SOWETO BUSINESS DIRECTORY · BOOK 8

Stock & Ordering

Count clearly. Order wisely. Keep the shop moving.



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Fictional stories. Practical steps. Less guessing on the shelf.

Chapter 1: The Shelf Was Full of Confidence

Count what is there before buying what you think is missing.

Thabo could count stock from the doorway. According to Thabo. At his aunt's small household-goods shop, he waved at a shelf of washing soap. "We have plenty, Auntie Busi." She asked how many bars. "A healthy amount." Busi handed him a notebook. "The supplier does not sell healthy amounts. He sells units." The front row looked full. Behind it were empty spaces, one torn wrapper and a box nobody had opened.



The shelf looked full. Thabo had counted the confidence.

They started with one exact item. Plain washing-soap bars, 500 g, counted as individual bars. Not toilet soap, not a different size and not cartons. The delivery note said one carton of 12 bars. They checked inside: 12 bars, not one unit and not 12 cartons. Busi wrote the item, size, counting unit and storage places at the top of the page. A full shelf of the wrong soap would not answer the question.

The book and the shelf needed to meet. They counted at a quiet point and noted the time. While they counted, Thabo recorded any sale or movement so it would not disappear between the shelf and the page. They checked the display, the back room and the loose stock under the counter once each. Twenty bars were physically there. Nineteen were fit for sale. One damaged bar was set aside and labelled, not quietly returned to the display.

The rough record expected 21, not 20. They had started with 24 bars, received 12 and sold 15: 24 plus 12 minus 15 left 21. Thabo looked towards the door. "Somebody took one." Busi raised an eyebrow. "Somebody must first check the record." Then she remembered the bar she had taken home and confirmed it with Thabo, who had handed it to her. It had never been written down. They recorded that one bar as owner use, not a sale and not a mystery thief.



Before accusing the neighbourhood, check the notebook.

A full-looking shelf is not a stock count. A difference is a question, not an accusation.

Count the stock you can actually use or sell

Now every bar had an explanation. Opening stock 24, plus deliveries 12, minus sales 15, minus owner use 1 left 20 physically on hand. Of those, one was damaged, leaving 19 saleable bars. Do not deduct that same damaged bar twice. Keep its quantity and condition visible until its return or disposal is recorded. The stock record explains both what is present and what is available to sell; the damaged bar does not become good stock because it is still in the building.

Write movements while they are still easy to remember. A simple stock page can have date, item and unit, quantity in, quantity out, reason, balance and a receipt or note reference. Sales, owner use, samples, damage and supplier returns need their own reasons. Ordered stock is not delivered stock. Keep confirmed customer reservations separate from quantities freely available for another customer. When correcting a mistake, keep a dated note of what changed and why.

Know what you have before deciding what to buy

Nineteen bars is a fact, not an order instruction. Whether it is enough depends on how fast that soap sells, how long the supplier takes, what is already on order and the money available. We will build that buying decision next. For now, do not buy another carton merely because the display looks thin, or stop buying merely because a slow-selling item fills the shelf. Stock is money sitting in goods, not profit waiting to be counted twice.

If the difference stays unexplained, leave the question open. Recount, check units, delivery notes, sales and movements. Write the difference and the next check instead of inventing a sale to make the book agree. Start with a few important items and count them regularly. Busi closed the notebook. "Now how much soap do we have?" Thabo smiled. "Nineteen saleable bars. My confidence is extra."

Sho't left, do this today

1. Choose one item. Write its exact size, counting unit and storage places.
2. Count at a clear time. Record movements during the count and avoid counting twice.
3. Separate good stock, damaged stock and stock already promised to customers.
4. Match opening stock, deliveries and all stock out to the physical count.
5. Record corrections with reasons. Investigate differences before placing the next order.

Busi, Thabo and this shop are made up. Quantities are practice examples. General stock-counting guidance: Business Queensland's stock-control basics. This chapter uses its practical stock principles, not Australian tax rules.

Chapter 2: The Special Was Not on the List

Order before you run out, not whenever a supplier shouts "special".

Thabo had found a bargain before finding the shopping list. "Auntie Busi! Five cartons of soap. A special!" Busi looked up from the 19 saleable bars they had counted. "Is the rent also on special?" He had planned a mountain of soap and forgotten that the shop still needed electricity, transport and other stock. A lower price per bar could still leave them with an empty cash box and a very impressive wall.



The soap had a throne. The cash box had nothing.

Nineteen bars told them what they had, not how long it would last. They checked recent sales of the same plain 500 g washing-soap bar. Across 10 ordinary trading days, with stock available throughout, they had sold 40 bars: an average of four a day. Not four every day, and not a promise about tomorrow. They kept owner use and damage out of sales. Days when stock ran out could hide customer demand; a payday rush or big once-off order needed a separate look.

The supplier's waiting time mattered. For this practice example, Busi checked that an order could arrive ready to sell after three trading days. That waiting time is called lead time. At four sales a day, they expected to sell 12 bars while waiting. They chose four extra bars as a small buffer for a busier day or a short delay. Twelve plus four gave a reorder point of 16 saleable bars. The buffer was their starting choice, not a rule for every shop or a guarantee against running out.

> **The reorder point tells you when to act. It does not tell you how much to buy.**

A warning line, not a shopping instruction

At 19, they watched. At 16, they acted. Busi wrote "Check daily; reorder at 16" beside that exact item. Three more bars sold, leaving 16 saleable bars. No bars were reserved for customers and no soap order was already on the way. The damaged bar from Chapter 1 stayed separate; it did not help them fill a customer's bag. They checked the count and supplier again before ordering.

Now they worked out the quantity. Busi wanted enough at delivery for the next three trading days' expected sales plus their four-bar buffer: 12 plus four, or 16 bars. From the 16 on hand, they expected to sell 12 during the delivery wait, leaving four. To reach their planned 16 at arrival, they needed 12 new bars. One verified carton contained 12, so one carton fitted this plan. Five cartons did not become sensible because Thabo said "special" louder.



One carton had a job. The other four had a sales pitch.

The order was still not stock on the shelf. They wrote one carton, 12 bars, in an outstanding-orders list with the promised arrival and total cost. If the expected 12 bars sold before delivery, four would remain; receiving 12 would bring saleable stock back to 16. Actual sales or a late delivery could change that. They would record the real balance, not force the notebook to match the forecast. If an order was already coming, they would check its quantity and arrival before ordering again.

Let the money and the shelf have a vote

Before buying, Busi checked what the shop could afford. The total included transport or delivery charges, not just the carton price. Money needed for bills, other essential stock and existing commitments was not spare buying money. They also checked storage and how soon stock must sell before it becomes unusable. A supplier's minimum order or pack size could change the plan. If the total did not fit, they would ask about smaller quantities, compare a reliable alternative or revise the plan, not quietly spend bill money.

A smaller order can mean an earlier next order. It may also mean more trips and higher transport costs. Busi would check the soap daily and plan the next purchase before this carton ran out. If demand rose or delivery slowed, she would review the warning line and buffer. Each important item needed its own plan. Thabo crossed out four cartons. "So we are buying less?" Busi smiled. "We are buying with a reason."

Sho't left, do this today

1. Choose one item. Check recent sales in the same unit and note unusual demand.
2. Confirm the delivery wait. Estimate sales during it and choose a sensible buffer.
3. Set a warning level and check often enough to act before it is too late.
4. Check saleable stock, customer promises and orders already due. Plan the quantity needed at arrival.
5. Check pack sizes, storage and the full cost against available buying money. Record the order separately until received.

Busi, Thabo and this shop are made up. Quantities, demand, delivery time and buffer are teaching examples, not buying advice for your shop. Practical sources: Business Queensland: stock control (not its Australian tax rules); Sortly: reorder point basics (not a software recommendation).

Chapter 3: The Box Was Not the Proof

Check what arrived before the notebook says it is ready to sell.

The carton arrived with more confidence than contents. Thabo reached for the delivery pen. "One box. We ordered one box. Finished." Auntie Busi stopped him. "A box is packaging, my boy. We ordered soap." They had ordered one carton of 12 plain 500 g washing-soap bars. The delivery note said 12. The carton did not get a vote until somebody opened it.



The box had arrived. The checking had not.

First, they matched the delivery to their order. Right shop, right supplier, right order reference. Then they checked the exact soap, size and counting unit against what they had agreed. Twelve smaller bars would not be the same order. They checked packaging and contents for damage. Other goods may also need checks such as dates, seals or safe storage conditions. An unfamiliar replacement item needed a decision, not a quiet place on the shelf.

They counted 11 bars, not 12. Ten were fit for sale. One was damaged and kept aside. One ordered bar had not arrived at all. Busi wrote: "Ordered 12; physically received 11; 10 good, 1 damaged; short 1." Thabo counted again. The answer stayed the same. They photographed the contents, damaged bar, label and delivery note so the supplier could see which order and item they meant.

> **Record what arrived, separate what cannot be sold, and leave the missing quantity visible.**

A signature must not pretend the check was clean

Busi noted the shortage and damage before signing. She asked the driver to acknowledge the notes and kept a copy. She did not sign that 12 good bars had arrived. If a full check cannot be done at the door, record exactly what was checked and what still needs checking, keep the packaging and inspect promptly. If the driver will not acknowledge a problem, note that and contact the supplier. A note helps preserve the facts; it does not guarantee a refund or override the agreed terms.

The stock page used the real delivery. During the three-day wait, the expected 12 sales had actually happened: 16 saleable bars minus 12 left four. Ten good new bars brought saleable stock to 14, not the planned 16. The old damaged bar from Chapter 1 remained separate. The newly damaged bar joined it, making two damaged bars physically held. That meant 16 bars in the shop altogether: 14 saleable and two damaged. The missing bar was not hiding in that total.



Missing is not damaged. Damaged is not ready to sell.

The supplier needed one clear report, not five angry voice notes. Busi used the supplier contact already on her order record. She gave the order reference, item, quantity received, shortage and damage, with the photographs. She asked how they would correct it and by when. In this story the supplier agreed to send the missing bar and exchange the newly damaged one, collecting that damaged bar. Busi saved the written agreement and expected date. A promise still added zero bars to today's saleable stock.

Match the paperwork as well as the soap

The invoice still charged for 12 good bars. They marked the difference for follow-up and checked it against the order and delivery record before treating the amount as settled. An invoice asks for payment; a delivery note records a delivery. Neither proves the other is correct. A credit note may reduce what is owed, but it is not automatically cash back in the bank. The agreed correction, payment terms and any revised paperwork needed to match; Busi did not invent a refund or quietly change an agreed payment date.

The job was not closed because the supplier said "sorted". Busi kept one line open for the missing bar and one for the damaged-bar exchange. She would check the replacement delivery, record the damaged bar leaving and update the balances only when those movements happened. Meanwhile, 14 saleable bars was already below their 16-bar warning line. She checked the promised correction time against likely sales before deciding whether another order was needed. Thabo put down the pen. "Next time, I open the box first."

Sho't left, do this today

1. Keep the order handy. Match supplier, shop, item, size and units.
2. Count and inspect. Record good, damaged and missing quantities separately.
3. Note problems accurately before signing; keep a copy and clear photographs.
4. Tell the supplier promptly. Save the agreed correction, contact and due date.
5. Update stock from actual movements. Match the invoice and keep corrections open until checked.

Busi, Thabo and this shop are made up. Quantities and the supplier's response are teaching examples. Practical sources: California DGS: receiving checks; Business Queensland: supplier relationships. These support checking and recording habits, not South African legal, tax or automatic refund rights.

Chapter 4: The Mugs Had Moved In

Stock needs to earn its shelf space, not become part of the furniture.

Thabo dusted the same six mugs every week. Bright mugs. Beautiful mugs. Mugs with more time in the shop than some regular customers. "They make the shelf look full," he told Auntie Busi. She pointed to the soap customers kept asking for. "A full shelf cannot buy the next carton if nothing on it sells." The mugs had become unpaid tenants.



The mugs were not selling. They were settling in.

First, they closed the soap correction properly. Before the next sale, the supplier brought two good 500 g bars: the missing bar and a replacement for the newly damaged one. Busi checked both and recorded that damaged bar leaving with the supplier. Fourteen saleable bars plus two became 16. Of the two damaged bars held, one left, leaving the old damaged bar from Chapter 1 still separate. Physically, 17 bars remained: 16 saleable and one damaged. She closed the two supplier follow-ups only after checking the movements and paperwork.

Sixteen bars was still the soap's warning line. The correction was not a reason to stop watching sales or postpone the next buying decision. Busi kept checking demand, the next delivery wait and buying money. But first she wanted to know why money was sitting in mugs while a regular seller needed attention. Different items needed different decisions. The soap's four-bars-a-day example was not a forecast for everything on the shelf.

Give older stock a fair chance

Thabo had been putting every new delivery in front. Busi showed him a simple rotation habit: first in, first out. Put older suitable stock where it can sell first, and newer stock behind it. Mark arrival dates or batches so "older" does not depend on memory. Check condition as well as age. Keep the old damaged soap apart; moving it to the front would not repair it. Follow the product's storage instructions, and check any relevant dates rather than assuming all goods keep equally well.

> **Rotate good stock. Investigate slow stock. Do not buy more just to make the shelf look busy.**

The mugs needed a question before a discount. Were they hard to see? Was the price clear? Did customers want that size or design? Were people asking for something else? Busi checked the sales page and asked customers without pushing them. She moved the mugs to a clear, sensible display with an honest price, paused new mug orders and set a review date. A better display was a small test, not a promise that the mugs would finally pay rent.



Before cutting the price, find out why nobody is buying.

A discount could free cash and still make a loss. For practice, suppose the six mugs had cost R20 each: R120 in total. Selling all six for R18 each would bring in R108, which is R12 less than their purchase cost, even before other costs. That would recover some cash, not create R108 profit. Busi would consider the loss, other selling costs and realistic alternatives before choosing. She would record the actual selling price, not leave the old price in the sales book.

Choose a route out, then check it happened

Returning slow stock was a question for the supplier. Did their agreed terms allow a return or exchange? Was there a fee or a deadline? Busi would get the answer and keep the paperwork before sending anything back. A supplier credit might help a later purchase, but it was not the same as cash to pay electricity. A bundle also needed its costs checked; adding an item did not make that item free to the shop. Whatever they chose, damaged or unsafe goods did not become suitable for customers because the price was lower.

The shelf needed a short review, not a farewell ceremony. Busi listed each slow item, quantity, arrival date, recent sales, money tied up and next action. She also checked whether regular sellers had run out, losing sales while slow goods occupied space. Thabo looked at the mugs. "Must I evict them?" Busi smiled. "Start by not ordering their cousins."

Sho't left, do this today

1. Check one shelf. Put older suitable stock first and keep damaged goods separate.
2. Find one slow item. Check quantity, condition, arrival date and recent sales.
3. Check visibility, price and customer demand before guessing the cause.
4. Pause unnecessary repeat orders. Compare a display test, a careful price change or an agreed supplier return.
5. Work out the money recovered and any loss. Set a review date and record what actually happens.

Busi, Thabo and this shop are made up. All quantities and prices are teaching examples, not market prices or a discount recommendation. Practical source: Business Queensland: stock rotation, slow stock and cash flow. This chapter uses its practical stock principles, not Australian tax rules.

Chapter 5: The Shop Must Not Wait for Busi

A small routine beats a big stocktake nobody has time to finish.

Busi went out for an hour. Thabo nearly ordered a rescue mission. A customer asked for soap, the supplier called about tomorrow and someone wanted to collect a reserved bucket. Thabo sent his aunt three voice notes. "Where is the stock? What must I order? Which bucket?" Busi replied, "Start with the notebook, not my blood pressure." Their system had to work when she was away, not only when she stood beside the shelf.



The notebook was on duty. Thabo called Busi anyway.

They gave each record one job. The stock page tracked movements and balances by exact item. The orders page tracked supplier, quantity, full cost, promised arrival and outstanding checks. Reservations had customer references, quantities and collection arrangements, kept private. A problems list held shortages, damage, returns and follow-ups. One notebook could hold these sections; they did not need four paid apps.

The daily habit: record, check, act

Movements went down while they were still fresh. Sales, deliveries, owner use, samples, returns and damage each needed the right reason. Moving a carton from the back room to the display was a location change, not a new delivery or a sale. Thabo wrote the quantity and unit, date, reason and reference, then updated the balance. They checked for duplicate entries and marked uncertainties for checking rather than inventing answers.

At a quiet point, they checked a few important items. Regular sellers, items near their warning level and items with recent differences came first. They counted across the shop, recorded movements during the count and separated saleable, reserved and damaged goods. Other stock still needed checks on a planned cycle, with more frequent checks when sales, delivery times or problems changed.

Write the movement. Check the balance. Give every open problem a person and a next step.

The soap page already told Thabo something useful. After the checked correction in Chapter 4, there were 16 saleable bars and one old damaged bar kept aside. Sixteen was their warning line, not spare soap to ignore. Thabo checked any further sales, reservations and outstanding orders, then asked Busi to approve the next buying decision using the current delivery wait and buying money. The damaged bar was not saleable, and the same order must not go in twice.



The warning line was a reminder to think, not a button marked buy.

The weekly habit: buy with the whole shop in mind

Busi made a short buying list, not a wish list. For each important item she checked the exact item and unit, saleable quantity, customer promises, recent demand, supplier waiting time, buffer and orders already due. She worked out the proposed quantity and full cost, including transport. She compared the whole list with buying money after bills and commitments. Sensible individual orders could still cost too much together.

Slow stock and unfinished problems joined the review. Had the mug display test produced actual sales? Were repeat mug orders still paused? Had a supplier correction arrived, or was it only another promise? The old damaged soap still needed a decision about its proper return or disposal; it stayed out of saleable stock until the actual movement was recorded. Busi checked dates, condition and storage too, noting each next action, person responsible and follow-up date.

They made one small handover rule. Thabo could record sales, count and flag problems. Busi approved purchases and agreed supplier corrections. If she was unavailable, he used their agreed contact plan rather than guessing approval. At handover they checked balances, deliveries due, collections and problems together. They kept order messages, invoices and delivery evidence with matching references, plus a private backup in case the notebook or phone was lost.

The useful system was the one they would keep using. They began with a few important items and added more as the routine settled. A phone spreadsheet still needed correct units, real movements and checks. Busi closed the notebook. "If I am away tomorrow?" Thabo smiled. "The shop will still know how much soap it has." She nodded. "Good. Now teach it not to order more mugs."

Sho't left, do this today

1. Set up stock, outstanding-order, reservation and problem sections in a notebook or simple spreadsheet.
2. Pick the first items to check and a clear daily time. Record movements as they happen.
3. Choose a weekly buying-review time. Do urgent warning-level checks sooner.
4. Write who may order, who follows up and what happens when the owner is away.
5. Keep matching evidence and a private backup. Review the routine after a week and fix what gets missed.

Busi, Thabo and this shop are made up. This routine and all quantities are teaching examples, to adapt to your business. Practical source: Business Queensland: manual stock records, checks and ordering. This chapter uses its practical stock principles, not Australian tax rules.