

10 Trade Truths

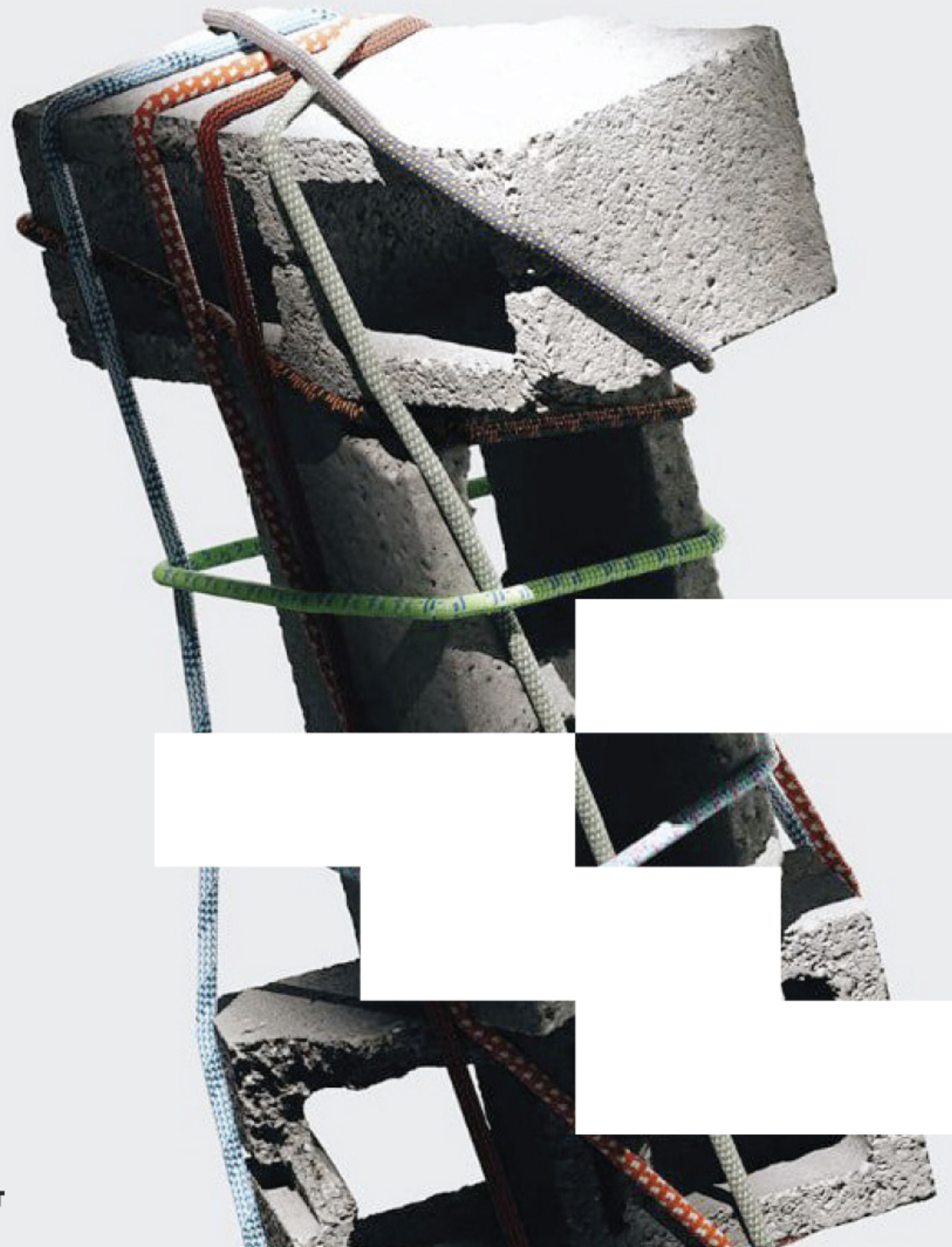
**INSIGHTS FROM
A TRADE IN TRANSITION**



At Trout, we talk to tradies every day, but lately the conversations have shifted – tighter margins, AI creeping into the business, and a growing focus on looking after themselves.

The industry is changing, and workers are feeling it. Here are 10 insights that keep coming up – they've certainly sharpened how we think about the trade.

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Tradies are still busy, but there's less to show for it.

Despite talk of jobs slowing, rising material costs and a shaky economy, the work is there. The real issue is margins – customers can't see what a job actually costs to deliver.

The squeeze has moved from the diary to the invoice, and tradies are learning to live with less on every job.

“We're flat out – it's the margins we have to get used to, not the workload.”

PLUMBER

Our take

Customers can't value what they can't see. The real problem isn't price, it's visibility.

The leaders in the home and built environment space make their value visible. The skill, the materials, the care – because understanding is what makes a price feel fair. When the value is clear, price becomes easier to justify and harder to compete on alone. It's a brand job, and the ones that get it are already pulling ahead.

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AI is changing the office before it changes the worksite.

It's showing up in quotations, variations, safe work method statements and compliance paperwork. One tradie told us admin that used to take him four or five hours now takes just two or three minutes.

So the trade skill isn't what's under threat. The paperwork around it is.

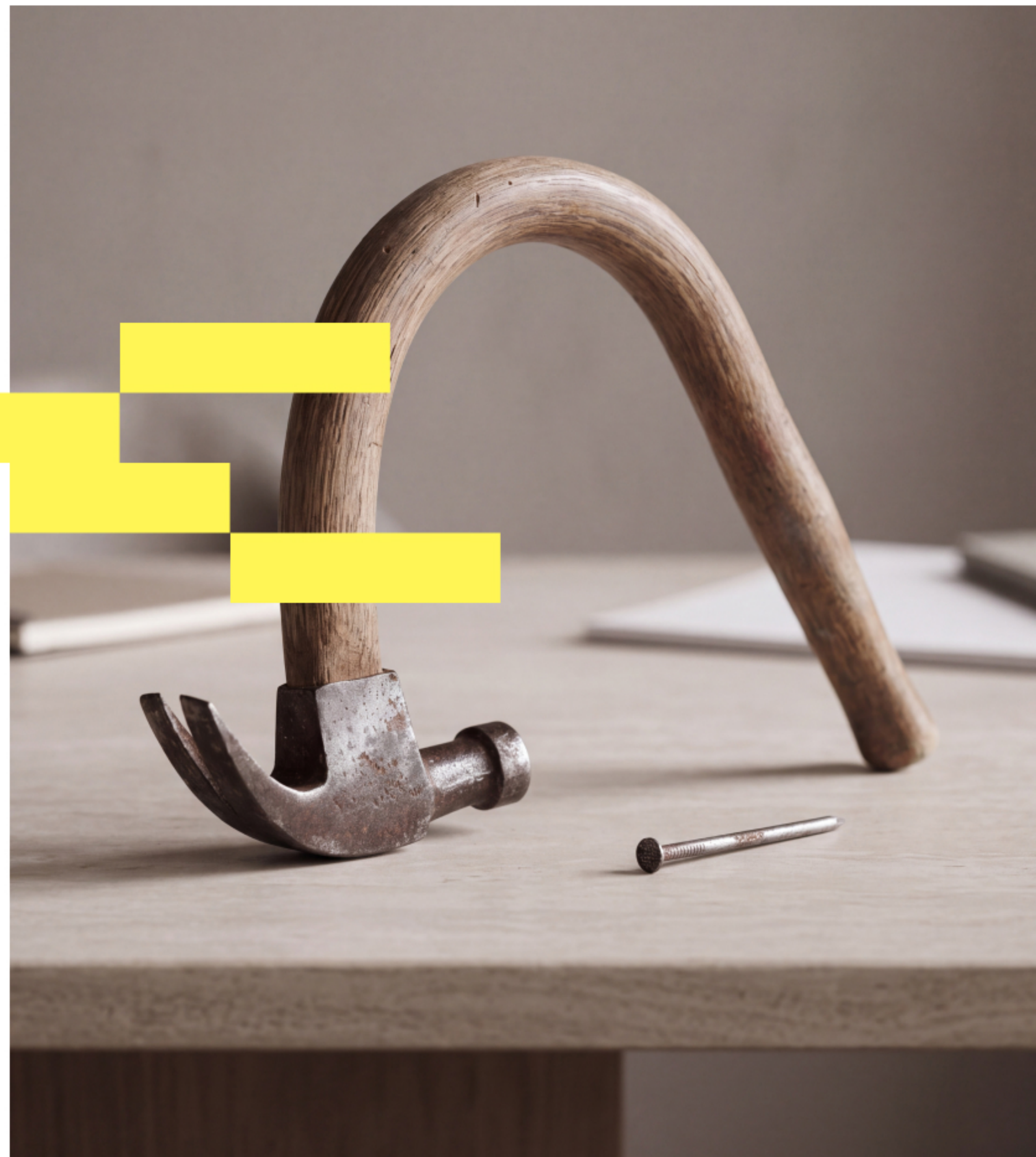
“Admin has always taken me longer than the work, but AI has made a huge difference. It helps with emails, quotes and day-to-day communication, which frees me up to focus on the job itself.”

ELECTRITIAN

Our take

The trade isn't standing still, and neither should the thinking behind it. As technology changes how tradies spend their time, the right questions become more important than ever. What still needs a human touch? Where does expertise matter most? And what will customers come to expect? The answers could reshape everything from a brand's role in the trade, to how it earns trust.

TROUT





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One trade now runs at two different speeds.

AI adoption is splitting the trade. Some tradies are using it to save hours on admin, while others are sticking to familiar ways of working.

As the gap widens, so does the difference in how efficiently businesses can operate.

A significant generational shift is underway as the boomer generation retires and younger workers enter the industry.

Our take

Will the gap close by itself as younger tradies take over? Not necessarily. What gets a tradie to try a new tool is usually trust, not tech. Brands with a clear stance make that trust easy to give, and make new technology feel useful – not like another thing to keep up with.

04 / 10

The biggest fear is the callback.

Tradies aren't losing sleep over the competition. They're worried about product failures, compliance issues and getting called back to fix a job after they've left the site.

It's not the work that keeps them up. It's the work coming back.

The real cost of a product isn't what it costs to buy, but what it costs when it fails.

Our take

Tradies don't always pick the best product. They pick the one least likely to cost them later. That changes what a brand needs to lead with – proof it holds up, reliability over time and performance they can see for themselves. Confidence matters more than clever marketing.





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Problem-solving is the fun part.

Ask a tradie what makes a good day on site and it's rarely the heavy lifting. It's working out what's gone wrong, finding a way around it and getting it right.

The problem isn't what gets in the way of the job. It is the job.

“What tradies love most is the problem-solving – every job's a puzzle that keeps the mind switched on.”

ELEVATOR TECHNICIAN

Our take

If thinking is the job, why is the physical side what we usually see? A product might be easier to show than a problem but tradies want to be seen as problem-solvers, not just installers. That means recognising them as experts. It's a role that brands can play by making their knowledge as visible as the work they do.

06 / 10

YouTube is where tradies go to learn.

Chances are someone has already filmed a walkthrough (that takes 90 seconds, not 90 minutes). For plenty of products, that someone isn't the company that made it.

Whoever explains a product shapes how it's understood.

The people who know a product best aren't usually the ones teaching it.

Our take

Tradies have set the standard for learning content – short, practical and there when they need it. Could trade businesses build learning content as quick and useful as a YouTube tutorial, but as an asset they actually own?





07

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Suppliers inform, peers convince.

Tradies still hear about new products from the people selling them – online, through monthly emails and from reps dropping into stores or sites.

But hearing about a product isn't the same as trusting it.

“We’ll listen to suppliers, but we won’t trust a product ’til a mate’s used it.”

PLUMBER

Our take

Tradies trust proof over promises. Recommendations, real-world experience and peer endorsement carry more weight than marketing claims. So the most convincing story about a product may not come from the brand, but the tradies who’ve already put it to work.

08 / 10

Community forms early.

Most brands arrive after a tradie's network is already set.

Our take

If these connections are formed early, the brands that stand out may be the ones that help tradies connect, not the ones that shout the loudest. Reaching tradies early could mean being part of how their community forms, not just a voice they hear later.





09 / 10

‘Tough it out’ is on the way out.

The ‘push through it’ mentality still exists, but more tradies are putting wellbeing first. Often, it takes an injury before they look after themselves but solo operators are the exception – they know it’s all on them.

Looking after yourself is becoming part of the job.

The tradie identity was built on toughness.
It’s time wellbeing was part of it.

Our take

Brands help decide what normal looks like. Keep glorifying the grind and anyone who slows down looks like they’re falling short. But tradies are already moving on. The brands that move with them will be the ones that show they get it.

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Transport is the hidden cost.

With fuel prices climbing, going from A to B eats into the time and money tradies can put towards the work itself. Every kilometre adds to the cost of doing business, often without adding a cent to the invoice.

The cost of getting to the job is becoming harder to absorb.

“Fuel’s killing us when jobs are spread all over town. That’s why we’re car pooling now.”

ELECTRICIAN

Our take

The opportunity for suppliers is to look beyond the products they sell to the pressures shaping the work day. Better information, stronger industry connections and smarter brand-led initiatives can take some of that weight off. That’s how suppliers earn a more valuable place in a tradie’s day.

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