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Safety First

How Ace Hardware Titusville Helps Protect Professional Customers

For the residents of Titusville, Florida, space exploration is more than a passing interest—it's a way of life. Located in the heart of what's known as the Space Coast, Titusville residents still stop what they're doing and look up at the sky to watch rockets launch into outer space.

And while NASA's Kennedy Space Center may seem like an impenetrable operation, it relies upon many local businesses to provide products and services to support the scientists, astronauts and employees whose job it is to help us better understand the universe.

In fact, one business that has worked for more than 50 years to support the various Space Coast industries is Ace Hardware Titusville, says store manager Michael Martin.

"Living in Titusville and within the Space Coast has been an important part of my life and our community members' lives," Martin says. "It makes me very proud that our company is a local supplier for NASA and other companies in the space industry. Knowing our services and the products we sell travel out of this state and possibly off of this planet is really cool."

Whether Ace Hardware Titusville is supplying materials to astronauts from NASA or safety equipment to local manufacturers, the operation has earned its reputation as a store all businesses can turn to for the products they need. By monitoring prices and providing prompt delivery and exceptional

customer service, Ace Hardware Titusville continues to cement its importance in the community.

While the products the store sells to B2B customers includes everything from military-grade hardware to army cots, safety equipment is one category that frequently shows up on commercial customers' orders.

Hardware Retailing spoke to both Martin and the store's commercial and industrial sales manager, Candy Mattingly, to learn how the company sells safety equipment and gear to its loyal B2B clients.

For a greater appreciation for the necessity of safety practices and equipment, we also spoke to Cliff Meidl, a safety advocate and a former construction worker who was directly impacted by an accident on a job site. Visit [TheRedT.com/meidl-safety](https://www.theredt.com/meidl-safety) to learn more about Meidl and use his insights to impart the importance of education and training with your customers.

Products That Protect

As a product supplier for a wide variety of companies, Mattingly strives to meet the needs of her B2B customers.

In addition to the Kennedy Space Center, the store's current accounts include major names like the Cape Canaveral Air Force Station, as well as construction and manufacturing companies. Mattingly says she sources products through her co-op, and she does research and places orders for less common products directly from suppliers.





Ace Hardware Titusville offers a wide selection of safety equipment. The safety equipment aisle is mainly shopped by walk-in shoppers who need to pick up safety items, but it also reminds B2B customers of the safety equipment they need to restock for their businesses.

“The items our customers request from us can often be challenging to find,” Mattingly says. “If they request specific items my co-op doesn’t stock, we have a variety of other sources to get the products from, like other vendors, which also may allow us to buy in bulk.”

“Safety equipment is important and often required for just about any of our commercial and industrial accounts. These items save lives and protect people from injuries.”

—Michael Martin, Ace Hardware Titusville

The most frequently ordered products for government facilities and related companies are military-grade nuts and bolts, Mattingly says. All orders are delivered to the store first and are inspected before being delivered to the customer. This ensures that the products a customer receives are not damaged or incomplete, saving them time and guaranteeing a high level of customer service. Many B2B customers need standard inventory items, but some may have a special focus on safety equipment, Mattingly says. Common safety items, or personal protective equipment (PPE), that the store sells includes hard hats, vests, gloves, goggles and glasses. These items are regulated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which is a part of the U.S. Department of Labor. OSHA ensures safe and healthy job site conditions for workers by setting and enforcing

workplace standards and providing training, outreach, education and assistance. “The majority of safety equipment we sell is regulated by OSHA, which the manufacturers producing the safety equipment are required by law to stay up-to-date on,” Mattingly says. “For example, items like respirator cartridges have an expiration date, so I make sure the products we give our customers aren’t out of date. I can look this information up online, but I also rely on the manufacturer to provide us with that information.” To find success selling safety equipment to their B2B accounts, Martin says it’s just as important to sell the items to walk-in customers. “We have an aisle in the store that has all of the items you would need in a variety of industries to stay safe on the job,” Martin says. “Having this area stocked and visible to our walk-in customers is a great way to make them aware of our safety equipment. Plus, this may lead to creating an account with us if they plan on placing a bulk order.” In addition to carrying safety products in the store, Martin says it’s also important to promote the various B2B services your store offers, whether it’s through a website, word-of-mouth or store events that are specifically tailored to pros and commercial accounts. “Safety equipment is important and often required for just about any of our commercial and industrial accounts,” Martin says. “These items save lives and protect people from injuries.”

Keeping Track of Information

For retailers investing in the safety equipment category, staying knowledgeable on the PPE in stock and how long you have before it must be sold or replaced is very important, Mattingly says. And for major organizations like NASA, the equipment has to meet strict regulations in order to ensure their employees are safe on the job. Because these products protect employees from potential injury on the job, OSHA puts an expiration date on products. This ensures an item that has been in stock for multiple years doesn’t get sent out. A product that has reached its expiration date could have developed imperfections or issues, Martin says. “If the item a customer requests from us has an expiration date of the following week, I can’t sell it to them,” Mattingly says. “The good thing about this is that our manufacturers will usually replace these items once they are outdated.” If you decide to start selling safety equipment, it will be important to double-check the dates on these products online and with the manufacturer to ensure you don’t sell outdated products.

Generating Big Business

To succeed in B2B sales, Martin says it’s key to have at least one person focused on generating and maintaining business accounts. He says B2B accounts have been a part of Ace Hardware Titusville nearly as long as the company has been in operation. “Any retailer interested in starting or expanding upon an existing B2B business should have someone leading this aspect of their business if they want it to be profitable,” Martin says.



Most safety equipment on the market is regulated by OSHA. This inventory has strict shelf life dates to ensure workers are using up-to-date safety equipment.

In the past, Ace Hardware Titusville has been successful by hiring commercial and industrial sales managers who have prior experience in sales and are self-starters who work well in an independent environment. Hiring someone who can step in with plans to attract new accounts as well as another employee who is able to devote their time to working closely with commercial and industrial customers every day is key.

If you're looking to hire an outside sales manager to help grow your B2B business, Martin suggests finding an individual who is outgoing, self-motivated and a go-getter.

To market these products, list all of the safety equipment you sell on your website. This will show B2B customers you are a reliable source for all of the products they need.

To keep your B2B business strong, he emphasizes the importance of having a commercial and industrial sales manager like Mattingly. This employee will strengthen the relationship with the client, help place orders and answer questions day-to-day. Even if you have a B2B account that hasn't purchased safety equipment in the past, this sales manager can make it a point to ask if any safety equipment is needed or talk in more detail about the topic if a customer is interested in learning more.

To market these products, list all of the safety equipment you sell on your website. This will show B2B customers you are a reliable source for all of the products they need. The company even has a landing page devoted to its B2B business. The operation provides a list of accounts they have, contact information to get in touch with Mattingly and a list of the products available.

To thank their customers, the team has also hosted targeted events at Ace Hardware Titusville, like contractor-themed gatherings.

"During our previous contractor events, we have invited B2B contractors to come to the store and had tents set up in our parking lot

with demos and product giveaways from manufacturers," Martin says. "This has been a great way to show appreciation to these customers and encourage them to continue working with us."

If you are holding a special contractor event, Martin says including safety vendors can help drive conversation on the category and potentially encourage sales. This invitation gives contractors face time with vendors and arms them with current information on safety products, a category in which understanding current regulations can often be complicated and change frequently.

By hosting the event, you position yourself as the safety expert and the source customers rely on. Attendees will view your team and your product selection as reliable sources of safety equipment.

Educate to Stay Safe

As is the case with any industrial or commercial company doing business with you, it's important to ask questions and deliver the safety items a customer needs.

Since 1970, American workers have been protected by OSHA. Although adhering to OSHA's regulations may seem daunting at first, they are necessary to keep employees across all industries safe on the job. In addition to selling safety equipment, OSHA spokesperson Kimberly Darby recommends retailers encourage their B2B accounts to utilize the educational resources OSHA provides.

"OSHA can provide compliance assistance through a variety of programs, including technical assistance about effective safety and health programs, on-site workplace consultations, training and education," Darby says.

OSHA's On-Site Consultation Program offers free, confidential occupational safety and health services to small and medium-size businesses in all states and several territories across the country, with priority given to high-hazard work sites, according to Darby.

Explain to your customers that utilizing this free training resource is not the same as an enforcement visit, so it won't result in penalties or violations at their job site.

As a supplier of safety equipment in your community, you have the opportunity to gain loyalty with small-scale contractors in this category. Since many contractors are navigating safety regulations on their own, your retail business can help facilitate the free consultations OSHA offers to commercial and industrial customers at their places of work. These resources are just another way to help you build stronger relationships with your B2B customers. ➔

Top 8 Most-Cited OSHA Violations

OSHA releases its most-cited violations for the previous year on an annual basis. This list gives employers a chance to see the most common mistakes made across all industries. Check out this list from 2017 to help your B2B customers focus on ways to prevent accidents.



Fall Protection

Falls are among the most common causes of serious work-related injuries and deaths. OSHA provides strict regulations to prevent falls and injuries, like using guardrails and safety harnesses.



Hazard Communication Standard

All employers handling hazardous chemicals in the workplace must have labels and safety data sheets visible to all workers who are exposed to hazardous chemicals.



Scaffolding

An estimated 2.3 million construction workers work on scaffolding, according to OSHA. Using OSHA-compliant equipment may prevent injuries and deaths from scaffolding accidents.



Respiratory Protection

Respirators protect workers against insufficient oxygen, harmful dusts, fogs, smokes, mists, gases, vapors and sprays, which may cause lung impairment, cancer or death.



Control of Hazardous Energy

Energy sources, including electrical, mechanical, hydraulic, pneumatic, chemicals and others, can be hazardous to workers. Workers can be seriously injured or killed if energy is not properly controlled.



Ladders

Ladders are a major source of injuries and fatalities among construction workers. OSHA has a list of regulations specifically related to the use of ladders employers should be aware of.



Powered Industrial Trucks

Powered industrial trucks, or forklifts, are used in many industries to move or lift materials. Each type of truck poses different operating hazards, so employers should consult OSHA standards.



Machinery and Machine Guarding

Moving machine parts have the potential to cause severe workplace injuries, such as crushed fingers or hands, amputations, burns or blindness. Safeguards are essential to protect workers.



To create a strong commercial and industrial sales business, Ace Hardware Titusville store manager Michael Martin emphasizes the importance of bringing on individuals devoted to both growing new B2B accounts and helping current B2B customers on a day-to-day basis.