

From quick service store to full range shop – also on the Internet



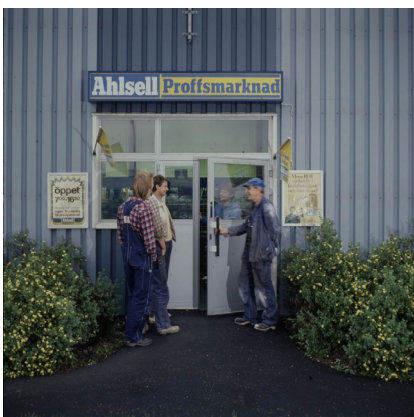
You have to go back a long way to the time when Ahlsell was solely suited to the wholesale trade. As for a long time there has been a need for small item replenishment sales to the professionals. The pictures show our predecessors, Holm & Karlström, in Norrköping in the 1920s. However, cash and carry warehouses for smaller heating and plumbing components do not appear to have been introduced on any great scale until the 1960s, and not until around 1970 in the large office and warehouse establishments. Small parts were stored on wooden shelves marked according to the standard plumbing trade catalogue (“RSK catalogue”) system and staff then gathered them and took them to the goods counter where the order had been placed. Most of the orders in the company were received from contacts in the sales departments and shipped by lorry.



Quick self-service store

In the early 1970s, the Do-It-Yourself market underwent rapid expansion, as did over the counter sales to installers, department stores and DIY stores. In 1973, Ahlsell & Ågren opened its first self-service cash and carry warehouse, a quick service store, on Norra Stationsgatan in Stockholm. After that, all the old and new cash and carry warehouses were adapted for self-service. Already at that stage, the industrial companies were striving for higher capital turnover, and their supplies of spare parts were replaced by the wholesale companies’ warehouses with their speedy delivery. It was thought that the advantage of self-service was that the customer could find the goods more quickly. As early as 1973, Ahlsell & Ågren was striving to be a full range wholesaler, and one offering better service, too, to those doing rebuilding or modernisation work, or minor installations in the home. Quite simply, the customers wanted to have the goods at the speed they required them. In the early 1970s, Ahlsell & Ågren greatly expanded their network of warehouses in Sweden. In order to provide a faster service to the customers, major training efforts were made in for staff, who needed a deeper knowledge about technology and distribution.

The quick service store became the Professional store



At the same time, the very first quick service stores for electrical items began to appear. In 1981, all quick service stores introduced as the “Professional store”. They became places to meet for people in the trade. The pictures show the entrance to a professional store in 1985. During the 1980s, a graphical programme was introduced of uniform staff clothing, colours, printed materials, nameplates and plastic carrier bags. The professional stores held more and more products such as equipment, machinery, ironmongery goods and working clothes.

The shops continue to play a central role in the company’s business today, complemented by the internet store, opened in the last years of the 1990s.