

## QUEANBEYAN AGE COLUMN 9 May 2008

Simon Mitchell-Taverner, Secretary QBC

**See for yourself!** – “First impressions are often the truest, as we find (not infrequently) to our cost, when we have been wheedled out of them by plausible professions or studied actions”. So said 18<sup>th</sup> century essayist William Hazlitt – and it is just as true today. First impressions can be vital to the success of your business.

You, your staff and your business premises are all subject to other people's first impressions. If your premises are untidy, unclean or disorganised, if your staff are surly, dishevelled or disinterested – how does this affect your potential customer?

As a business operator, it is a good idea from time to time to look at your business as an outsider. A simple way is simply to clear your mind, imagine yourself to be a potential customer and just look objectively at your business:

- Is your entrance clean and welcoming? Check for cigarette butts, litter.
- What sort of message does the entrance to your premises portray?
- Once inside the premises, is the area the public sees clean, tidy and 'friendly'.
- Is this area configured appropriately for the type of business you are operating?
- Are staff appropriately dressed for the work they do?
- Do staff greet customers in a friendly and helpful manner?
- Do staff display appropriate knowledge?
- Do you have supplies of the stock you are advertising?

To be more effective, you can prepare a simple but confidential survey form for your customers to complete. You could prepare this yourself or get outside help. Whatever method you choose, you must be confident you know the answers to at least the above questions.

The bottom line is that customers are just about the most important component in any business. If you aren't keeping them happy, they will find someone else who will. This applies to both new and repeat customers.

“You never get a second chance at a first impression”, has, unfortunately, become something of a cliché in recent times. Like other clichés such as “your service is only as good as your worst operator”, it is nonetheless absolutely true.

**Member News:** It has been an exciting time for QBC member and Queanbeyan crime trends analyst John Walker. He was recently invited to Oslo, for discussions with the Norwegian Government's agency for assistance to developing countries (Norad). There is, he says, worldwide concern at the extent to which developing countries economies are being damaged by illegal

financial flows as a result of the combined effects of organised crime, fraudulent business practices and corruption, but there has so far been little action by agencies such as the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United Nations.

All of these organisations attended the discussions, and heard that Mr Walker's analyses suggest that the problem is of the order of US\$850 billion a year – a huge drain on those already poor economies. Mr Walker has already been commissioned to do some follow-up research for the International Monetary Fund, and he will be visiting Washington with ACT Chief Minister Jon Stanhope's Trade Mission in June to discuss further work.