

Rural Retailer

The Journal of the Rural Shops Alliance

Shop signs: pointing the way for customers



- **Newspaper wholesaling:** what is really happening
- **Open all hours:** when should you close your doors?

Your contacts...

for more
information
and news...

- **Rural Shops Alliance**
Egdon Hall, Lynch Lane,
Weymouth, Dorset DT4 9DN
- **Tel:** 01305 752044
- **Fax:** 01305 772949
- **E-mail:** info@rural-shops-alliance.co.uk
- **Website:** www.rural-shops-alliance.co.uk



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Cover photo: Rural
shop in Herefordshire
targeting European
agricultural workers

RuralRetailer

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Ken Parsons, RSA chief executive, writes...

A Relationship over the counter

A lot of people in our industry spend a lot of time telling shopkeepers what to stock, how to display it and what to charge for it. I am one of them. But shopping is not just about logic; it is far more personal than that. Customers relate to the shops they use. They like places they consider “my kind of shop”.



RSA chief executive,
Kenneth Parsons

The Recession makes it more important than ever to provide the smile behind the counter and the other little things that make a customer say of your store, “it’s my kind of shop”.

Loyal Waitrose shoppers, for example, tend very much to be a certain type of person. Tesco’s success is built on being “my kind of shop” for millions of people across a very wide spread of classes and income groups.

Most rural shops are more like Tesco than Waitrose; they have to appeal to a broad spread of customers. Forming a good relationship with a village is not easy. Some shopkeepers cannot do it; they just do not have the right personality. Some can do it themselves, but find it hard to train staff to match their own approach. Sometimes it is a joy to see the smiles the right personality behind the counter can generate. Even then, it is always hard work to keep relationships going.

The best shopkeepers “go the extra mile” to foster goodwill and loyalty amongst all their customers. In a village environment extra efforts do get noticed and do get talked about. But a relationship is two-way. Donating a prize for a school PTA event is fine, less so if the food and wine for it is then bought from the supermarket. Taking in undelivered

parcels for someone in the village is a great thing to do, but not if they never buy anything from the shop. And sometimes the relationship between resident and local business breaks down. Such problems can last for years - I recently met a man in a village shop who had boycotted the local petrol station because 45 years ago they did not let him use their toilet. It is really impossible to solve that sort of issue!

The Recession makes it more important than ever to provide the smile behind the counter and the other little things that make a customer say of your store, “it’s my kind of shop”.



Our Partners...



DIAGEO
GREAT BRITAIN



BOOKER

Retailer Services Team



Is a national organisation of independent shopfitting companies, all of whom offer a complete survey, design and installation service



Have over 20 years' experience providing affordable EPOS systems that meet the specific needs of convenience stores, newsagents, etc.



Has been part of the rural community for nearly a century, providing expert advice and a personal, friendly and local service

The co-operative bank
good with money

Offers a service specially for high cash turnover businesses that offers low fees and convenient banking via your local post office



Is the largest independent direct supplier of cards in the UK. They offer a full range of cards with a great service



Is one of the leading providers of cash machines, providing a high level of service to help you meet your customers' needs



Is the number one supplier of home entertainment to the convenience sector, offering a wide selection for customers to rent or buy

To obtain further information on any of these companies, please fill in the details opposite:

RSA welcomes new partner

The RSA is delighted to welcome Westons Cider as a Partner. This is a go-ahead company that has expanded enormously in recent years. They have successfully combined traditional strengths with modern management

techniques. They are also very supportive of smaller retailers in the way they conduct their business. We are looking forward enormously to working with them in the coming months.

Get involved with the RSA

The RSA is an unusual trade association in that we have strong relations with many local county councils and rural community councils. We often work in partnership with them and other organisations to get actively involved in helping individual rural retailers. This means that from time to time we have opportunities for paid consultancy work in particular parts of the country. If you think you have the right

experience and personal qualities to do this and can occasionally spend time away from your business, we would be delighted to hear from you. Please send your contact details, including address and phone number, together with a brief outline of your background and experience to the following address and we will be in touch:

response@rural-shops-alliance.co.uk

Name: Tel:

Business Address:

E-mail (where applicable):

Please send more details on the following service(s) (please write in the box below):

Send to: To: The Rural Shops Alliance, Egdon Hall, Lynch Lane, Weymouth, Dorset, DT4 9DN
Fax: 01305 772949 e-mail : info@rural-shops-alliance.co.uk

a key issue for all retailers...

Open All Hours?

Arkwright might have been Open All Hours, but most rural storeowners don't have the comic character's stamina.

Running a farm means Jane Hewson can't manage to open Crossroads Farm Shop in Melton Mowbray any more than she does, closing at 4pm most days. "We're always being asked to open longer but we can't spare the time," she says. "We would have to earn enough to pay staff and make a bit more on top, but I don't think it would be worth it."

Deciding on trading hours is an important decision that affects your customers, profits and lifestyle. It's a question of balancing the costs of opening with potential sales; there's no point staying open if you're making a loss. (In fact, in the US, some stores are even cutting opening hours to save costs.)

If you're new to the area, it helps to get a feel for the rhythm of village life first before you decide, and even if you're more established, why not work out exactly who your customers are, and how many you get at certain times?

"Use EPOS to see how much you sell, and the number of customers each hour of the day over a period, or get a manual check on numbers over a sample period," advises RSA chief executive Ken Parsons.

You might bemoan the fact that you've only got elderly customers, when closing at 6pm means that commuters will never get the chance to shop. Weekends can also be the only time that some residents can shop locally.

Many rural retailers report that because everyone gets up early in a village you'll need to open at 7am – and don't even think about closing for lunch. Evenings are important for off-licence sales, while for those with a lottery terminal, 7.30pm is the earliest the shutters can come down on Wednesday and Saturday.

The RSA's Ken Parsons believes that customers who are used to long supermarket hours increasingly expect this locally. Indeed, the Association of Convenience Stores reports that many small shops are opening for longer to compete with the supermarkets – a few even

by Helen Gregory

7am until 11pm – and believes that in rural areas consumers are becoming more demanding too. Says a spokesman: "The main opportunity is to open for longer on a Sunday when the supermarkets are more restricted. Store owners might be surprised to find that rejigging their hours can help."

The current credit crunch means there's pressure to pick up all the sales you can, but not at the expense of a decent work/life balance; you might be making a bit of money by staying open all hours but have no time to spend it.

"I'm a village store, not a convenience store," says Penny Sunaway, at Otley Village Stores in Suffolk. She reckons that she couldn't physically open any longer and closes at 7pm on weekdays when the village is quieter: "It wouldn't be worth my while to pay someone to sweep the lino in the evening."

Plus, there are security issues to consider on dark winter nights when passing trade might not stop. "Opening later on Friday is more



successful in the summer as people are more likely to shop on a light evening," reports Jane Hewson. But remember that when the 'closed' sign goes up, your customers have no choice but to shop elsewhere. It's why Richard Jones, who runs Colne Engaine village shop in Essex, believes business is booming.

"We are open 7am-10pm on Fridays and Saturdays and we're busy because we open longer hours - customers depend on us," he explains. "I'm here so much that I often get nicknamed Arkwright – but I don't mind!"

The RSA View

Opening hours are obviously very important. They are also very hard to change. Customers get used to one pattern – we often see customers come into a shop expecting the post office section to be open, when the hours actually reduced a year or more ago. However, shop opening hours do need to be reviewed from time to time – the fact that the shop-owner decided to take an hour for lunch and close on Wednesday afternoons twenty years ago does not mean it is right for 2009.

Sometimes you can reduce hours. If the last hour of business is dead, then save costs and close earlier. If most customers are local, then they get to know your opening hours and work round them. But if you have a lot of passing trade, then you may need longer hours to catch their business.



Westons Cider and the market for premium ciders...

Cider with Old Rosie

Today cider is a rapidly growing sector of the drinks market, appealing to young and old alike. The big cider producers are spending large sums of money to develop the market, whilst there is an increasing number of smaller producers, often based in the traditional cider-growing counties of Somerset and Herefordshire.



Cider is a traditional English drink that has been produced for hundreds of years. Often made by the farmer's wife and served to the farm labourers at harvest time. Good quality cider tended to attract the best workers to that farm, so competition to produce the best possible cider was fierce!

One leading producer is Westons Cider. Still family-owned, they have been growing apples and producing cider in the village of Much Marcle in Herefordshire for over 125 years. Throughout this time they have always tried to make the very best quality, traditional cider with a characteristic rich and fruit-filled flavour. Trailers of local fruit still arrive from local orchards and the cider is still matured in massive old oak vats.

The result is a range of ciders for various tastes including some from the past and some for modern tastes - Old Rosie, Stowford Press Export, Henry Westons Vintage Reserve, and Premium Organic Cider & Premium Organic Pear Cider. Westons combine their cider making skills with a thoroughly modern approach to marketing and distributing their product. Growth in sales in recent years has been meteoric.

Westons as a company is committed to supporting smaller retailers and are making great efforts to ensure that product availability and pricing help them to stock the brand profitably. And as part of their support for rural retailers, they have recently joined the RSA as a Partner. Over the next few months, the two organisations will be working together to support the sector. Bob Patch, the

company's National Account Manager, said, "This is a great opportunity for us to work closely with a large number of independent retailers especially as the cider market is showing tremendous growth. We are unique in that we have such a wide range of ciders, all just that little bit different from the norm." The increased numbers of people drinking cider mean that retailers do need to review the range they are offering customers. Add in the fact that more people will be staying in the UK rather than going abroad over the summer, the weather is predicted to be good and the result should lead to a lot more people enjoying a refreshing glass of Westons premium ciders.

We suggest that in addition to stocking it in the alcohol section, you also display premium ciders where possible in secondary sites as well e.g. alongside seasonal offers such as barbeque and picnic foods or with complementary "food matches" such as traditional English cheeses or roast hams.

- For more information see page 5 or go to www.westons-cider.co.uk



Newspaper wholesaling

The Government has accepted the recommendations in the Office of Fair Trading (OFT) reports on the newspaper wholesaling industry. Hence as matters stand, the industry will not be referred to the Competition Commission and wholesalers have been released from various existing undertakings, particularly the duty to supply any business irrespective of location on standard terms.

These quotes from rural retailers give their views on this issue.

“We currently experience far better service from our independent wholesaler who is shortly to lose News International titles. Ideally we would like to see an imposition of no later deliveries to retailers as a result of this change. It will also affect our cash flow as the receiving wholesaler takes longer to credit vouchers and we have a high volume of these. We feel that there needs to be a bottom-up look at the distribution situation and to the needs of the retailer”

The RSA has been lobbying interested parties, including Lord Mandelson at the Dept for BERR, to try to ensure that the agreement that eventually emerges takes into account the particular needs of rural retailers.

Alongside this has been the sudden move of newspaper wholesaling contracts to Smiths News and Menzies Distribution, at the expense of the few remaining local wholesalers and particularly Dawsons, which has now announced that it will be withdrawing from the market.

It is really quite an extraordinary situation. Even twenty years ago, there were dozens of newspaper distributors; whilst in a few months there will be just seven.

There will be 3 companies serving offshore islands and just 2 independents operating in Cornwall and Kent respectively. News

International is expanding its in-house distribution in urban areas, but for most rural retailers there are now just the two big players that matter.

There is a real temptation to cry “foul” and call for yet another investigation into the industry. Although the RSA believes that events have made a total farce of the recent OFT investigation, we cannot turn the clock back.

Any further investigation would take months or even years and even then no new entrants could be attracted

continued on next page...

“ We are not only losing part of Dawsons to Smiths, but we are also losing Vieweary! It seems to me that within a year or so we will have gone from a competitive situation... leaving us with a poorer service...and no alternatives. The publishers are clearly not interested in independents. How long before only supermarkets are powerful enough to be able to stock news at all?”

The industry has lost the plot over supply chain. Now, the wholesalers tender for supply rights and get a tiny per copy fee, so they have no incentive whatever to ensure we have the right amount of stock to sell. The cart should be set (to) the right end of the horse and wholesalers should be paid a huge amount per copy and a minute extra lump sum – it would make sure we get the stock and when we need it and make sure the wholesalers competed for OUR business”

“ We are already stuck with the Smiths News monopoly. They take 1/3 of our profit (as the delivery charge). If (these changes) mean Smiths get to be bigger and more menacing than it already is, I hold out no hope for my small outlet. As with the Post Office...we are being squeezed out just because we have no clout with the big players”

“ Increasing costs to the retailer will ...cause some to hit the final buffer and shut. The imposition of (another) wholesaler with a more distant warehouse will introduce many new (delivery) problems. Teething problems could spell disaster to some retailers as customers loose the habit of stopping for news products and change their behaviour. The obvious conclusion is that urban retailers will probably be better served and given priority whereas the rural community will become even more than ever the poor relations as the distance travelled and the profit achievable by the wholesaler is so small in comparison.

Wholesalers and publishers (need) to understand the retailer is their customer. The retailer is by far the most important point in the commercial chain. Without the retailer, access to the consumer is far more difficult, especially in the rural environment. My own business may have to cease to trade in news products if my expectations are correct and the slippery slope to unprofitability gets steeper”

newspaper wholesaling continued...

"In general we find Menzies (are) one of our worst supplies. We have little or no control on what they supply on a daily basis (they are now sending boxes of sweets!).

Particularly on magazines, credits have to be closely watched on a weekly basis; invariably many credits are missed off, margins are forever reducing and delivery charges seem to be forever on the increase. I really do wonder at the end of the day whether it is profitable."



into the business. Instead, in the coming months we will be actively working alongside other trade associations to ensure that new arrangements do not penalise smaller rural retailers.

We will also be actively helping rural news outlets to make the most of the business available to them - we hope to be trialling some innovative ideas shortly with some retailers.

Smiths News is on record as saying that although the universal obligation to supply will be removed when the Newspaper Code lapses,

they will continue to supply all existing customers. Hence small and medium rural newsagents will have their delivery charges cross-subsidised by larger players. Smiths also intend to make sub-retailing easier. These are promising statements that we hope will help the situation.

When your new local arrangements are finalised, please contact the RSA if your business is being significantly harmed by them. We will take up any genuine cases of hardship with the newspaper publishers, who are the ultimate paymasters in this industry. Please include precise details and figures where possible. All comments to info@rural-shops-alliance.co.uk

In the meantime we are publishing a selection of the comments we have received from rural retailers on this issue. Some retailers are concerned that competition is being reduced, whilst others take the contrary view that one delivery is better in terms of administration and one delivery charge. The general theme seems to be, "better the devil you know..."

● For more details of this important issue, see the RSA website.

"Delivery charges should be incorporated in the price of the newspapers and magazines like virtually every other commodity, so that it's not the retailers who have to foot the bill. As newspapers are a price-marked product, we cannot pass the cost of delivery on to our customers. Alternatively, take the price off the front of newspapers and magazines and let us charge what we like.

The costs of delivery are very high. In the case of Kemble's delivery charges, they make more from the delivery charges than we do from selling the newspapers! As most of our newspapers and magazines are collected from the shop, there is no way for us to pass on the delivery charges to our customers."

signage suggestions...

Signposting - The way to more customers

Signage is a very important aspect of retail marketing. It not only identifies the shop but your fascia also tells customers a great deal about your business. They will judge you shop from its colour, what it says and even the typeface it uses.

For example, potential customers will usually have a clear idea what to expect from a shop with a symbol group fascia. This is usually an advantage but conversely, farm shops often need a more individual and rural image. But whatever the shop, a tatty fascia can keep potential customers away.

No rural shopkeeper wants to put up inappropriate signs that are out of keeping with beautiful rural surroundings. However, many shops are difficult to see from the road and particularly where passing trade is important, bright signs can make a huge difference to sales.

On main roads, signs a couple of hundred metres ahead of the shop can alert drivers to the shops presence, whilst, a good sign can even encourage drivers to deviate from their route to find a shop.

Not surprisingly, a lot of shopkeepers are unsure of the legal position when it comes to signs. It sometimes seems there is a guerrilla war going on, with shopkeepers setting up roadside signs to publicise their businesses and council employees regularly removing them.

This is a disappointing state of affairs. Shopkeepers need to know what signage is allowed, whilst some councils can be over-keen to remove costly signs, which are actually helping to keep a vital community asset alive. The following is intended to help you understand what the regulations say.

What the law says about shop signage

The current legal rules on signs were set out in the snappily titled Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 2007. These cover posters, notices, boards, fascias, projecting signs, advanced signs, flags and a lot more besides.



Above: Vehicles with signs come in all sizes



Below: Vehicles or trailers used as billboards must comply with relevant legislation

signage suggestions continued...



Above: A low impact fascia for sensitive surroundings

Below: A-boards are good cheap advertising

There are no less than 14 different classes of adverts, each with their own rules, so the following is just a brief summary. When in doubt, do contact your local planning authority for help – this is your district council, unitary authority or National Park Authority as applicable. There are areas of the country, such as Areas of Special Control of Advertisements, where tighter rules apply.

All adverts must be kept clean and tidy, be safe and not obscure official

signs. It is always necessary to have the permission of the owner of the land they are on. The local highways authority usually owns roadside verges and pavements. Some advert types enjoy “deemed consent”. This means you are allowed to display them without specific permission. The following sections will give you an idea of what else is allowed under the “deemed consent” rules.

Deemed consent

Adverts displayed on the outside walls of a shop, which would include the fascia, must relate only to the business itself or the goods it is selling, have letters or numbers under 0.75 metres high (about 2’5”), be lower than 4.6 metres above the ground (about 15’) and lower than the bottom of any first floor windows, not be illuminated and must be displayed on a wall with a shop window in it. However, some adverts that fall outside these guidelines can still be given consent by the planning authority – when in doubt, ask. Enlist the help of your district councillor to support you, if necessary. Projecting signs above 4.6m (about 15’) from the ground or signs on gable-ends will usually need consent, as will most illuminated signs.

Where a shop has a forecourt, you are allowed to place additional signs on it or on walls around it, but you cannot have signs on a pavement frontage, which is part of the highway. Forecourt signs must be under 4.6m² in total area (about 50 sq ft) and not be illuminated. Signs other than those listed

generally need specific permission. How your planning authority judges applications is down to local policy but they can only consider two broad issues, amenity and public safety. Some local authorities seem much tighter than others in interpreting the rules.

Official signs

You can also ask the local highway authority (usually the county council) to erect official brown tourist signs directing people to your premises. They do vary in their willingness to do so for shops – at least one highway authority will just put “post office” on the sign but refuse to mention the associated shop business because that is deemed too commercial! There is often a significant price charged for these signs. Some local authorities will provide black and white official signs to local shops; a lot depends on local policies.

Enforcement

Although breaches of the rules can lead to prosecution, unless an offence is particularly bad, this is unlikely for a first offence – you are more likely to be invited to apply for the permission needed.

In the case of fly-posting of a placard or poster, then some highways departments are very active in removing unauthorised signs such as A-boards on roadside verges, others less so. In some places it almost seems down to the zeal of the local highways engineer. If he passes it every day on his



Above: Councils can provide brown tourist signs for shops

commute the signs may disappear very quickly. Signs on private land that are difficult to access sometimes survive for years.

FURTHER INFORMATION

The above is just an overview and different rules do apply in different parts of the country. You do need to make your own enquiries.

- For more information, the Department for Communities and Local Government has published a very useful booklet “Outdoor advertisements and signs: a guide for advertisers” that can be obtained free of charge from your local district council or unitary authority.

- The full wording of the Town and Country Planning (Control of Advertisements) Regulations 2007 can be found at: [www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/ uksi_20070783_en_1](http://www.opsi.gov.uk/si/si2007/uksi_20070783_en_1)

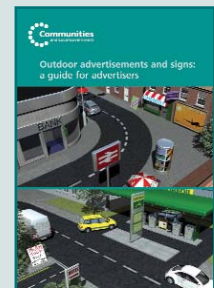
But trust us, they are not a light read and you really do not want to go there unless you have to!



Above: Signs generate an image of the shop



Above: You can have too many signs!



A brand new shop that took 10 years to build

by **Beth Whittaker**

It's taken ten years of determination and dedication on the part of two brothers to open a new shop for the village of Lighthorne Heath in Warwickshire.

When the former owner went bankrupt in 2000, brothers Rachpal Dev and Iqbal Singh took over the lease of the shop, housed in a dilapidated former NAAFI building, from the landlord, the local housing association.

"My brother already owned two other local shops, so he was the ideal person to make a go of the shop and Post Office at Lighthorne Heath," recalled Dev. "But we took on the lease on the basis that the housing association would build a new shop, as part of their plans for the land which included a doctor's surgery and some new houses. Little did we know it would take ten years!"

These plans never materialised and Dev took over the running of the shop full time, doing his best with the old building.

"We had a self repairing lease - but we thought we'd only have the old building for ten months at the most! Half the shop was derelict; when it rained, it leaked. The loo and the kitchen were in a sorry state and the whole place was dark and dingy. It was embarrassing really. But we stuck with it, because we had family roots in the community and we were determined to see it through."

In 2003, the housing association asked the brothers if they were interested in buying the land; A price was agreed - but at the last minute, the association pulled out. Explained Dev: "Eventually, they went on to build ten houses on the land - but they did keep their

part of the deal and built a brand new shop on the site - and we opened with a flourish in September 2008. The new shop is everything the old one wasn't. It's bright and airy and welcoming - and nothing leaks!"

But all has not been plain sailing for the business, even with a bright new building. "Because it looks so smart, it's become a target for thieves," said Dev. "Between December and March this year, I was called out 32 times in the small hours because the alarm had sounded. "As a result, I had to resign as sub postmaster, so the PO side of the business closed. I just felt I was expected to take on too much for very little reward," he added.

But Dev remains optimistic about the future. The shop will soon get a Paypoint terminal to allow local people to pay their domestic heating and other household bills - and stamps are still for sale.

"So far, the closure of the PO has not affected our business. Because we offer a good service, and like to help out the community wherever possible, people are very loyal and happy to shop here," added Dev.



Practice nurses from the doctor's surgery four miles away visit the shop once a week for the distribution of repeat prescriptions - a boon for local people without their own transport.

Dev is also delighted with the support and advice he has received from the RSA's Ken Parsons and Steve Patalong from Warwickshire's Vital Villages programme. "It's good to know there is help and support out there; running a business is challenging, and I'm always happy to listen to good advice," he said.

"It took ten years, but we now have a brand new building, and business is looking good. We feel very much part of the local community; it's a real social hub," added Dev, who runs the shop with the help of just one part-time member of staff.

Below: The new premises

Right: Rachpal Dev



The RSA View

Lighthorne Heath is not a typical village. It is based around the married quarters of an old RAF cold war bomber airfield. The old NAAFI looked as though it was built to withstand a direct hit from a large bomb, whilst the inside looked as though it had already received one. Dev has really got to be commended for sticking it out so long under really trying conditions to get his modern premises. The downside is that the old shop was harder to break into and losing the post office under these circumstances is really dispiriting for Dev and the community he serves. We understand that Post Office Ltd. is seeking alternative provision in the village.

calling all photographers...

Photographing village shops is surprisingly difficult. Fittings get in the way of the perfect shot, the lighting is all wrong, a customer suddenly wanders into the viewfinder. Even pictures of the exterior often have cars parked awkwardly or undesirable reflections on the window glass. So we thought that shopkeepers could

Whatever your size of camera, we are interested in the results.



probably do better than our own efforts. We are looking for some stunning shots on the theme of "customer service", with some real human interest. We will pay £40 for any photos we use on the cover of future editions of Rural Retailer, so fame and monetary reward awaits!

Photos should be of sufficiently high resolution and ideally in JPEG format. Please ensure you have permission from the people identifiable in them for the image to be used. If you are sending prints, please write your name and address on the reverse and enclose a suitable sae if you would like them returned. By submitting your photo, you agree that the RSA can use it in any way it thinks fit in its publications.

post office...

ESSENTIALS TRIAL EXTENDED

In the spring edition of Rural Retailer, we told you about the Post Office Ltd. trial of its essentials concept in 20 retail outlets, including some that had been re-

opened after their inclusion in the compensated closure programme. We now understand that POL is considering how the concept can be used in smaller outlets, including in rural areas, and is looking to establish in such a location soon.

This is a very welcome development, providing another possible format to help smaller communities retain access to key post office services. It also means that retailers who provide these services in this way will be responsible to POL directly rather than working through a core subpostmaster under the partner outreach programme.



legal bits and bobs...

Tobacco products Banning Orders

These are now in force – and any retailers found responsible for underage sale of tobacco is liable to receive one. Trading Standards can apply to the magistrates' courts for two types of order:

Restricted Premises Orders (RPOS) – served on premises where three underage sales of tobacco products have taken place in a two-year period. It bans the sale of tobacco products from those premises for up to one year.

Restricted Sales Orders (RSOs) – served on individuals and preventing them from supervising the sale of tobacco products or selling such products themselves.

Tobacco products – picture health warnings

Picture health warnings must appear on the packets of all tobacco products sold – after 30 September 2009 in the case of cigarette packs and 30 September 2010 for all other tobacco products

Batteries recycling

New laws covering the recycling and collection of batteries under the Batteries and Accumulators Regulations came into force on 5 May 2009. In our submission, the RSA had called for an exemption for small retailers and this is in place. Any retailer selling less than 32Kg of batteries per year does not have to provide collection facilities for accepting back used batteries.

Few rural retailers will sell enough batteries to get caught up in these regulations – 32Kg is equivalent to about 1400 single AA batteries. For more information go to: www.berr.gov.uk/files/file51268.pdf

National Minimum Wage

The Employment Act 2008 came into force on 6 April 2009 and introduced measures to toughen up penalties on rogue employers who fail to pay the NMW and provides a fairer method for dealing with NMW arrears. There is more information available on www.businesslink.gov.uk/minimumwage and a calculating tool at www.businesslink.gov.uk/wagecalculator.

Absence from work

A trend has emerged of GPs certifying employees as being "fit for light duties" although not fit for the job they are contracted to do. This is in line with the Government's expressed intention of getting people off benefits and back to work wherever possible.

However, it is far easier for the GP to prescribe light duties than it is for employers to interpret what they actually are. There may also be insurance issues if someone on light duties suffers an injury and hence insurers may need to be told of the basis on which the employee came back on light duties. Rural retailers

usually have a few staff who have to turn their hand to anything, with little room for individuals to have only light duties. If you are in this situation, one approach would be to provide a copy of the employee's job description to the GP and ask what duties the particular patient can perform.

Dispute resolution

The Employment Act 2008 repealed the former statutory dispute resolution procedures and created a framework to help resolve disputes at an earlier stage. The changes to workplace dispute resolution came into effect on 6 April 2009.

The Act gives employment tribunals discretionary powers to adjust awards if parties have unreasonably failed to comply with a relevant statutory Code. ACAS has published a new Code on disciplinary and grievance procedures to reflect the new regime. See <http://www.acas.org.uk/index.aspx?articleid=2126>

Holiday Entitlement

From 1 April 2009 the minimum paid holiday entitlement for workers increased to 5.6 weeks per annum. The European Court of Justice has ruled that entitlement to paid holiday accrues whilst employees are absent on sick leave. The case has been referred back to the House of Lords where the European Court decision is expected to be upheld.

Flexible Working

From April 2009 the right to request flexible working was extended to those employees with children up to the age of 16 years (18 if the child is disabled)

Health & Safety – registration with relevant authority.

From 6 April 2009 new rules made it unnecessary to register with the relevant health & safety authority under the Offices, Shops and Railway Premises Act 1963. This means that shop employers will no longer have to complete the OSR1 form to register.

Health & Safety Poster and Leaflet

From 6 April 2009 new versions of these publications are available. Go to www.hse.uk/pubns/books/lawposter

Working Time Regulations- 48 hour week.

Following a vote by Euro MPs that the UK's opt out from the 48-hour week should end, talks continued between the European Parliament and the 27 EU member states in an attempt to achieve a compromise on a revised Directive. Those talks have finally broken down without agreement being reached and the UK opt out is protected for the foreseeable future.



With thanks to PBS Blueprint for much of the information in this article.

Go to pbsblueprint.co.uk for more details

how to beat supermarket own labels at their own game...

EURO SHOPPER

In the current Recession, we all know that customers, more than ever, are looking for good value for money. Many shoppers are turning to the discounters and supermarket own labels to get it. This can leave rural independents at a real disadvantage.

The Euro Shopper value brand offers great quality, low prices and amazing value, helping to deliver extra sales and profits for retailers.

Exclusively available at Booker, it allows independents to compete effectively, whilst still making the high margin of 30%. The range contains essential grocery products, specially selected for the independent sector. All products are price-marked and offer low everyday prices to shoppers.

“Since Euro Shopper was launched in July 2007 it has gone from strength to strength,” said Steve Fox, Sales Director – Retail at Bookers. “We recommend the full range of Euro Shopper products to rural shops as we know it drives footfall and generates incremental sales due to its fantastic quality.”

Less than two years after the launch, Euro Shopper Energy Drink won ‘Product of the Year’ at the prestigious Convenience Retail Awards. This is the first time an own-brand product has won this award and demonstrates its outstanding success.

Steve Fox commented: “With a RSP of 35p and profits of over 36% for retailers this is a fantastic product to help them to increase their sales. Euro Shopper Energy Drink and similar ones in the range, like the Euro Shopper Orange Isotonic Drink, actually grow sales of the whole category rather than stealing them from other brands, which is a great reason for independent retailers to stock them.”

The Euro Shopper range has recently been extended with the launch of five new chilled products including bacon, cheeses and cooked meats, which are all price-marked at the same price-point of £1. As with all of the Euro Shopper range, the products give retailers a high POR of 30%.

Steve Fox continued: “Chilled products remain vitally important to independent retailers and these particular categories are dominated by own-brand. Therefore, these new Euro Shopper lines are ideal to help independent retailers sell more as they are fantastic quality, at an entry level price which is great value for money.”

Booker recommends that where space is available, retailers dual-site the products within their store to make the maximum impact with the brand. As well as each product being displayed within its category,

a Euro Shopper promotional end display will raise awareness of the brand and lead to increased sales. Booker also provides a free of charge point of sale kit to all retailers who stock the brand.

Steve Fox said: “I would encourage all retailers to try these products in their store, as I am sure they will be delighted by the range. We are offering Sale or Return on all cases of Euro Shopper products to give our customers the confidence to try these products in their shops.”

The RSA View

The Discounters are increasing their market shares. A record proportion of the goods sold are bought at offer prices and supermarket own labels make up well over a third of their sales. It is therefore vital that independent retailers have the means to fight back. Wholesalers’ own label brands such as Euro Shopper can make a huge difference in helping independent retailers compete in the current cutthroat market place.



Are you taking fire safety seriously ?

Your responsibilities under current legislation In October 2008 Mr Mehmet Parlak was sentenced to four months imprisonment and his company was fined £21,000 for eight offences relating to a fatal fire on his premises. This custodial sentence highlights that the Fire Safety Order, in force from 1st October 2006, is now leading to harsher sentencing for fire safety breaches.



Severe fines of thousands of pounds are not uncommon. Although the Fire & Rescue Services attend more than 30,000 workplace fires each year, many businesses are not complying with the new Order and some are not even aware of it!

The Regulatory Reform Order 2005 takes responsibility for fire safety away from Fire Services and firmly places it with the owner or occupier of the building. This means if you operate a shop or own a rental property of any size, you must carry out a Fire Risk Assessment.

Fire Risk Assessments

The Fire Services no longer issue Fire Certificates or provide advice on Fire Safety to businesses. Instead, they are now the enforcing authority that will prosecute you if you do not take your responsibilities under the Regulations seriously. Fundamental to compliance is the completion of a Fire Risk Assessment by a competent person. This is your responsibility! This document assesses the fire risks to the property

and to employees and visitors on the premises. In looking at the steps needed to mitigate these risks, it follows a simple five step approach:

- **Step 1** - Identify the fire hazards
- **Step 2** - Identify people at risk
- **Step 3** - Evaluate, remove, reduce and protect from fire
- **Step 4** - Record, plan, inform, instruct and train
- **Step 5** - Keep assessment under review

Once the Fire Risk Assessment has been carried out, the Assessment becomes a "living document" that requires the holder to address any deficiencies. This document should be reviewed on an annual basis or when changes are made to the building structure or what is undertaken in it.

A series of control measures to reduce the risk from fire will be required, such as removing potential causes and putting in reasonable fire protection measures such as fire alarms, detection systems and emergency escape routes. It also involves training staff to know what to do in the event of a fire, including how to use Fire Safety equipment such as fire extinguishers.

Below are listed some common Risk Assessment findings. Do any of these apply to your shop?

- No, or inadequate, fire alarm system.



- Fire alarm system not being tested or serviced.
- No Emergency Escape Lighting or not being tested or serviced.
- No safety signage or below standard or out of date safety signage.
- No fire training for staff.



- Fire drills not carried out.
- No fire procedures in place.
- Mains electrical system not serviced.
- Portable electrical appliances not tested.
- Fire exits blocked or compromised through storing of stock, materials or waste materials, seized up exit doors, overgrown vegetation or enclosing fencing.
- Inappropriate or inadequate Fire Extinguishers
- Fire Extinguishers not tested/inspected by a qualified inspector on an annual basis

The simple message is now is the time to act before its too late, you get fined, imprisoned or more importantly somebody gets injured or killed due to a fire in your premises!!!

more information

For more information on the Regulatory Reform (Fire Safety) Order 2005 or a confidential discussion about Fire Safety in your workplace please contact **Gary Hepburn** at the RSA head office on **01305 752044** or **gary.hepburn@rural-shops-alliance.co.uk**

Trident puts fun back into gum with exclusive Beyoncé concert



Cadbury

Creating more moments of pleasure, Cadbury, the UK's number one confectionery manufacturer, is thrilled to announce that Trident has teamed up with global superstar Beyoncé to put on an exclusive concert at the O2 Arena for Trident chewing gum shoppers.

Cadbury is investing £2.5m to raise awareness of the promotion, including outdoor and print advertising, PR, radio, digital and in-store POS material. In order to be in with a chance of winning one of the 13,000 tickets available for the 15th November concert, shoppers simply need to purchase a pack of Trident, in any flavour, and fill in the last four digits of the barcode online at www.tridentunwrapped.co.uk.

Kate Harding, Trade Communications Manager at Cadbury, comments: *"With this unique promotion Trident will drive fun and growth back into the gum category. Beyoncé is one of the biggest music stars on the planet and the bootylicious event will deliver more moments of pleasure for 13,000 lucky Trident and Beyoncé fans. Retailers who*

understand the scale of interest this activity will evoke should display Trident in a prominent position in store as we anticipate very significant sales uplifts."

The promotion will use existing, standard packs of Trident, so retailers do not need to purchase special promotional packs. Consumers will be alerted to the promotion using the advertising and POS material, which follows the theme of the advertising campaign featuring Beyoncé and includes a call to enter the competition.

Merchandising advice to retailers

Most gum products are consumed on the go, so it is important to offer shoppers a good range to choose from. The gums category has a fast rate of sale, so products should be sited in key impulse areas in-store and flagged by top-selling brands such as Trident, for maximum visibility. Availability is also key. Retailers should make the most of the available POS material to help create theatre around the gum fixture.

