



NIIRTA^{news}

The magazine for the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association

Delivering for Town Centre Traders



Car Park Charges Frozen & Rate Relief Extended Again

2000 Local Shops to Close This Year

NIIRTA Message at Town Centre Summit

2000 local shops are projected to close unless radical action is taken according to the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association. The organisation, which represents 1400 independent retailers across Northern Ireland made the call at its Town Centre summit involving the Social Development & Environment Ministers, senior officials from DRD & local traders.

NIIRTA also launched its own version of the Mary Portas Review entitled Town Centre First, which contains 50 solutions to the problems facing local Town Centres and the Retail sector. The document calls for, among other things a freeze on car parking charges for ten years, and the amalgamation of DRD, DSD and Environment into a Department for Strategic Development.

NIIRTA President Paul Stewart said: "With Northern Ireland once again scoring the worst in the UK for shop vacancies, our Town Centre Summit is very timely in bringing not only together the three Ministries responsible for town centres, but also to launch new ideas on how to reinvent retail for tomorrow's town centres."

"With some Town Centres approaching a 40% shop vacancy rate, projected figures of 2000 local shops closing this year and a staggering 2 million sq. ft. of out of town superstore development currently being processed by DOE Planning service, we are facing melt-down unless the Executive acts fast."

NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts, who wrote the Town Centre First report, said: "Our Town Centre First report is about the future. It is about change and the building of modern and inclusive town and city centres which have the right mix of independent, niche and multiple retailers."

"It's about making town centres destinations for shoppers and providing the very best in shopping experiences as well as making them living communities with a strong café culture and night-time economy."

"Our report highlights the need for more radical measures in relation to cutting tax, more rate relief and giving local councils more power to shape their own town centres."

"We are bringing forward 50 solutions to alleviate the continuing decline of our town and city centres. Despite the grim forecast, if we have real joined up policy and a determination, we can turn around the fortunes of our retail sector and town centres."

Speaking at the event, Stephen Acheson, Managing Director of sponsors Acheson & Glover, urged politicians to ensure local businesses were offered an opportunity to be

involved in the roll out of publicly funded construction contracts throughout Northern Ireland.

He said the Executive could save millions of pounds, preserve local jobs and ease the impact on the environment by choosing local hard-landscaping products instead of imported Chinese granite or clay brick.

"Another advantage in relation to the public realm schemes proposed for Northern Ireland is the fact our products can be laid in roughly half the time of Chinese granite. Therefore by choosing local products retailers in our towns and cities could face less disruption and be open for business more quickly."



Environment Minister Alex Attwood MLA, Glyn Roberts NIIRTA CEO and Social Development Minister Nelson McCausland MLA launch the Town Centre First Report

The Town Centre First report makes 50 recommendations. Among them include:

- A third party right of appeal against out of town superstore applications and a new Town Centre First planning policy based on draft PPS5
- Merger of DSD, DRD & DOE into a new Department for Strategic Development
- Intertrade Ireland to establish Cross Border Retail Forum
- Every local council to hold an Independent Retail week in their area
- Third Extension of Small Business Rate Relief Scheme in place by 2016
- Establishment of Retail Enterprise Zones
- DRD to give local councils a greater role in car parking schemes
- Ten Year freeze on Car Parking Charges
- Translink monopoly ended and greater private sector involvement in running public transport.

Action Needed Now to Save Town Centres

Local Traders Plea To First & deputy First Ministers

One of the largest ever delegations of local Chambers of Commerce & Traders Groups met with the First & deputy First Ministers to press for urgent action to address the huge challenges facing our local town and city centres and the wider local retail sector.

The meeting was organised by the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) and comprised of a dozen different local business organisations. NIIRTA also discussed at the meeting its recently launched Town Centre First document which has over 50 solutions on how to regenerate town centres and revamp the local retail sector.

The 12 Business Organisations also announced that it is their intention to establish a new Campaign Group, entitled the Town Centre Alliance to spearhead an extensive lobbying campaign to save Northern Ireland's struggling town centres. All interested Business Groups and local Chambers of Commerce will be invited to join the Town Centre Alliance.

NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: "This was a very useful and productive meeting in which all 12 organisations put forward solutions to the problems facing our struggling town and city centres to the First & deputy First Ministers'

"Northern Ireland has the highest shop vacancy rate in the UK and lost 1000 small shops last year. This figure is likely to double by the end of this year, leaving nearly 1 in 3 shops vacant"

"Key issues such as developing a new Car Parking Strategy, new Retail Planning Policy, extending the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme, establishing Enterprise Zones and the need to progress the current Corporation Tax talks were all discussed"



Pictured back L-R are: Joe Jordan, President Belfast Chamber of Trade; Adrian Farrell, Chairman Portadown Chamber of Commerce; Junior Minister Jonathan Bell; Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive and Stephen Dunlop, Chairman Association of Town Centre Management. Front L-R: Junior Minister Jennifer McCann; Enterprise Minister Arlene Foster; Regional Development Minister Danny Kennedy and Social Development Minister Nelson McCausland.

"We also pressed the Ministers on the need for a more effective joined up approach by Executive Departments given the current situation of having three government departments responsible for Town Centre Regeneration and Planning and three for the Economy"

"All our organisations are intending to establish a new campaign group - the Town Centre Alliance - to spearhead an extensive lobbying campaign to reverse the decline in our town centres and local retail sector. It is our aim that the Town Centre Alliance will be the largest ever coalition of business organisations from every part of Northern Ireland"

"We plan to invite any interested business groups to join the Town Centre Alliance and to ensure we get action from Governments at Stormont and Westminster"

Following the meeting with the First & deputy First Ministers representatives from the new Town Centre Alliance met with the Ministers of Enterprise, Regional Development, Social Development and the two OFMDFM Junior Ministers on challenges facing the Retail Sector and Town Centres.

This was the first time business organisations have made a formal presentation to the Executive Sub Group on the Economy

Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive, Joe Jordan, President of the Belfast Chamber of Trade, Stephen Dunlop, Chairman of Association of Town Centre Management and Adrian Farrell, President of Portadown Chamber of Commerce met with the Ministers at Parliament Buildings just before Christmas

In a joint statement after the meeting the group said: "At the meeting we didn't bring the Ministers problems, we brought them solutions to the challenges facing our Retail Sector and Town Centres. We greatly appreciate the opportunity to be the first Business Organisations to present to the Executive Sub Group on the Economy"

"We put forward new ideas on rates, planning, car parking and above all we pressed the Ministers on the need for a new Shop Vacancy Strategy, given that 1 in 5 shops are now empty"

"This meeting is a very useful start to getting a new joined up approach from the Executive and we will be engaging further with the Ministers"

Jill O'Neill founder of Refound with Social Development Minister Nelson McCausland MLA launching the 'Have An Independent Christmas' campaign to support independent retailers

A photograph of three business professionals standing in front of a background featuring various technology icons like a Wi-Fi symbol, a play button, a globe, and a QR code. The person on the left is a man in a suit, the person in the middle is a woman in a business suit, and the person on the right is a man in a black t-shirt.

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Businesses 'Power Ahead'

In today's economic climate, we constantly hear the terms 'rising costs', 'struggling to make ends meet', and 'need to reduce overheads.' So when Northern Ireland's leading energy company Power NI announced a price decrease in August last year, a sigh of relief could be heard from businesses up and down the country.

As a result of Power NI's improved efficiencies and cheaper world fuel prices, the local energy supplier is able to pass these savings back to its customers, seeing a price cut of over 14% for small business customers. Alan Egner, Business Sales and Marketing Manager at Power NI said: "We've listened to our customers and we know that great service and better value are more important than ever. So I am delighted that we can offer our

customers cheaper prices, especially in these tough times.

"What's more, not only will customers benefit from cheaper bills, they will be assured of great customer service as well. Figures released last year by the Consumer Council NI showed that Power NI has by far the lowest level of formal complaints than any supplier here.

If cheaper prices and excellent customer service don't cut it, then maybe the great value ways to save energy and money that Power NI can offer will. Like Energy Online, a new online billing service for direct debit customers. Businesses can get 24/7 access to their account, view bills and payments, monitor usage and more. Power NI also works with industry



Alan Egner

experts to bring customers a range of grants and offers for the latest energy saving and renewable technologies including solar PV, solar water heating and variable speed drives.

Alan concludes: "Our new lower rates, great value and friendly, local service all add up to happier customers."

To find out more on how Power NI can better your business, visit www.powerni.co.uk/business.

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Rate Relief Extended to Assist Businesses

Finance Minister Sammy Wilson has announced his intention to extend a number of rate reliefs and exemptions to assist businesses.

The Empty Retail Premises Relief scheme and the rates exemption for stand alone ATMs in rural areas which were due to end in March 2013 will now be extended until the end of the current budget period in March 2015, subject to Assembly approval.

The Minister also announced his intention to extend the current 18-month developer exclusion applicable under the Rating of Empty Homes for a further 12 months.

Speaking in the Assembly, Sammy Wilson commented: "The Executive recognises the difficulties that our local businesses are facing and are committed to helping them in these challenging financial times. "I was pleased to have the opportunity to visit Home Restaurant to see how the value of the Empty Premises Relief has assisted businesses such as this. The opening of this restaurant has created 28 jobs.

"Northern Ireland has led the way with this innovative scheme and was the first devolved administration in the UK to introduce such an initiative; Scotland is now following in our footsteps. 52 businesses have benefitted from a 50% reduction on their rates totalling £143,000 since the introduction of this new rate relief in April 2012. "As well as tackling the high number of shop vacancies in our town centres this scheme is also helping to create much needed employment in this difficult economic climate. I would encourage anyone thinking of setting up a business in an empty retail unit to consider applying for this concession. Just ask Land & Property Services and they will be happy to advise you about applying."

During his statement the Minister also highlighted the assistance the Executive is providing for small businesses by extending the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme to include properties with a Net Annual Value of up to £15,000. This will see an additional 3,500 businesses benefitting from a 20% reduction on their rates.

Another measure, which the Finance Minister intends to extend, is the exemptions of rates for stand alone ATMs in rural areas. Commenting on this he said: "I am of the view that retaining ATMs in rural areas is important to ensure financial inclusion for rural communities, given the loss of other financial services in recent years. In addition research shows that cash withdrawn in rural areas is usually spent locally." He concluded: "I hope the extension of these rate



reliefs and measures will provide much needed assistance to our local businesses in these difficult economics times."

Glyn Roberts, Chief Executive of the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) said: "Since the extension of the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme in April 2012 we have received positive feedback from members about the savings on their rates bills and how these have been re-invested back into their business. We are pleased that the Minister has once again listened to our views and extended the scheme, which will benefit many more of our members in these challenging economic times. The Empty Premises Relief has also played a role in both supporting new start businesses and addressing the problem of vacant shops and buildings. It is excellent news that the scheme has helped to create 52 new businesses since April 2012."

Joe Jordan, President of Belfast Chamber of Commerce commented: "I think that the Minister's offer of 50% reduction in the commercial rates bill during the first trading year is a fantastic way to promote investment in the city centre. It is great to see Home Restaurant taking advantage of this scheme. I would encourage any budding entrepreneur who is going to start up a business to investigate if the property they are going to occupy qualifies for the Empty Premises Relief scheme or indeed if you are preparing a business plan it would be worth considering a premises that has been vacant for 12 months or more."

Further information about the Empty Retail Premise Scheme can be found on the nibusinessinfo website at <http://www.nibusinessinfo.co.uk/emptypremises> or by calling the Land & Property Services helpline on 0300 200 7801.

Executive Announces £200 million Economy and Jobs Initiative

The Executive has announced a £200million economy and jobs initiative to support people, businesses and investment.

The new measures, which include support for more than 4,600 people through skills training and employability, are additional to the commitments in the Executive's Programme for Government and Economic Strategy.

Welcoming the measures, First Minister Peter Robinson said: "I am pleased that we are able to announce this package which will provide a significant boost to the economy in Northern Ireland and provide employment, particularly for our young people and those who have been out of work for long periods.

"This initiative comes on top of the £26million in additional funding recently announced as part of Delivering Social Change 'Signature Projects' and again shows that by working together the Executive continues to deliver on our Programme for Government commitment to grow the economy and contribute to rising levels of employment by supporting the promotion of over 25,000 new jobs.

The deputy First Minister Martin McGuinness MLA said: "The Executive is responding flexibly to the needs of those hit hardest by the recession and taking action to ensure those out of work have access to the right training, skills and education opportunities. These employment measures are particularly focused on the needs of young people to help them get into work.

"The Executive is already committed to delivering over £5billion of capital investment in the current budget period. To boost employment in the construction sector this package will deliver a range of new measures to improve our schools, roads and accelerate nearly £60million of capital projects."

Supporting People

Ministers are taking action to ensure that those out of work have access to the right training, skills and education opportunities. They are particularly focused on the needs of young people and other disadvantaged groups.

There will be waged employment opportunities for 1,700 young people of a minimum of six months duration within either the private, public or voluntary and community sectors.

Around 1,100 over-50s, who have been out of work for more than 12 months, will take up temporary paid employment of up to 26 weeks in the Community and Voluntary Sector.

Further employer engagement with ApprenticeshipsNI will mean up to 900 additional young people will participate in the Youth Employment Scheme.

An additional 500 undergraduate Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths places will be funded each year, bringing the total increase in STEM places to 1,200 by 2015. This will enhance the skills base in priority areas for the NI economy. There will also be 150 fully funded PhD places and 20 bursaries for Aerospace MSc students.

A further 500 work experience placements/training opportunities for young people will be provided across the public sector as part of DEL's Steps to Work Programme.

Supporting Businesses

The Small Business Rate Relief Scheme will be extended to provide around 3500 business ratepayers with a 20% discount.

A new Invest NI 'Skills Growth' scheme will be introduced for small businesses (up to 50 employees) which would provide 50% grant towards training costs.

Car parking charges in towns and city centres will be frozen until at least 2015.

An additional £15million will be available to ensure that farmers receive more money in their Single Farm payment in 2013. This will generate additional spending power for farm business from the end of 2013 and into 2014.

There will be a new 'Finance Voucher' scheme to help SMEs access the specialist support they need to grow their businesses.

Streamlined and 'fast-track' application & approval processes will be brought in for many Invest NI business support schemes.

Supporting Investment

The Executive is already committed to delivering over £5billion of capital investment in the current budget period. To boost employment in the construction sector there will be several new measures.

More than £40million will be available to deliver a range of projects in the current financial year which will support the construction sector. This funding will see further resources being made available to:

- improve the schools estate (including addressing the consequences of the fire damage to Arvalee Special School);
- undertake further roads structural maintenance; street lighting maintenance; emerging works along the Antrim Coast Road;
- £8million additional funding for the housing co-ownership scheme;

The maintenance budget for the Schools Estate will be increased by £10million in 2013/14.

Nearly £60million of capital spending will be accelerated to allow projects to commence in 2013/14 rather than 2014/15.

A further £10million will be available in both 2013/14 and 2014/15 through the housing co-ownership scheme.

An extra £5.7million of funding will go to the Tourism Development Scheme which could deliver total investment of over £27.5million, supporting over 450 jobs in the construction phase and creating or sustaining approximately a further 50 tourism jobs once complete.

There will be further reforms to planning, including changes to the Permitted Development Rights regime which enables developers to undertake works without the need to apply for planning permission and revisions to the structure of planning fees to alleviate the financial burden on developers.

NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: "NIIRTA welcomes this Economic Package and in particular the further extension of the Small Business Rate Relief Scheme and the freezing of Car Park Charges until 2015. We lobbied Ministers extensively for action on reducing business rates and addressing car park charges to support local traders and Town Centres and are very pleased that both feature prominently in this package."

"The new Invest NI Skills Growth and the Finance Voucher schemes to assist small businesses are positive developments to help our struggling small business sector."

"While this package is not a 'silver bullet' in addressing our huge economic challenges, it does include practical and imaginative solutions to assisting retailers and small businesses get through the worst of this recession and toward a sustainable recovery."

NIIRTA once again busy lobbying on behalf of its members...



Glyn Roberts welcoming Eamon Gilmore TD, Irish Minister For Foreign Affairs & Labour Party Leader to the NIIRTA/Pubs of Ulster Drinks Reception at the SDLP Conference



Glyn Roberts with DSD Minister Nelson McCausland MLA at the DUP Conference



Glyn Roberts NIIRTA CEO with SDLP Leader Alasdair McDonnell MP & Shadow Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Vernon Coaker MP



First Minister Peter Robinson MLA with Glyn Roberts at DUP Conference



Glyn Roberts meeting Irish President Michael D Higgins with Retail Excellence Ireland CEO David Fitzsimons at their recent awards.



Glyn Roberts welcomes NI Secretary of State Theresa Villiers MP & OFMDFM Minister Jonathan Bell MLA to NIIRTA information stand at the DUP Conference



Glyn Roberts at the Sinn Fein Conference in Killarney with Party Vice President Mary Lou McDonald TD



At the UUP conference with Party Leader Mike Nesbitt MLA



At this years Conservative Party Conference, NIIRTA hosted a working lunch for Secretary of State Theresa Villiers MP & NIO Minister of State Mike Penning MP

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On 9-10 May 2013 The Belfast Media Group will host the fourth annual Belfast One City Conference spotlighting the vibrant city of Belfast. An international roster of speakers and delegates from every corner of Belfast will tackle the pressing challenges of the day and debate how the city can best speak with one voice. The conference will open on the evening of Thursday May 9 at e3 in West Belfast and will move the following morning, May 10, to Titanic Belfast for a series of provocative and timely sessions. At Titanic Belfast, delegates will gather for The One City Gala Luncheon before touring the Crumlin Road Jail development. Conference will close with a farewell finale reception at the residence of the US Consul General.

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Secretary of State Guest speaker at NIIRTA Christmas Reception

The new Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, Rt. Hon Theresa Villiers MP was the guest speaker at the recent NIIRTA Christmas reception, which was sponsored by the Ulster Bank, Mash Direct and Manleys. Belfast Harbour Commissioners generously hosted the event, which attracted nearly 100 NIIRTA members, MLAs, Councilors and guests.



Above: NIIRTA CEO Glyn Roberts,
Secretary of State Villiers and
NIIRTA Chair, Paddy Doody



Above: NIIRTA President Paul Stewart,
Jim Wells MLA with the Secretary
of State

Right: Secretary of State, Basil McCrea
MLA and Derry Traders Forum Chair,
Martin McCrossan



NIIRTA Urges Support For BikeforMike

Friday 22nd February sees an intrepid group of eight forty-something men take to the hills of Scotland on a 130-mile charity bike trek from Aberdeen to Edinburgh. The fundraising cycle is designed to raise money for those affected by Motor Neurone Disease, in memory of Michael Arnott.

Mike, an academic at the University of Aberdeen and father to three young children, died in February last year aged just 46 after a long and courageous battle against the debilitating condition. Mike was part of a group of school friends, now scattered across the UK and Ireland, who have remained close friends through the quarter-century since they left the Sixth Form.

The Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) is urging its members and the local community to sponsor the 130-mile charity bike trek.

NIIRTA Member David McCrea, and owner of Dundela Pharmacy is another cyclist gearing up for 'BikeForMike'.

"We all played rugby together at school, and as well as developing a love of the game, we learnt a lot about the importance of teamwork and friendship. Although he lived in Scotland for most of his career, Mike was a devoted Ulster and Ireland fan. The BikeForMike route leaves from Mike's home village



NIIRTA CEO Glyn Roberts and David McCrea launching the BikeForMike cycle trek

outside Aberdeen and arrives at Murrayfield ahead of this year's Scotland v Ireland Test. Mike always loved those matches, and we know this year he will be there with us in spirit. We're hoping to raise as much money as possible to help others affected by this cruel condition."

Mike's brother Alan is one of the organisers of the 'BikeForMike' fundraiser. "Mike was like the rest of us", Alan recalls, "raising his family, going to work and living his life, until his world

was ripped apart by being diagnosed with Motor Neurone Disease. What people found most inspirational about him was his attitude to the disease. The courage, dignity and intellect he brought to the fight. He inspired us to take on this challenge in the depths of the Scottish winter and hopefully we can inspire others to donate to the fight against MND."

NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: "We wish the eight cyclists well in their trek and would urge

everyone in the local community to give what they can in donation. I know from losing a relative to Motor Neurone Disease just how important it is to support further research toward a cure"

All proceeds from the BikeForMike fundraiser will go directly to Motor Neurone Disease charities in the UK and Ireland. Details of how to donate to the charity cycle can be found at the website www.bikeformike.co.uk

Opportunities with the SUBWAY® brand

The SUBWAY® brand is one of the UK's most popular franchise opportunities, with over 1,600 stores in the UK and Ireland. The brand has more than 300 outlets open or in development in convenience stores and on forecourt sites throughout the UK and Ireland. There are currently opportunities available for convenience store operators to partner with the franchise and open an outlet within an existing store.

Partnering with the SUBWAY® brand provides excellent dual branding opportunities, high rental returns and increased customer market share. The outlets are efficient, convenient and provide a quick service, which draws a steady flow of customers – creating energy and a beneficial atmosphere.

Due to the simplicity of the operation, there is an adaptable approach to the size and physical layout of its stores. Outlets can be as small as 350 sq ft and still carry the full menu. The format also means that staff levels can be increased at peak times and downscaled to one employee during quiet periods. A SUBWAY® store can also maintain a full range of products maximising sales throughout the day, whilst managing wastage at less than 1%. Unlike traditional food outlets, there is no need for grills or fryers in a SUBWAY® store.

Contributing to the success of the SUBWAY® brand is the fact it continues to keep its concept and operations simple, start up costs low and seeks

ambitious franchisees who embrace the entrepreneurial spirit. A SUBWAY® franchise is perfect for those who have had experience running a successful business, or have benefited from a flourishing career.

SUBWAY® franchisees can take advantage of operating in a tried-and-tested system with great training and a solid support structure with aspects such as site selection, leasing, purchasing, marketing and more. This support has proved to be very successful and the fact that over 70% of all new SUBWAY® franchises sold worldwide are sold to existing owners, speaks volumes.

Caroline Thomson, National Accounts Manager for the SUBWAY® brand, commented: "I've seen many companies quickly integrate SUBWAY® stores into forecourts and convenience stores with great success. The collaborative approach that the SUBWAY® brand takes, delivers real benefits for companies, including increased footfall and sales and excellent business growth opportunities."

To find out more about opportunities to partner the SUBWAY® brand, please contact Caroline Thomson on 02894 452420, email thomson.c@subway.co.uk or call SUBWAY® UK and Ireland on 0800 085 5058 (UK) or 1800 413 076 (Republic of Ireland) or visit www.subway.co.uk/property



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Neighbourhood Retailers Shine at Industry Awards

Northern Ireland's Neighbourhood Retailer Awards 2012 were a huge success this year and proved just why the country's independent grocery retailers are vital to Northern Ireland's economy.

The country's most prestigious awards ceremony for the grocery retailing industry and backed by Neighbourhood Retailer magazine, the 14th annual NR Awards were attended by more than 400 industry professionals who saw NI's leading retailers vying for prestigious industry accolades. Supported by platinum sponsor Bank Machine and held at Ramada Plaza Belfast, the NR Awards were hosted by UTV star Pamela Ballantine and saw NIIRTA Member Kenny Bradley, Magherafelt crowned Northern Ireland's Retailer of the Year 2012.

It was a hat-trick of awards for Kenny Bradley's stores as they also picked up Neighbourhood Store of the Year (Cat 1) and Training Initiative of the Year before going on to win the biggest award in the industry – the coveted Neighbourhood Retailer of the Year title. Following the win, Kenny Bradley said: "Words cannot describe how we feel - what a night! I'm so proud of my team who have really lived our values; teamwork, loyalty, honesty, respect and ownership over the past 18 months. We are on a journey to 'exceed our customers expectations' and this fantastic award is a massive acknowledgement of our progress so far and a real incentive for us to focus on completing our mission." Kenny added: "Congratulations and a big thanks to all our people in the store who are making it happen. I'm so, so proud and pleased at what we have achieved by winning this prestigious and highly sought after award. Brilliant!"

Independently judged by Spotcheck, there were 17 hotly contested categories, including the inaugural Store Manager of the Year category which was awarded to NIIRTA



member Darren Given of Swift's, Lisnaskea. Commenting on the success of the awards, Bill Penton, Neighbourhood Retailer publisher said: "We are delighted that we had more than 450 entries this year and the quality of entries just gets better and better." He added: "The Neighbourhood Retailer Awards are a showcase of Northern Ireland's finest independent grocery retailers and create a pivotal industry event that rewards excellence in retailing."

Commenting on the awards, Paul Hoy, Bank Machine's area sales manager, Northern Ireland and platinum awards sponsor said: "In an increasingly contactless society, the 'personal touch' provided by neighbourhood retailing is on the up. Cash is the life-blood of this service, ensuring customers get swift transactions but also meaningful, human interaction. We are over the moon to see just how many winning entrants into the awards have free to use Bank Machine ATMs within their stores. Bank Machine's latest statistics show that our ATMs are now attracting in excess of 1,000,000 transactions per month, so we know that cash continues to be king in Northern Ireland."

NIIRTA

Benefits of Membership

Do you have a News Story?

Contact NIIRTA with the details and we'll cover it if we can!

What is NIIRTA?

It's not just a lobbying body – it's a trade association with an excellent range of services and benefits available to members.

What can NIIRTA do for you?

NIIRTA can provide retailers with advice on a whole range of issues – from rates reductions and car parking to crime prevention and legislation information.

Here's a list of what's on offer from NIIRTA...

NIIRTA News – a regular update on issues affecting you!

Public Affairs – NIIRTA is the voice at Government level on all issues affecting your business

NIIRTA Advice Helpline 028 9022 0004 – Available 9.00-5.00 – Monday to Friday – for specific advice on employment and other issues.

HCMA – a sickness and injury scheme similar to BUPA – contact NIIRTA for details or telephone 01423 866985 (and quote NIIRTA).

Willis Insurance – Property insurance at competitive rates – Debbie Galbraith at Willis Insurance – 028 9089 1813 or email: galbraithd@willis.com

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Avoiding the Minefield

Tom Campbell



I have often heard an employer say that the law is “stacked in favour” of an employee when it comes to a tribunal claim. This need not necessarily be the case.

The problem here is that there are very precise and technical requirements that have to be met. If these steps are not followed, an employer will be penalised by a finding of what is known as “automatic unfair dismissal”.

To add to the picture the rules that have to be followed have been abolished in the rest of the UK-but not here! What are these rules and how do employers follow them?

They are known as the “three step procedure”. The three steps are mandatory. Failure to follow them is invariably fatal to any defence.

The steps can be summarised as-
(1) a letter to the employee setting out his conduct or other characteristics which lead the employer to “contemplate” dismissal. That

letter contains an invitation to a meeting to discuss the allegations or issues to be raised. The employee has a right to be accompanied;

- (2) the meeting takes place and the employee is given his opportunity to put his case. The employer’s decision is communicated in writing; and
- (3) if the employee wishes to he is entitled to an appeal.

There is a “modified” or shortened procedure where there is overwhelming evidence (such as a hand in the till). Both require the employer to conduct an appeal hearing if required.

Any failure to follow these procedures to the letter will mean a finding that the employer will almost certainly lose any tribunal claim and (as a penalty) he will face an increase any award.

Ironically the biggest minefield for an employer is in the area of an internal appeal. Most contracts are standard and

typically allow for a short period for the employee in which to appeal. If the employee advises that he wishes to appeal some employers will refuse to consider this as it is outside the time limit set in the contract. Unfortunately this is a serious mistake: the law says that “if the employee informs the employer of his wish to appeal, the employer must invite him to attend a further meeting”. There is no time limit in the law. This legal provision supersedes every contract. The message is that you should take advice and be careful to follow these procedures to the letter. Don’t make up technicalities or you will step on a mine!

Having set out the potential pitfalls this does not mean that an employer will not be able to successfully defend such claims-he just needs to get the basics right.

Tom Campbell is a partner in Campbell Stafford Solicitors who are new NIIRTA members. He can be contacted on 02890230808 or tomcampbell@campbellstafford.com

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1. To qualify for this offer, claimants must request a connection to the Phoenix Natural Gas network between January 1st 2013 and April 30th 2013. This offer applies to owner occupied domestic dwellings where natural gas is currently available and within which Phoenix Natural Gas is licensed to operate. Visit our website or call to request a copy of the full terms and conditions that apply to this offer. 2. Source: Energy Saving Trust. 3. SEDBUK 2005. 4. Based on the average of all available PAYG tariffs for natural gas in the Greater Belfast area and the average price for 900 litres of oil in Northern Ireland as published by the Consumer Council for Northern Ireland on Tuesday 29th January 2013. *Calls cost from 3p per minute from a BT landline. Calls from other networks may vary. Calls may be recorded or monitored.

Ulster Business School Launches New Centre for SME Development

The integral role played by SMEs in the growth of the local economy has been recognised by the University of Ulster's Business School which has launched a dedicated Centre for SME Development.



Professor Pauric McGowan, Vice Chancellor Richard Barnett, Professor Marie McHugh and Professor Ken O'Neill launching the SME Centre

Headed up by Professor Pauric McGowan and with endorsement from the Northern Ireland branches of CBI, IoD, FSB and the Chamber of Commerce, the new Centre aims to help SMEs achieve business goals through programmes to boost business performance and by facilitating leadership and management development.

Professor Marie McHugh, Dean, Ulster Business School, explains, "SMEs make up almost 95% of businesses in Northern Ireland. The performance of these companies is crucial to the performance of the local economy as a whole in terms of output, value added, productivity, innovation and employment. This is particularly pertinent at present with losses of public sector jobs and the need to rebuild and rebalance the economy through private sector growth. Investing in SMEs that are capable of contributing to the regional economy

through export growth and employment creation is central to Northern Ireland's economic future. With 40 years' experience in fostering the development of local businesses, the Ulster Business School is perfectly positioned to help government drive this important SME agenda and we would encourage SMEs to take maximum advantage of the new Centre and its services."

The Centre for SME Development will provide a range of support activities, development programmes and events delivered by the Ulster Business School's staff complemented by visiting lecturers and sectoral experts. Masterclasses, short courses, business mentoring and coaching will be offered as well as extended Business Development Programmes, work placements and knowledge transfer activities.

Professor Pauric McGowan, Director of the Centre for SME Development,

continued, "Too often SMEs are categorised as 'little big businesses' and development is offered in a one-size-fits-all approach. We firmly believe that SMEs deserve bespoke forms of support and as such we have worked closely with a vast range of key professional bodies and government agencies to ensure that the new Centre is relevant, inspirational and capable of delivering tangible results. An Advisory Board has also been established under the chairmanship of Professor Ken O'Neill to oversee and support the work of the Centre."

Further information about The Centre for SME Development is available now at www.business.ulster.ac.uk/sme. Programmes and events will begin early next year with a Small Business Development Programme and an Entrepreneurial Marketing in Practice Programme scheduled for Easter.

Re-Energised Forum Looks Forward to Working in Partnership with NIIRTA

The newly reconstituted West Belfast Traders' Forum is hoping that recently awarded support from Belfast City Council will act as a vital fillip as it forges ahead with ambitious 'buy local' promotional plans.



Local student Christopher McKenna receives an award from Gerry Stafford of The West Belfast Traders' Forum during the 2012 Aisling Bursaries ceremony this September past.

The Forum is designed to act as a strong collective voice for all traders in The West Belfast electoral area, including self employed tradespeople, professional services providers and local independent retailers.

Chairman Gerry Stafford hopes that a dynamic buy local campaign - including a revitalized online business directory and ongoing cooperative advertising initiatives - will help to keep shops thriving.

"We've got a strong independent retail sector here in West Belfast, and there are some positive things planned for the future in terms of improvements to infrastructure and much needed capital investments such as the proposed redevelopment of Casement Park.

However, as with any other high street in Northern Ireland, we're facing the same adverse economic challenges and the problem of shop vacancies is particularly acute in these relatively deprived wards.

We welcome partnerships with other trade associations and retail groups so that we can learn from each other and keep our shops busy, and we particularly look forward to working in partnership with NIIRTA for the mutual benefit of all of our members."

Gerry is pictured at The Aisling Bursaries, an initiative which is delivered by the West Belfast Partnership Board in conjunction with the Belfast Media Group. The Bursaries provide a valuable channel for students to access further and higher education and training.

Local businesses, companies and individuals contribute either £1000 or £500 and in the process make a firm commitment to developing the skills of the local community and enhancing young people's capacity to achieve their full potential. In total, 38 bursaries were presented this year to recipients.

For more information about the West Belfast Traders' Forum, please visit: www.westbelfasttradersforum.com.

Invest Northern Ireland & NIIRTA Encourage Businesses to Focus on Efficiencies to Boost Performance

Invest Northern Ireland and the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) have launched a new guide aimed at helping retailers reduce energy costs.

The publication, called Chilling Energy Costs, was developed by NIIRTA and Carbon Trust and funded by Invest NI. It focuses on reducing refrigeration costs on which NIIRTA members currently spend £7.5 million a year.

Alastair Hamilton, Chief Executive of Invest NI said: "In a highly competitive market maintaining costs is an important consideration for every business. Keeping costs low ensures a business remains competitive and can drive up profit. This new guide provides helpful information for retailers on how they can reduce their energy spend and gives advice on what steps to take to make changes that will help make efficiency savings in their operations. It is a practical resource which we hope will help retailers reduce costs and increase profit margins.

"Invest NI offers a range of support to help businesses in Northern Ireland manage the use of energy, water and materials as efficiently as possible. We are working with NIIRTA, amongst others, to encourage businesses to take advantage of this support which will ultimately improve the competitiveness of Northern Ireland's wider business base."

To help local businesses increase their productivity and save money Invest NI has recently launched a new package of support as part of its Boosting Business campaign. Invest NI is offering advice and financial help, including capital grants and interest free loans, plus project management support.

Alastair Hamilton and Glyn Roberts



NIIRTA represents the interests of over 1,400 independent retail members throughout Northern Ireland. Carbon Trust has been working with NIIRTA since 2010 to provide its members with advice and information on energy efficiency. It has also worked with a number of independently owned retail chains to deliver training to shop owners, managers and their staff on energy efficiency measures.

Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA Chief Executive, said: "In a climate of difficult trading conditions the importance of helping our members reduce costs by

becoming more energy efficient is paramount. By working with Invest NI and the wider government through initiatives such as this, we aim to drive business growth and ensure the sustainable future for our retail sector." A copy of the Chilling Energy Costs guide is available to download at <http://bit.ly/Nq920t>

For further information on Invest NI's resource efficiency workshop and how to get support contact Nigel McClelland, Sustainable Development Manager – 028 9069 8830 or nigel.mcclelland@investni.com.



We've created a monster

There's no doubt the next generation will be digital. Even now, our new digital solutions are tempting customers away from traditional branches with more and more transactions being handled online. It's time to say goodbye to banks as we know them, and hello to new standards for how you bank with us in the future. The short version is we are now much more accessible than just on the high street. You can find the slightly longer version at newstandards.co.uk.

Danske Bank

New Standards

Nipak Introduces New Time-saving Software

Northern Ireland's only locally-based compliance scheme, Nipak, was 10 years old at the end of October. To celebrate the birthday, the scheme has invested in some software that will help make it easier for you, the independent retailer, to meet your obligations under the packaging waste regulations.

If you have been contacted by the Northern Ireland Environment Agency (NIEA - formerly the EHS) about the regulations then you should talk to us about them as we can advise you - and may be able to save you money. If you have a turnover of more than £2 million and handle more than 50 tonnes of packaging in a year, then you become an 'obligated producer'. This means more forms to fill in and more costs.

We can help because while the regulations say that the data has to be as 'accurate as reasonably possible' we know from 10 years of working with the NIEA that we can make certain assumptions, reducing the amount of work you have to do. They also know our methodology and have passed it at audits. For example, if you don't have an off-licence, then your turnover has to be quite significant as the glass contributes quite a lot to the 50 tonnes! We also know that if you are between £2m and £5M then there may be an easier way to do the calculations.

What we want to be able to offer you is a package that allows you to continue getting on with your day job, with the minimum of impact in terms of time and cost. We have put together a special offer for NIIRTA members. Please contact us for more detail on 028 9042 7595 or by email info@nipak.co.uk and we'll explain the offer in more detail. Dianna looks after the members, Michael looks after the money and Simon looks after the technical stuff.

Nipak is supported by its sister companies Scotpak (another

packaging compliance scheme) in GB and Leaf Environmental in Dublin which is an environmental consultancy specialising in packaging

waste, waste electrical and electronic equipment (WEEE) and battery waste compliance issues.



Supplier Day @ NI Water

NI Water is the sole supplier of water and wastewater services in Northern Ireland, with a budget of approximately £120 million annually. It is a major presence in the local commercial world, and awarded 119 new contracts to companies of varying size in the 2011/12 financial year alone.

In order to broaden the range of organisations from which it receives tender bids, the company wishes to invite business suppliers to a 'Supplier Day' on Thursday 14 March 2013. This event is aimed at current suppliers and also potential suppliers that do not currently provide goods or services to NI Water. Suppliers will be able to book a 20 minute slot with an NI Water procurement officer, who will guide them through the services required by the company, as a major investor in the local economy.

The event will be held at NI Water's Training Centre, 61 Milltown Rd, Antrim, BT41 4NW, and will commence at 9:30am.

Those interested in attending will be required to pre-register by completing a registration form which requires you to

provide some background information on your company, what role it fulfils etc. This information will be used by the procurement team to ensure that you get the most from the event. You can register your interest now by completing the registration form available on www.niwater.com and emailing the completed form to sourcing@niwater.com.

NI Water is very keen to make its procurement process as simple and accessible as possible for any current or potential supplier. There are tremendous opportunities for large and small tenders within NI Water, and the business community are strongly encouraged to come along and meet the team.

If, for whatever reason, you can't make it along that day, please review NI Water tenders through eSourcingNI, where they are all advertised, in common with all Government Departments in Northern Ireland. Tenders are also advertised on the company's website, www.niwater.com. Look under the 'About Us' column and then click on 'Tender Opportunities'



and then 'Goods, Materials and Services'.

For details on available contracts, please see <http://www.com/gms2.asp>

Categories available for discussion are:

- Vehicle parts/maintenance
- PPE
- Professional services
- Web services
- Photography services
- Facilities management
- Security personnel/apparatus
- Full service marketing
- Mechanical and Electrical
- Mechanical and Electrical technical training
- Legal services
- Sludge management services
- Laboratory consumables
- Civil engineering

SRC Launch 2nd Retail Training Store

Southern Regional College has officially opened a new Retail Training Store at their Portadown campus which is the second such facility at the College.

Director of Workforce Development & External Relations John Quinn welcomed over 40 guests to the launch of this new facility aimed at meeting the training needs of local retailers. He explained that the store would be used to deliver SRC's wide range of retail training programmes across all levels. The facility is also available to be used by local and regional retail specialists.

SRC is committed to meeting the needs of local retailers and believes that a practical training environment will assist with the development of staff within this sector. Following on from the store that

opened in Newry in May 2010, SRC is delighted to expand their retail training resources in the southern region.

Glyn Roberts from NIIRTA (Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association) spoke at the event and praised the foresight of SRC in addressing the training and development needs of the retail sector. Mr Roberts said "NIIRTA fully support this excellent new retail training initiative by the Southern Regional College. It is our hope that this new Training Shop will help produce the independent retail entrepreneurs of the future and thus make a considerable contribution to both

National Skills Academy for Retail

The National Skills Academy for Retail is a not for profit organisation which provides support and training for retailers across the UK through a network of local 'skills shops'.

There are three such skills shops in Northern Ireland – the Greater Belfast Retail Skills Shop, the North West Retail Skills Shop and the Southern Retail Skills Shop. Between them, these skills shops provide access to world-class skills and business support for retailers whatever their size, wherever they are located.

The National Skills Academy for Retail's Thriving High Streets Campaign offers training and skills support to independent retailers across the Province. Delivered through the three skills shops, there is a wide range of solutions to support small businesses.

From our Location Model research which helps

identify skills and development needs within a town centre or location, to pre-employment training, small business courses and a mentoring scheme, the National Skills Academy for Retail can deliver a package of support appropriate to each individual retailer and/or town.

Just this week, new funding was announced, allowing Northern Ireland retailers to access a world-class customer service training programme for just £20. WorldHost is a world-class customer service training programme that has already been used to train nearly one million people worldwide. Originally developed for the Winter Olympics in Canada and used

to train tens of thousands of staff and volunteers for London 2012, the training has been adapted for use in the retail sector by the NSA for Retail and gives front-line staff a comprehensive grounding in the principles of customer service.

In conjunction with the Northern Ireland Tourist Board (NITB) and the Department for Employment and Learning (DEL) the NSA for Retail is now rolling out the renowned WorldHost programme for retailers in a bid to improve customer service standards across the retail sector.

The two programmes – The Principles of Customer Service, and the Ambassador Workshop were previously

open only to businesses in the hospitality, passenger transport, travel and tourism industries. The funding, provided by DEL, will now allow retailers which employ fewer than 250 employees to send their staff on the programmes for a fraction of the usual cost.



To find out more about any of the support available to independent retailers go to www.nsaforretail.com, call 0207 462 5060 or email: products@nsaforretail.com.

the expansion of our sector and indeed the private sector as a whole."

Other speakers included Lynn Livingstone, Recruitment Manager for Tesco as well as Jane Rexworthy, Director of Skills Solutions at the National Skills Academy for Retail.

Mayor Carla Lockhart, officially declared the Retail Training Store open for business! She welcomed this facility as a much needed training environment for the retail sector of the southern region and beyond.

The training store is stocked with a number of items that were kindly donated by some local sponsors including Tesco, Around-A-Pound, Martin McQuillan's Menswear, O' Reilly's, Tayto, Kaos and McKerr's Hardware.

For more information on the Retail Training Store please contact the Retail Team on 028 3025 9664 or email retail@src.ac.uk.



David Simpson, MP; Carla Lockhart, Mayor of Craigavon; Glyn Roberts, NIIRTA; Claire Byrne, SRC

Rising food costs 'Hard to Stomach'

The Consumer Council has published a report, 'Hard to Stomach' which looks at the impact rising food costs are having on Northern Ireland consumers.



Glyn Roberts at the launch of the Consumer Council's report: "Hard to Stomach".

Speaking at the launch at Stormont, Antoinette McKeown, Chief Executive of the Consumer Council said "Food is a central and essential part of our daily lives. Our report, 'Hard to Stomach' highlights the anxiety being felt by consumers throughout Northern Ireland in light of rising food bills."

"Our research has found that almost 9 in 10 consumers (87 per cent) are worried about the cost of their food and groceries and it's a concern that cuts across all ages, income brackets, cities, towns and villages.

"In response to rising food prices 82 per cent of consumers reported changes to the way they shop, cook and eat. We found consumers are making less impulse buys (34 per cent); buying less in general (29 per cent) and planning meals more carefully to avoid waste (28 per cent)."

"As well as the price of food, our report looks at the level of trust between consumers and the large supermarkets and retailers and we found that 61 percent of consumers felt that more could be done to help by charging a fair price."

"The report also reflects the anxiety felt by consumers trying to afford a balanced diet. We heard from parents and

those with medical or dietary requirements in particular."

"We also got feedback from consumers on the balance of special offers available at supermarkets and how confusing deals and price promotions can be."

"We will use our report to work with Government and food industry representatives to ensure that the consumer voice is heard and to address the issues raised by consumers."

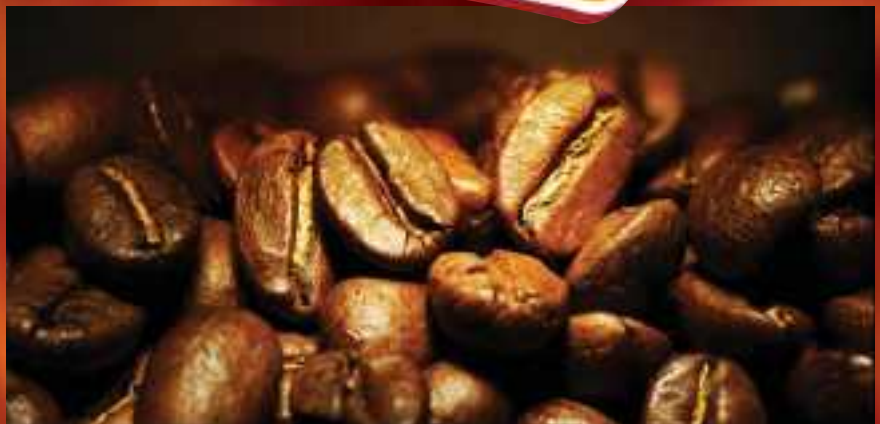
"The Consumer Council is looking forward to working with government and food industry representatives to ensure the consumer voice is heard and to address issues raised. This is particularly relevant at the moment given the pending Groceries Code Adjudicator Bill."

Glyn Roberts NIIRTA Chief Executive, who attended the launch said: "We welcome the publication of this report and its conclusions have quite literally given us 'food for thought' in terms of the challenges it poses to our grocery retail members."

"We will study in detail all of its conclusions and will continue to work with the Consumer Council to ensure our members provide food which is sustainable, affordable and local at a time when pressure is on hard working families."



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DON'T JUST SIT THERE, SAY SOMETHING!

By Prof. Lester Manley Chief Executive Manleys.



Many years ago in my art class at school I would hear the teacher shout "Manley, why are you staring out of the window? You haven't put one mark on your page!" My hurried reply was: -, "Miss, I am waiting for inspiration!"

Sometimes the hardest thing to do is "something". Whether it is lack of inspiration, procrastination, laziness or simply not knowing where to start, the most important thing to do is "start" and then keep going! Nowhere is this more important than in building your brand, no matter whether you are a business, charity, public service or an educational establishment. Good brands are good listeners and good communicators, they never stop listening and never stop talking, they have charismatic personalities and we are drawn towards their persona! In many ways, as I have said in previous articles, a brand is very similar to a person in how they develop and mature and should be treated in a similar way.

The personality of your brand is crucial to its success and needs to portray the qualities that are attractive to your target audience; it is also imperative that those qualities are backed up with actions and consistency.

We can wait for inspiration to strike or intend to "get round to it when we are not so busy" and pay the consequences of falling into reactive marketing communications, product and service development and solid brand strengthening. This is a common problem with businesses large and small and a disciplined approach should be adopted to make sure you benefit from your communications and exposure into the marketplace.

If we "wait for inspiration" it may never come, we need to make sure we don't get caught up in a mental block or wait until the message is perfect.

Building a brand is heavily dependent on correctly positioned, multiple forms of frequent communications. All too frequently some of the basic values, features and benefits of our products and services are taken for granted and forgotten about in communication to market place. I see this a lot and it is amazing the difference it can make when we start to remind ourselves of the basics and pass them on by way of the communications media mix.

So lets look at how we can get started:

What have we got to say that might be of interest to our target client?

Firstly look at the basic values and qualities of your offering and re list them down without judging the simplicity or obviousness of them. I often hear clients say "but we couldn't say or claim that, our competitors would laugh at us!" I am amazed at how many times fear of the competition reacting in a condescending way stops people claiming simple or obvious facts - even though sometimes that is all your client is looking for.

Why do brochures of products lack so many photographs or illustrations of the fundamental functionality or features? When we want to buy something new, we like to look at the brochure and look at all the relevant aspects of the product as well as the stylized beautifully photographed aspirational, in situ shots. It is also important to grade your statements so that the level of importance or uniqueness is highlighted by the priority it is given.

How can we get them excited about your offering?

Helping your client understand your product and then suggesting to them how it can be of benefit is essential and this needs a clear understanding of whom you are targeting. There is no point in marketing a car with its 0-60, F1 gear change and titanium brakes if you want to sell a small hatchback to an elderly lady who will do an average round trip of 3 miles up and down to the shops with a poodle in the boot!

The mistake is sometimes we are so excited about making our product look glamorous that we miss getting the core values across. We really need to "walk in our clients shoes" to make sure we are getting it right, especially if "you" are not like your target market. If only I had a pound for every time I heard "I would never buy that" or "it doesn't do it for me". Of course it wouldn't, you are not the target audience, more often than not they think very differently to you! So take time to get inside your customers head and find out what it is that makes them purchase your product or service

How unique is it or how unique can we make it?

The good old USP, be careful you don't look down on the good old USP as a worn out cliché. When you spell it out again it makes a lot of sense in two, simple statements- "UNIQUE" "SELLING POINT".

What is unique about what you sell and is it a selling point? People often limit where we can get these USPs believing that it relates to the core product exclusively, this is a huge mistake.

To help you get this, think over things that you have purchased and examine the reasons that have significantly influenced you "to buy" or more worryingly "not to buy". Sometimes it can be simply the speed of response, taking a genuine interest, suggesting solutions or pointing out the relevant features. Sometimes it is even simpler, letting the customer know you want their business!

How do we get the message out there?

We are spoilt for choice in the marketplace, although this can seem like a good thing, often it can confuse and waste a lot of your time and money. Think carefully what media(s) are relevant to you. It is important to use multiple forms of media with a good level of frequency and variety providing a pincer effect building on the multiplier effect.

How do we get them to respond?

Get your customers to be excited about what you can do for them, this takes a combination of elements including your product or service being good to start with and then taking a genuine interest to being a solution to their needs. Make it as personal as possible, be authentic, take an interest and make it easy for them to do business

How can we make the competition irrelevant?

You will have to wait until the next article for further insight into this point! Meanwhile start practicing: talking to your clients and target clients more frequently with more interesting and relevant messaging.

Don't forget though: - make it fun! It can be quite infectious and is a rare commodity; it could even be one of your USP's




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‘Stupid-Is-As-Stupid-Does’

“Momma says, stupid is as stupid does!” *Forrest Gump*

Your brand “is”, as your brand “does”!

If your brand could talk, what would it say about “Momma”?

We all spend different amounts of time and money making sure our brand looks well, but do we really understand what branding means and the things that make a difference?

Looking at this famous quote from the movie “Forrest Gump” in a little bit more detail we can begin to see just what really matters at the heart of your Brand so that all the hard work you spend on presenting it well is not diluted or even ruined.

What you “do” will have a significant impact on how we proceed to develop and control your brand from a strong foundation so that you are not spending half your time and energy recovering from bad “brand parenting”.

The question is who is “Momma” and how good a “brand parent” is she?

Three reasons why so many organisations don’t invest properly in their brand from the outset are:

- 1 We don’t understand what the elements are in the development of your brand.
- 2 The significant role it has to play in the success of your enterprise
- 3 We don’t know to take ownership and therefore responsibility for parenting this very powerful and important “child”.

The challenge is to treat your brand in exactly the same way that you would strive to be the perfect parent to your own children. If you can do this, then I can assure you that you are likely to see the same results, go through the same uncertainty, take the same risks and feel the same pain, but, with a significantly increased chance of it giving you huge rewards and satisfaction as you watch it maturing into a fine young adult that “you” have helped shape.

“My Momma always said, life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re gonna get” Forrest Gump

Life doesn’t guarantee you anything, you just need to be content that you have done your best and hope that it will bring you the return that you deserve. Just make sure you have bought the right box of chocolates!

So let’s talk about “Momma”. Firstly it is a term of endearment, respect and influence. We as the parents of our brands



are responsible to earn the right to be treated in the same way.

This includes every aspect of your organisation, as that is the “home” your brand will be brought up in with massive influence in how it turns out.

The parenting of your brand cannot be delegated down the organisation but must be owned by the top table be it the business owner, or Board, it must start at the top and stay there, so if you haven’t already done it, welcome “Momma” to the board!

The next thing to do is look at all aspects of your business as there is not a corner or cupboard that is exempt from affecting your brand. Interestingly it is the tiny things that often have the biggest impact in both good and bad ways.

Says professor Lester Manley, managing director, Manleys Ltd; These “SBS” “small but significant” things make all the difference as a conduit to establishing your brand in the way you want it to be. If your audience has responded to your marketing or advertising but it takes 20 rings before someone answers the phone as if it was an internal call or don’t respond to their enquiry, not only is it not a good experience for the potential customer but it actually changes their perception of your company and brand in a much more conclusive way.

How many times have we experienced a help line where they follow an unnecessary and protracted procedure which makes you lose confidence in their competency, or the shoe shop who pulls the shutter down while they are talking to you, or the sales assistant who gives a

sigh when you ask them to try another size.

Have you ever had a supplier who you feel has not delivered add in to his response “with due respect....”? Whether they are right or wrong, it certainly doesn’t build a strong relationship or heal a broken one!

One of my most memorable client “SBS” bombs was when a delivery man blocked the business owner for five minutes on his road while having a sandwich before making the delivery causing the customer to take the business away from his supplier with a lost revenue over a ten year period of over £1.5m, a very expensive sandwich!

Even more amazing was that the delivery man didn’t even work for the company and the supplier never thought to try and get the customer back.

On the other hand your “SBS” behaviors can make a world of difference and cost you nothing, the reason why, is that it usually demonstrates a highly attractive human attribute saying “we care”, quite irresistible, bringing huge depth and relationship to your organisation and ultimately your brand, just make sure it is authentic. Do we phone up our clients and thank them for the business, do we support them by referring them to other potential customers, do we take an interest and treat individuals as individuals?

We all do “SBS” things every day, make sure they build up and not divide!

And finally, to the “Box of chocolates” When you are choosing your box of chocolates, or from your brand point of view, the marketing mix, marketing and branding advisors, business processes, products and services with a bit of personality, a lot of capability and some passion and culture thrown in, you never know, you just might be pleasantly surprised.

As someone who is passionate about branding, there is nothing more satisfying for my team and me as when our clients change the way they look at branding and how it significantly improves their business. We never get bored with that, so when you meet us please forgive our childish enthusiasm!

And always remember: Branding is a journey, not a destination!

For more information, contact Manleys, info@manleys.co.uk www.manleys.co.uk

Online Platform Just The 'Ticket' For Retailers

Digitally driving footfall to local businesses

TreatTicket.com, a daily deals provider headquartered in Newtownabbey, has developed an app which will revolutionise how high street retailers interact with local consumers, and how customers can locate discounts and offers in their area.

With many local businesses feeling the heat from online competition, TreatTicket Mobile has been heralded by the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association (NIIRTA) as a completely affordable digital marketing tool that has the ability to digitally drive significant footfall to the high street and local retailers.

TreatTicket Mobile provides all businesses - from large multi-nationals to small retailers - with a digital platform to upload offers to a mobile directory of 'deals' visible to those who have downloaded the free app.

All types of businesses including, hotels, restaurants, pubs, cafes, spas, hair salons and retailers on and off the high street use the app to upload offers to drive trade on quiet days or sell unwanted stock.

With 43% of shoppers in the UK now using smartphones*, Mary McCall, TreatTicket Managing Director cites digital shopping as the inspiration for the app:

"Digital is now an integral part of the way in which we shop. A recent survey ** found that more than half (55%) of consumers now prefer to shop online rather than in-store for a variety of reasons.

"The introduction of TreatTicket Mobile will allow these consumers to continue to 'browse' online and drive footfall in-store to local business which of course will financially support the Northern Ireland economy."

Mary McCall, who has already raised



Glyn Roberts with Managing Director of TreatTicket Mary McCall

almost £1million private investment for her company since leaving her civil service job 18 months ago, continued: "TreatTicket Mobile presents local businesses with a unique opportunity to communicate with a mass digital and mobile market, in real time and in a cost effective manner.

"The internet doesn't have to be the enemy of local businesses. The free TreatTicket app allows them to take advantage of the digital technology available to us and use it to drive customers and sales in-store." TreatTicket Mobile provides shoppers with the best of both worlds - actively hunting for an offer online and letting the offers find you by utilising 'push' technology.

The geo-targeted elements of the free TreatTicket app allow consumers to find the best offers, via sector or business name, closest to them at any given time.

The technology has received backing from NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts. He said: "TreatTicket Mobile has the ability to bring 'digital' spend back into the high street.

"The ease and convenience of online

shopping presents a threat to independent retailers based on our local high streets and in our town centres. But I urge all local businesses to fight back and make 'digital' work in their favour.

"TreatTicket has developed a platform that will allow retailers in Northern Ireland to use 'online' technologies to their advantage, driving sales and footfall back into our local streets, rather than to online competitors." One boutique hotel already signed up to TreatTicket Mobile and looking forward to using the app is Julie Lynch, Business Development Manager at Malmaison Belfast, explains:

"We're excited to be working with TreatTicket Mobile. We often have promotions and this technology helps us push existing offers to a huge audience in the local area. We particularly like the flexibility of the technology which lets us choose when to start and end an offer, in real time." To find out more download the free TreatTicket app now (available for Apple and Android), visit www.TreatTicket.com/Mobile or contact: 028 9084 5200.



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Independent Retailers Call on NI Executive – Urge Re-Think on Alcohol Regulations

ACS (the Association of Convenience Stores) and NIIRTA (Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association) have submitted evidence to the Northern Ireland Executive, calling on them to rethink plans to bring in further costly and burdensome alcohol regulations.



The consultation proposes the introduction of further restrictions on the sale, promotion and advertising of alcohol products in stores to try and address concerns over increasing alcohol consumption and alcohol harm. This includes plans to create a permanent solid barrier between alcohol products and the rest of the store, and to ban any under 18s, even if accompanied, from entering the alcohol area.

ACS and NIIRTA have concerns about the proposals, claiming there is no evidence to suggest that measures such as preventing people from seeing alcohol products in stores would materially impact upon reducing alcohol-related harm. The proposals

would however both increase costs for independent retailers and inconvenience for customers.

ACS Chief Executive James Lowman & NIIRTA Chief Executive Glyn Roberts said: "Independent retailers are committed to the responsible retailing of alcohol and are involved in a number of initiatives, such as the Derry Community Alcohol Partnership, to work with local people to address the root causes of alcohol misuse and alcohol related crime and disorder.

"We believe that the proposals in this consultation regarding local shops will serve only to impose further costs and regulatory burdens on small shops

during what is already a difficult economic time. We would therefore call on the Department for Social Development to rethink plans to introduce further burdensome regulations for the off-trade, and instead work to a robust yet fair approach to the regulation of alcohol sale and supply across all licensed premises in Northern Ireland".

Concluding Mr. Roberts said: "Independent retailers, unlike the Supermarkets, avoid reckless drink promotions and sell alcohol at reasonable prices. Along with our colleagues in Pubs of Ulster we want to see a more responsible attitude by the community to alcohol consumption in Northern Ireland."

Justice Minister Hosts Organised Crime Seminar

Justice Minister David Ford has hosted a seminar for NIIRTA members and other leading members of the business community to brief them on organised crime.



Representatives from local business organisations with Justice Minister David Ford MLA

This event was part of a series of seminars hosted by the Organised Crime Taskforce (OCTF) for local businesses to inform them about organised crime, how it affects them and to provide advice on how to reduce its impact.

The focus of the presentations was the role of money in organised crime and rogue trading practices.

Justice Minister and Chair of the OCTF, David Ford, said: "Organised crime threatens every part of society and businesses are not immune. I want to make sure that businesses are kept informed about the emerging threats and issues that may impact on their trade in the hope that this knowledge will mean they can counter the criminals.

"I want to thank our business partners in helping to

organise this event. The Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce, the Federation of Small Businesses, the Confederation of British Industry and the Northern Ireland Independent Retail Trade Association have helped to ensure that we have around 120 delegates at the event.

"I hope the business representatives found the presentations helpful and take the opportunity to discuss the issue of organised crime with members of the OCTF and share experiences with each other."

David Ford said: "We all know that this is a particularly difficult time for the business community. The OCTF will continue to work in partnership with business organisations to identify, raise awareness and tackle organised crime."

Northern Ireland Carrier Bag Levy

Subject to the approval of the Northern Ireland Assembly, from 8th April 2013 the levy will become a statutory requirement for retailers in Northern Ireland to charge at least 5p for each new single use carrier bag they supply to customers.



Over the last number of months, Customer Relations Managers from the Carrier Bag Levy Team have been in direct contact with independent retailers across Northern Ireland providing comprehensive information and support regarding the introduction of the levy.

In terms of raising public awareness about the levy, DOE Communications have already undertaken, or will be undertaking a series of activities including:

- **An Above - the - Line Advertising Campaign**
This campaign including radio, press, outdoor and online is part of the umbrella Rethink Waste advertising campaign and commenced in January, running up until the Carrier Bag Levy go live date (8th April 2013).
- **PR and Media Campaign**
This campaign, led by the DOE Press Office, began in earnest following the approval of the Regulations on Monday 14th January by the NI Assembly - major coverage was received across all main local media platforms. Again, a range of media activity is planned up to and beyond the go live date, including targeting
- **business, consumer / lifestyle and environmental sections of the media, as well as newsdesks.**
- **Website**
Bespoke Carrier Bag Levy information pages and downloadable documents and materials are available at www.nidirect.gov.uk/baglevy.
- **Information Line**
A bespoke Carrier Bag Levy information line is available on 0300 200 7878
- **Public Information Posters**
These will be / are already being displayed by retailers in their premises (including the major retail operators). DOE Communications has dealt directly with a number of major retailers in the supply of this P.O.S. information. Other retailers are downloading materials directly from the Carrier Bag Levy web pages on NI Direct.
- **Social Media**
A comprehensive social media campaign is being operated by NI Direct using Facebook and Twitter.
- **Local Government Engagement**
The introduction of the Carrier Bag Levy is being supported through

local councils. This support includes: Placing relevant information about the levy in ratepayer / business magazines / newsletters. This provides an extremely large cumulative circulation.

Displaying CBL information posters in council operated public buildings (e.g. leisure centres, libraries, etc.) and Community Centres (from February)

Providing web links from council websites to NI Direct.

Re-distributing CBL press releases with a local angle.

- **CBL Information Video**
A short information video about the levy is currently under production and will be available to view / download on NI Direct from early March.
- **Further Education**
A sub-campaign to raise awareness with younger shoppers through Universities and FE Colleges is now underway.
- **Tidy NI / Eco Schools Promotion**
A "Bring a Bag Week" promotion with Eco Schools in conjunction with Tidy NI (March) encouraging bag reuse amongst school pupils will run from 4th – 8th March. This will be launched by the Minister.
- **Public Sector Communications**
An awareness campaign targeting public sector employees (total audience c 240,000) using various internal communication channels will run in March / April in the run up to and past the go live date.

firmus energy

firmus energy's head of sales, Paul Stanfield, would be an excellent 'phone a friend' option for a 'Who wants to be a millionaire' contestant if a topic such as 'the energy market in Northern Ireland' ever came up.

On a day to day basis, Paul could be in Warrenpoint discussing connection options for small food outlets or in Ballymena liaising with global energy buyers about alternatives for a major production facility. Paul manages a dedicated sales team, which offers advice to companies of all sizes across Northern Ireland on the best fuel package, which can mean significant monthly savings for businesses. With more than 30 years' experience, Paul's insight into the energy marketplace and the needs of the Northern Ireland consumer is substantial.

firmus energy, the sister company of BGE (Northern Ireland) which built the South-North and North-West pipelines, has connected more than 90% of major industrial companies along the pipelines' routes. Household names, such as Michelin, Seagate, Gallaher Ltd, Kingspan, Armaghdown Creamery, Dale Farm, Moy Park, Irwin's, Ulster Carpets, Almac, Foyle Meats, Galgorm Manor and White's Speedicook are just a few of firmus's industrial customers.

The highly-experienced team at firmus energy not only advises clients about the costs of natural gas in comparison to other fuel types but also how additional controls can add further efficiencies and savings. The right natural gas package for a small to medium business could result in significant financial savings as well as reducing an organisation's carbon emissions by around one third (*Defra: Carbon Dioxide Emission Factors for UK Energy Use 2010*). Many independent



retailers across Northern Ireland have already made the decision to switch, including Henderson's shops as well as The Genoa in both Newry and Warrenpoint.

Paul explains: "I have worked in the energy sector for 30 years and I thoroughly enjoy being out in the field or in the office with the team in our Antrim headquarters. Working with big clients is very rewarding but I equally enjoy helping smaller businesses to save money and thrive in these difficult times.

"Energy may not be the most obvious area where small companies can save money but switching to natural gas from oil, LPG or Economy 7 can offer significant savings each month.

"Costs of converting are not as high as many business owners might imagine. The returns are quickly repaid and as each business can vary greatly, I can sit down with companies to work out what the costs and benefits would be. It may not even be necessary, depending on your current equipment, to buy anything new. We work efficiently to ensure that downtime for each company that switches is kept to a minimum. Although it depends on the requirements of each individual site; it can be possible to switch a company in just a few days."

firmus energy has been operational in Northern Ireland since 2005 and has connected thousands of small businesses to the economic, practical and environmental benefits of natural gas. Paul continued: "We know that first-class customer service is a top priority for our customers and we have worked hard to ensure that our business customer processes are as simple as possible. We have online billing and account managers for each business so that we are easily contactable at a local level and help can be on the other end of a phone or on a customer's doorstep promptly.

"There are around 90 of us working for firmus energy across Northern Ireland. We have dedicated people who work every day out and about in our network areas, including Antrim, Templepatrick, Ballymena, Ballyclare, Armagh, Tandragee, Broughshane, Ballymoney, Banbridge, Coleraine, Portstewart, Craigavon, Moira, Lurgan, Portadown, Limavady, Derry~Londonderry, Newry and Warrenpoint as well as in our Antrim head office. We all work to make sure that we cause as little disruption as possible as we connect homes and businesses to our natural gas.

"We also supply greater Belfast homes and businesses with natural gas and offer a guaranteed discount against our competitor in the market.

"As I am out and about in a different part of Northern Ireland each day, I have gained quite a bit of knowledge about the businesses in each of our areas so you never know; I may prove a useful 'phone a friend' someday – particularly if you want to reduce your energy bills!"



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