

Dog friendly policies can be good for business



In many countries it's common for dogs to be present in social settings. In Australia however, we're only just beginning to appreciate this concept and the rewards that can flow from it. Dogs are a natural "icebreaker". They encourage people to get out and about and facilitate conversations amongst strangers.

*"A dog friendly business in pubs can boost business
and if dog and owner are kept happy they stay loyal for life."*

- the Guardian July 31, 2004

It can also make good economic sense for business.

When Mike and Clare Flanagan bought their hotel in Prahran, Victoria in late 2007, they were surprised by the number of dogs and owners walking in the nearby parks and gardens.

Initially, the couple followed in the footsteps of the previous owner who had banned dogs outright from the premises, but after repeated and persistent requests, the young couple gave it some thought. "There was proven customer demand and there's no doubt that winter has its slower nights," said Mike.

The hotel's beer garden has a gate that opens onto the street, allowing owners and their dogs to enter and exit the garden without going into the hotel itself, in compliance with local council legislation.

So began the now popular "Mad Dog Mondays" where dogs and owners can pop in for a drink, a meal, friendly conversation and fun and games. The couple have not experienced any nuisance behaviours from the dogs or their owners.

"Most people are aware of how their dog should behave in public. We haven't had any fights or dog mess. The owners don't want to be embarrassed by their dog's actions, so everyone puts on their best behaviour."

It's a behaviour that gets rewarded with a regular prize for the evening being awarded to the "Best Behaved Dog" on the night. "The dogs provide a common bond for people here," Mike said. "Monday nights tend to be a very social night with the dogs providing an ice breaker for conversation and a relaxed atmosphere. We have a lot of regulars that come in now, and of course quite a few singles who come in with or without their dogs."

*"What better thing to do with the family on a Monday night
but walk the dog down so they get their exercise,
have a good pub meal, meet some people and
wander back home. It ends up being a good fit for all."*

Mike Flanagan, Flying Duck Hotel

Benefits of pets in business

- Develops friendly social networks amongst locals
- Creates a boost to local business by developing a loyal clientele
- Helps form "walkable neighbourhoods" by creating accessible destinations



Tips

- Target any local businesses that have a tendency to attract dog owners
- Review Council regulations relating to dogs and eating places
- Encourage business to come up with a doggy theme i.e. "Spot for Coffee" or low fat treats given to dogs on arrival
- Promote in local papers, by word of mouth etc

Web Links

Flying Duck Hotel - www.flyingduckhotel.com.au