

Builders VP Karen Ferrini on retail innovation and expansion

 By [Lauren Hartzenberg](#)

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Karen Ferrini brings 25 years of retail and FMCG experience to her [new role as vice president](#) at Massmart-owned home improvement, DIY and building materials retailer Builders. As of 1 February, she took the baton from [Herman Venter](#), who shifts into the position of group chief merchandise officer (CMO) for Massmart.



Karen Ferrini, vice president, Builders. Source: Supplied

The new Builders VP holds a BSc qualification in Chemical Engineering and a Higher Diploma in Education, both obtained from the University of the Witwatersrand.

Ferrini has spent the last 14 years working at Builders, initially as the Africa executive and then as operations vice president. Prior to Builders, she occupied various positions at consumer goods giant Procter & Gamble spanning engineering, manufacturing, warehousing & distribution, and customer service.

She brings this varied experience and an action-orientated approach to the VP role, which she hopes will assist in driving the streamlining of processes and the refining of the Builders customer experience.

Ferrini chats to *Bizcommunity* about her new role, Builders expansion plans and how the retailer is innovating to better serve its retail and trade customers.

■ ***Karen, congrats on your appointment as Builders vice president. What does this promotion mean to you?***

I am very excited. I have been a part of Builders for almost 14 years and am passionate about the business.

■ ***What's at the top of your to-do list in your new role?***

In this role, the focus is more overarching, and we must work on continuous improvement to meet the different needs of

retail and trade customers and the way they choose to shop with us - whether in-store, online, through the contact centre or serviced by a sales representative.

As an engineer, I am very process-orientated and plan to use this passion to simplify the customers' interactions with Builders.



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■ ***What do you enjoy most about working in retail, and at Massmart in particular?***

I enjoy developing and seeing people grow. The fact that Builders is a growth engine is fantastic as it will create opportunities for promotion and career progression for our existing staff and of course, there will be many hiring opportunities for new staff which is really great for the South African economy.

■ ***Massmart is looking to expand its store footprint, and revamp some established stores. Can you comment on the evolving role that physical retail will play as online shopping becomes more commonplace?***

Builders is a growth engine for the Massmart business, and we want to open at least 50 new stores in South Africa over the next five years. Hand in hand with this, we are looking to restore over 60 of our existing stores to ensure that we offer our customers a consistent shopping experience.

Through our expansion plan we would like to make Builders accessible to customers in regions within South Africa where they currently have no Builders or customers need to travel some distance to complete a shop.

■ ***Considering that Builders serves both retail and trade customers, what do you view as the key opportunities and challenges facing the retailer?***

South Africans are feeling the pinch of the rising cost of living. Unfavourable economic conditions, exacerbated by load shedding, petrol price hikes, and Covid-19's lingering effects all contribute to low business confidence among the country's SMEs. To help address these challenges, Builders introduced the Builders Pro benefits programme in January to help tradespeople (plumbers, electricians, carpenters, etc.) navigate the country's increasingly challenging economic conditions.

We are proud to have just launched a rebate as part of Builders Pro for cash trade customers. Whatever they spend in cash (and by swiping their card) gets calculated and rewarded at the beginning of the next year with cash back on their Builders account for them to use for future purchases. They can get from 2% back for products like cement and up to 5% for products like paint, plumbing, and electrical. The rewards kick in as soon as a tradesperson has spent more than

R50,000 in the year.

For our retail customers, we launched the Builders+ benefits programme. Both of these benefit programmes offer customers savings-related benefits and personalised offers for products and services.

The opportunity for Builders to continue to surpass customer needs is to offer our retail and trade customers a full product and service offering which enables customers to save time, and money so that they can live better. We offer complementary services to our product assortments from credit to installation services to name a few. We have also just launched a [product finder service](#) which ensures that whatever you are looking for that we may not already stock, we will find it for you.

Builders continues to assess and address friction points that our customers may be experiencing and solve these through digitisation and innovation.



Builders launches tool to help shoppers source hard-to-find products - even those it doesn't stock

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▀ What impact do you hope to make in your industry?

I have been part of the Builders team for 14 years and in total, I have 24 years of retail and FMCG experience. The benefit of leading the team in this next chapter is that I already have a deep understanding of our business and industry supported by a team of passionate associates.

I also enjoy developing and seeing people grow, and working to create opportunities for career progression.

▀ Could you leave us with some valuable career advice?

You have to love what you do because time is too precious to spend focusing on something or working with people that you are not passionate about.

ABOUT LAUREN HARTZENBERG

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