

ACCC update

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What does the ACCC do for small business?

Small businesses employ over 3 million people in Australia and account for about 33 per cent of the country's gross domestic product. They are a fundamental support for Australia's economy and are therefore crucial to its wellbeing.

To stay healthy and productive, businesses need to know the rights and wrongs of business practice. These are set out in the Trade Practices Act, which is a Commonwealth law to make sure businesses treat each other and their customers fairly.

The Small Business Program of the ACCC helps people understand their rights and responsibilities under the Trade Practices Act.

In each State and Territory, the ACCC has Small Business Managers who work specifically with small business operators, organisations and associations. They run seminars and meetings to distribute trade practices information and to advise the business community of recent changes to the Act. They also attend business expos, ethnic festivals and field days.

Informed businesses are better able to protect themselves from behaviour that might damage their business. The ACCC produces many publications with the small business operator in mind, including:

- *Small Business and the Trade Practices Act*: a concise guide to the Act which answers the most common questions put to the ACCC by small business;
- *Fair Game or Fair Go*: a small business guide to unconscionable conduct; and

- *Retail Flash*: a magazine produced in cooperation with the Australian Retailers Association.

More recently, the ACCC's publications have been expanded to include videos. *Fair Game or Fair Go* is also a video which explains unconscionable conduct through scenarios of common business dealings and panel discussion. Another, about advertising and selling, will be released in early 2002.

The ACCC's relationship with small business is not just one-way. It organises regular meetings of the Small Business Advisory Group, where small business associations can raise the latest trade practices issues affecting small business.

The work of the ACCC's Small Business Program also involves industry codes of conduct. For example, the Trade Practices Act has incorporated the Franchising Code of Conduct since 1998. New and existing franchisees must be able to make informed decisions about investing in a franchise and so the ACCC takes its education role about the code very seriously.

The ACCC helped to establish the Code of Conduct for Film Exhibition and Distribution in 1998. It recently reviewed the code and made a series of recommendations to improve its operation.

More detailed information on the Small Business Program, including contacts for each State and Territory, can be found at the ACCC's website <<http://www.accc.gov.au>>. For phone inquiries call the ACCC Infocentre on 1300 302 502.