliers with large and awkward catalogues. If you want someone to walk your twelve points with you and tell you honestly which ones are real problems and what they cost to solve, that conversation is free and takes about half an hour.

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