

## Some business tips for the holiday season

Printed in "Business Monday" newspaper on December 14th, 2009

It's the most wonderful time of the year! So the familiar carol goes, but of course Christmas time also brings with it other superlatives besides "most wonderful".

It is also the busiest time of the year for many businesses with the longest hours and the most customers seen in the last 12 months. Let's be honest, that can all contribute to making it the most stressful time of the year. Between juggling the long hours, serving many customers and co-ordinating the many advertisements your firm may be placing in the media, there is a lot to deal with and sometimes we forget.

With all that in mind, the Fair Trading Commission is doing its part to make things a little easier and merrier. Following are a series of useful tips to provide guidance to businesses for this holiday season. Keep them close at hand!

1. Provide all information to customers up-front; it reduces the chances of disputes or complaints at a later date.
2. Ensure that all important terms and conditions of the good or service are in plain and intelligible language.
3. Do not mislead customers about their rights to a refund, and especially remember that No Exchange, No Refund signs are illegal.
4. Ensure that all information contained in any advertisement is accurate, for example the condition of the goods you are advertising i.e. whether new, second-hand or reconditioned.
5. Do not use fine print to significantly modify or change the main offer in the main message of an advertisement.
6. Ensure that any illustrations or pictures used in advertisements relate specifically to the good being offered for sale. For instance, pictures placed in advertisements should not be a different version of

what is actually being sold, as this could be very misleading and may more often than not confuse the consumer.

7. Assign a staff member to examine advertisements for mistakes before they are published. If mistakes are detected after publication, pull the advertisement immediately.

8. All discussions, displays and demonstrations are considered a part of the transaction and must be accurate.

9. Clearly disclose all costs to the consumer at the onset of any contract.

10. Do not accept payment if you know, or should know that your business cannot provide the kind of goods or services promised. If you advertise goods or services your business cannot or may not be able to supply since this may result in 'bait advertising';.

11. Do not mislead customers when giving estimates for jobs since it is on this information that customers rely in making a final decision to acquire the good or the service.

12. Cell phone providers please let your customers know up-front that the contract for the service is for one year.