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12<sup>th</sup> November 2002

Dear Di

## Breakfast Workshops

Many thanks for your email of the 8<sup>th</sup> November and the names, please forgive the short delay in replying - seriously busy at the present time. I had already 'signed up' John French, but will speak with Veronica Ryan as soon as I can.

The recent set of four Workshops deserved a much better turnout from local traders. They were very well presented by Gordon Jones and the ideas they contained were very accessible and easy for local traders to put into practice. In the past I myself have presented a number of broadly similar events for my own managers and staff, recognising the vital need to –

- Attract new customers,
- Sell effectively to them and importantly,
- Retain them.

Each summer, our 140 or so regular staff are supplemented by around 60 'student staff'. The majority of these received formal training sessions, especially in customer service. The value of this is demonstrated when we receive, as we now do each year, written letters of thanks from customers, complimenting these young people.

The Workshops are excellent and well worth continuing but promoting them is the principal issue. There is sadly an apathy and inertia prevailing. Many small traders appear to take some comfort in hiding behind external forces which adversely affect their businesses. This stops them having to blame themselves. A couple of days ago, whilst out shopping in Cheadle Hulme, one shopkeeper apologised for not coming to the Workshops, telling me that he 'would have had to get up half an hour earlier'. He obviously thinks that half an hour extra in bed is more important than his business, or perhaps feels that he knows it all, already.

Please do not misunderstand me, I strongly believe that a strong small retail sector is very beneficial to District Centres. They can offer personal service and advice and generally a higher level of product knowledge than the large multiples, along with a more specialised offering. They must not however, take a blinkered approach to business, rather think laterally or as the popular expression goes, 'out of the box'. Our own business has changed almost out of all recognition over the last 12 years. Your workshops provide a perfect start to this process of re-education, and at a low enough cost to prevent this being a deterrent.

Perhaps the ideal situation is to have a local 'champion' who knows many of the businesses in the area concerned and can personally canvass support and explain what they may achieve from participation. We receive around 50 pieces of mail each day and half of it heads straight for the bin, there simply being insufficient time to read and digest it all. There are usually training courses in there, but often at £200 per day!

Keep up the good work and I wish you every success with future events.

Yours sincerely



Chris Monkhouse

*Managing Director*

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*& Chairman,*

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