

a professional image

No matter how small your store may be, it's important to project a professional image.....and before you start worrying that that means a lot of money, rest assured, it doesn't have to. What it does mean is being organised, and taking some time to think about how various aspects of your business will be perceived by your customers. Remember, most of them will feel more confident doing business with you if they know they're dealing with a solid, experienced and organised retailer.

Here are a few things to bear in mind:

- **leave a professional message on your answerphone:** When you're a sole trader, it can be tricky to answer phones in a store, and nothing is worse for a customer than a phone that rings and rings. It may be a good idea to think about diverting calls to an answerphone if you're too busy to answer. If you do decide this is a good option, it's important to leave a professional sounding message on your answerphone. Customers place a lot of value in first impressions, so it's important to make sure your message projects the appropriate image.

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- **create professional invoices and letterhead:** While a lot of small businesses can't see the point in having letterhead and invoices professionally designed, it's a very easy way to improve the professional image of your company. And it doesn't have to be anything elaborate – even something that's generated using a word processing package on a computer is preferable to a hand written invoice or letter.

- **set up email accounts:** Hotmail email accounts might be convenient and cheap, but they aren't very professional. It's far better to invest in setting up your own email address that is personalised for your retail store (ie: mike@simplygifts.com.au rather than simplygifts@hotmail.com). While this service will cost around \$30 per month to host, it's money well spent to ensure your business projects a professional image.

- **project a professional image on the phone:** When a customer calls to place an order or make an enquiry, it's important that you deal with it professionally – and that means making sure you're in a situation that allows you to act professionally – if your children have just arrived at your store, keep them out of ear-shot. There's nothing worse than trying to talk business with laughing or crying kiddies in the background.

- **refer to different parts of your business:** Though your stock might be stored in various hiding places around your tiny store, it's important that you use the right terminology to talk about your business. No matter where you store things, always refer to it as your storeroom. And, even if you're simply placing an order in an in-tray, tell your customers you've passed their request onto your distribution department.

- **pay attention to your packaging:** How you package your product says a lot about it. Think about the sort of image your packaging portrays – you might not be able to afford anything personalised with your store's logo on it, but various companies have stock ranges of packaging available that project a much better image than a plastic bag.



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