



Devon County Council



MEMBER'S NEWSLETTER

Spring 2008

Annual Report 2007

CustomerFirst to merge with Buy With Confidence

Many of you will know that during the last year we have been involved in lengthy discussions with the Buy With Confidence Approved Trader Scheme operated by our colleagues in Trading Standards across the South East of England. The aim of these discussions has been to try and merge CustomerFirst with Buy With Confidence to create a single unified scheme. This has been a slow and complex process but we're delighted to announce that we have now reached an agreement in which both will be equal partners. We believe this will bring significant benefits both for the members, and the general public. It will provide a significant boost to the scheme as it means we are now the largest Local Authority Approved Trader Scheme in the country with more than 1800 members. Already operational in 20 Local Authorities across the South of England there are another 8 authorities in the process of signing up to the scheme and we are expecting further applications during the next year. The economies of scale derived from operating a scheme of this size will mean that for the first time we will be able to provide real promotional opportunities for the scheme.



Benefits of the merger include not only greater opportunities for promotion and publicity through 'purchasing power' but also a stronger voice with Central Government as the leading 'player' in the Local Authority Assured Trader Scheme Network (LAATSN). One immediate advantage for members is your inclusion on our joint regional website - www.buywithconfidence.gov.uk

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One of the most difficult decisions we faced was what to call the new merged scheme. We considered a number of options but in the interests of all parties we agreed that it would be sensible to retain the name of one of the schemes. After much debate we at *CustomerFirst* have agreed that the new scheme will be called **'Buy With Confidence'**. As the Buy With Confidence scheme currently covers a larger geographical area and has more members it was the logical option to choose. This was not a decision reached lightly but we felt that it was essential to retain the goodwill and brand recognition associated with one of the two schemes rather than waste time and money developing a new brand. We should stress that we are equal partners in the merged scheme and will ensure that your voice is heard and your rights are protected.

The next year will be a very busy time and there will be lots of work to do but we want you to know that we will work hard to support you during the transition period. In particular we want to reassure you that we will continue to support *CustomerFirst* as we start to promote the Buy With Confidence brand. For example, we will continue to maintain the *CustomerFirst* pages and database on the County Council website which will give us time to further develop and move across to the regional website.

We are currently drawing up an action plan to promote the new 'Buy With Confidence' brand during the next year which will include promotion through press releases and advertising. We will also be providing you with new promotional material to help you publicise your membership of the scheme. At the same time we will have a recruitment drive to encourage businesses to join the scheme. If you have ideas for raising the profile of the scheme or perhaps have found a particular means of promotion effective then please let us know – don't keep a good idea to yourself!

CustomerFirst / Buy With Confidence spreads it's wings

Congratulations to our colleagues in both Bath & North East Somerset and South Gloucestershire who are now also operating the the *CustomerFirst* scheme. Like us they will be rebranding to become Buy With Confidence - another important step in growing the scheme.

We hope that it won't be long before other authorities in the South West are in a position to join Buy With Confidence.

Yellow Pages



Last year some of you took advantage of the CustomerFirst Corporate Advertising Scheme we set up with Yellow Pages. I am pleased to confirm that once again the same facility will be available but now giving members the opportunity to be included in the Buy With Confidence Corporate Advertising Scheme.

By listing your business in an advert like the one shown here you will show you are a member of Buy With Confidence. Advertising under the Buy With Confidence Corporate Advertising Scheme is great value for money as prices start from as little as **£85 + VAT** for the Exeter directory.

To find out more please phone **0808 100 7890**.



Current membership

Member businesses now cover a wide range of trade sectors including the retail sector, food businesses, and car repairs and servicers. We want to sign up more members and anyone who runs a business with a good record of customer service is very welcome – so if you know anyone who might fit the bill, please encourage them to apply.

We're very aware that we have only have a few members in some trade sectors (particularly the home improvement and building / decorating sectors) where there is real public concern about finding a good tradesman. We're sure you'll agree that it's really important that householders can find reliable businesses and we want to support traders working in these areas of business who have high standards and deserve our recognition and support. We're taking measures to address this 'shortage' but if know of a good business involved in this trade sector (either professionally or through your 'home life') then please let us know and we'll do the rest!



Feed Back Forms

We are receiving a steady stream of completed feedback forms which is great, and the feedback is positive and full of compliments. Feedback is really helpful to us and an important way for you to raise awareness of the scheme. We'd encourage you all to give feedback forms out to all your customers so they can let us know what good service you give them!



- **Holders**

We know that one of the reasons feedback forms aren't given to customers is you just don't have anything to store the feedback forms in. We have now purchased a supply of plastic holders which you can sit on the top of desks and counter-tops to stop feedback forms blowing away in the wind everytime someone opens the door! Some of you will have received these holders already and we'll be distributing the rest over the coming months.

- **Pre-paid feedback forms**

We also think that some members (and their customers) were put off returning the forms because they had to pay for the postage on the form. This is quite understandable – it's one thing to be asked for feedback but a bit much to then expect you or your customers to pay for the stamp! We've decided that in future feedback forms will be pre-paid. These are being reprinted as this is written and we'll be arranging for them to be distributed to you shortly.

Scores on the doors

We've received some suggestions that the information coming back on feedback forms is turned into an approval rating that could be shown by members' names on the website, perhaps like the star rating system on e-bay.

We think this idea has potential and there is a commitment to explore this suggestion further but like many things it isn't as easy as it sounds. To start with, as a public service we are controlled by legislation and we have to be very careful about any information that we publish. We also need to ensure that all the Local Authorities who operate the scheme are using the same type of feedback system to make sure that any scores we list are fair and transparent. We hope that we can get something like this underway, but we'd ask you to be patient. In the meantime, as always, we'd welcome your views and comments so please drop us an email to let us know what you think.

Promotion & Publicity

It's clear from comments we continue to receive from members that the profile of the scheme needs to be raised among both consumers and businesses. For the first time this year we will have a small budget to spend on promotion and publicity to support the scheme. We want to ensure that we spend this money in the most efficient and economical way possible which will maximise publicity and raise awareness of the scheme among the general public. We are currently looking at a number of options including radio and newspaper advertising. If you have any good ideas about where and how we can best promote the scheme then please let us know. We'd also encourage members to use the scheme logo as much as possible and this is available in electronic format for members who wish to add it to their websites, letterheads, invoices and other business stationary.

Fees

We had planned to introduce fees from April but have decided that membership for current members will continue to be free until the end of March 2009. After that time a fee will be introduced but we should stress that this will solely be used to cover administration costs and to promote the scheme. Fees will be based on the number of staff (or full-time equivalents) employed by a company and the regional group has proposed they will be calculated as:

1 – 5 employees -	£110 + VAT*
6 – 20 employees -	£165 + VAT
21+ employees -	£220 + VAT

(*Please note Devon are likely to offer a reduced rate for businesses with less than 5 employees.) We plan to increase our promotional efforts as much as possible before we introduce fees so hopefully you'll see the benefits before you have to put your hands in your pockets next year!

Seminars

We've run a number of advice and training seminars this year for business sectors, including the car trade, those who sell age restricted products (cigarettes, alcohol, fireworks) and also general seminars on Civil Law. For the first time we've also run a seminar aimed at those businesses who work in the hospitality sector.

We're currently looking at what topics we should cover in our seminars next year and would welcome your comments. If there are any particular topics which you feel you'd like information and advice about then please let us know and we'll endeavour to accommodate you. Remember – we're here to support you and provide you with the information that you need!

Changing the way Devon Trading Standards works - Key Intervention Areas and Focus Groups

During the last year there has been a significant development in the way that Devon Trading Standards Service works. Central to this change has been the move towards focusing on Key Intervention Areas through the introduction of Focus Groups. The philosophy underlying this approach was to maintain our current organisational structure (4 separate teams; Fair Trading, Food Standards, Farming Standards, Special Investigations) whilst introducing a degree of flexibility in resource planning and allocation. It has allowed us to be more responsive to County Council corporate objectives, encouraged the cross-fertilisation of ideas across our service, and given staff opportunities to work closely with colleagues from other teams. Changes take time but we feel the ScamWise, Local Business Support, Healthy Local Eating, Environmental Awareness and Age Restricted Products Focus Groups are now starting to produce tangible results, vindicating this more flexible way of working.

In future editions of the magazine we'll be highlighting some of the work done by the Focus Groups. We've decided to start with an article written by a member of the Environmental Awareness Focus Group about the advice leaflets they have produced for businesses.



News from the environmental awareness group - Packaging Advice leaflet now available for businesses

As part of its Strategic Plan for 2006-2011 Devon County Council identified that it should aim to:

- minimise waste
- increase recycling and composting
- reduce the land filling of waste
- conserve the natural environment in which we live and work

At first these objectives may seem to have very little to do with the work of Trading Standards. In fact we have a contribution to make in this area by advising businesses on the Packaging (Essential Requirements) Regulations 2003. The aim of these Regulations is to reduce and minimise the impact on the environment caused by packaging and packaging waste.

The general requirement of the Regulations is that no packaging may be placed on the market unless the packaging fulfils the essential requirements and the heavy metal concentration limits. Packaging must be:

- Manufactured so that the packaging volume and weight be minimised subject to safety, hygiene and acceptance for the packed product by the consumer
- Recoverable through at least **one** of the following methods: material re-cycling, incineration with energy recovery, composting or biodegradation
- Noxious or hazardous substances in packaging must be minimised in emissions, ash or leachate from incineration or landfill

The Environmental Awareness Focus Group has produced a useful guidance leaflet for businesses on the Packaging Regulations which includes information about how you can demonstrate compliance with the Regulations, ideas for reducing packaging and waste in your business which can lead to efficiency savings for your business. So as well as doing your bit to help save the planet you may also be able to reduce your business costs. The leaflet (along with further advice leaflets on requirements for the energy labelling of cars and household appliances) can be accessed on our website at: www.devon.gov.uk/index/business/trading_standards

During the financial year 2008/09 we are also planning to run a seminar on this topic for local businesses. This seminar will be arranged in conjunction with Envirowise, one of the leading business advice organisations on environmental issues.

InBusiness E-Zine



News
Round-up
for Devon's Business
Community



A new business to business e-magazine is helping to grow Devon's already thriving economy by keeping thousands of companies and organisations right across Devon in touch with the latest news and information.

Inbusiness is produced by Devon County Council and is being sent, free of charge, by email to nearly 3000 major companies, businesses and commercial organisations in Devon - with the distribution list growing each month. You should now be receiving your copy by email but if not and you'd like to subscribe then please contact communications@devon.gov.uk or call the County Council information centre on **01392 380101**.

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County Hall, Topsham Road, Exeter EX2 4QH

Phone: 01392 381381 **Fax:** 01392 382732

Email: tsadvice@devon.gov.uk

Or visit our **website:** www.devon.gov.uk/tradingstandards

Office hours: 9am to 5pm (Monday–Thursday),
9am to 4.30pm (Friday)

We welcome calls through Typetalk

Want to be recognised as a customer friendly business?
Join our Approved Trader Scheme



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