

FINAL  
Township  
Marketing Plan  
Muswellbrook

Prepared for  
Muswellbrook  
Chamber of  
Commerce

Linda Hailey  
Hailey Enterprises Pty Ltd  
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# First Impressions

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## General

This information has been gathered from personal observation of Muswellbrook, an orientation tour of the township by car including Industrial Areas, lookout and town entrances, a retail audit of the main street and visits to Muswellbrook Marketplace and Muswellbrook Fair shopping precincts.

Additional information was gathered from meetings with representatives of the Chamber and Shire Council and reading the recently released CBD Strategic Plan.

Mike Kelly of The Muswellbrook Chamber of Commerce and Industry Inc and Carolyn O'Brien, Economic Development Officer of the Muswellbrook Shire Council acted as my guides for the site visit.

## Objectives

The aim of this first phase of the consultancy was to identify the key issues that will have an impact on the future marketing of Muswellbrook. This review involved a walking tour of the CBD.

The review encompassed:

- ▶ Town approaches
- ▶ Signage
- ▶ Visibility
- ▶ Identity and branding
- ▶ Product stock levels
- ▶ Product ranges in stores
- ▶ Traditional versus innovative products
- ▶ Merchandising
- ▶ Street scaping
- ▶ Architecture
- ▶ Heritage values
- ▶ Customer service

## First Impressions

### Approaches

There are three approaches to Muswellbrook. The New England Highway from Maitland and Singleton, Denman Road from Denman and New England Highway from Tamworth and Scone.

Muswellbrook is the first major township that you drive through after leaving the freeway from Sydney or Newcastle. The highway bypasses the town of Maitland and the Singleton CBD is set back from the road and can't be seen from the highway. Directional signage to the Singleton shopping area is also poor and can be confusing.

If coming through the Hunter, the visitor would drive through Cessnock which does not have the street appeal of Muswellbrook.

Muswellbrook has clearly defined "gateways" at each entry to town. All the gateways include:

- ▶ A welcome to Muswellbrook sign featuring a bunch of grapes and a horseshoe
  - These signs are quite dated and old fashioned in style
- ▶ Service Club sign with logos of all local service clubs
- ▶ On the approach from Scone and Tamworth there is
  - A memorial for Vietnam Veterans

- An information Board carrying the tourist information symbol and the wording "Welcome to Blue Heeler Country"
- A sign promoting St Heliers Heavy Horse Heritage Field Days
- Fire danger rating sign
- Stop Revive Survive signage
- ▶ On the Denman Road approach there is
  - A sign promoting the Racecourse and McDonald's
  - A large sign which was erected by the Chamber some years ago which says "Welcome to Muswellbrook the pick of the Hunter"
    - This sign is faded and in disrepair

The trip from the centre of Sydney took approximately 3 hours.

The approach to Muswellbrook from Sydney is quite scenic and there is a sense of "arrival" as you reach the town. The New England Highway is four lanes with a planted median strip. There is a "ribbon" of businesses along the highway which mainly include motels, service stations, trades and takeaway food outlets such as McDonald's. There is a feeling that you are approaching a substantial, thriving service town.

This feeling is somewhat negated at the run down and shabby looking T Intersection where you can turn right for Muswellbrook or left for Denman. This intersection is cluttered with signage and the buildings look neglected.

From the other direction the New England Highway approach is more positive as visitors pass well cared for entrances and proceed down the wide main street with KFC and a large RSL Club.

The approaches to Muswellbrook are all relatively free of unsightly hoardings or garish signage which mars the entrances to some regional towns.

## CBD Main Street

The Muswellbrook main street is relatively long and wide. It is the major thoroughfare through the town. At first glance it is a thriving business district which has kept its banks and services unlike many other regional centres.

The main highway runs through the main street of Muswellbrook and associated with this is a relatively high number of vehicle and truck movements. Noise levels rise when a large truck passes through but is not overly intrusive. During the retail review which took over an hour there was only one occasion where traffic noise intruded on conversations.

A feature of the main street is the number of arcades. In many towns where the main street is competing for business with local malls these arcades are the first to fall vacant and are often run down, dark and poorly presented. Although there are vacancies in Muswellbrook arcades, service businesses have taken residence in a number of them and most are well maintained and provide a pleasant environment. The Central Arcade in particular has potential to be revitalised with a mix of new businesses.

The overall impression of Muswellbrook main street differs depending on where you are standing. For instance standing outside the National Bank looking towards the roundabout the street feels quiet, run down and gloomy. Looking up the street towards Campbell's Corner the aspect is much more lively and prosperous.

## Shopping Precincts

In addition to the CBD, Muswellbrook has two shopping malls which service the local community. Coles anchors the newer Muswellbrook Fair development in South Muswellbrook and Woolworths anchors the older Marketplace Mall in Sowerby Street. There is also an Aldi Supermarket next to Muswellbrook Fair and a smaller development in the Campbell's Building which has Franklins as their major tenant.

Neither Muswellbrook Marketplace nor Muswellbrook Fair are visible from the main street or CBD area.

It would appear that most residents shop at the malls for their day to day needs and visit the main street for the service businesses. The Franklins supermarket in the Campbell's Building seems to have a stronger following with older members of the community.

## Streetscape

First impressions of the Muswellbrook main street are generally positive. The street is typical of a NSW regional town with attractive wide streets and established trees. At first glance it looks to be a busy service town focusing on a local market. There is minimal visual clutter from overhead wires etc. Streetscape features include:

- ▶ Wide paved footpaths that are mostly in good condition
- ▶ Tall light poles
- ▶ Established trees
- ▶ Newer trees protected by metal tree guards
- ▶ Planted roundabout
- ▶ The Royal hotel has brightened up their footpath with planters featuring colourful annuals
- ▶ Parks and public spaces adjacent to the main street that give an overall impression of a green, lush environment
- ▶ Timber panelled rubbish bins with ashtrays
  - On the day of the site visit there was also evidence of Sulo bins on the pavements, this may have been because it was the day of a rubbish collection
- ▶ There is a heritage style mural for TJS Real Estate on the wall facing the courthouse
- ▶ Apart from the main intersection of Bridge and Brooke Streets there are pedestrian "islands" at the North and South ends of the main street
- ▶ There is no seating in the main street
- ▶ Aromas is the only business in the main street that has outdoor café seating
  - The site visit was in winter so this may change during warmer months
  - This also could be an indicator that traffic noise is a real or perceived problem

## Architecture

The main street architecture is a key asset for the Muswellbrook business community. It generally has a solid, traditional feel which adds to the welcoming ambience of the main street

The majority of buildings are architecturally interesting and there are a large number of standout buildings including hotels, the regional art centre, Weidmann Cottage, Campbell's Corner and the old picture theatre. Most of these are detailed in the Heritage Town Walk.

Unlike many regional towns Muswellbrook has largely escaped the "red brick" plague and most newer buildings are not obtrusive in the landscape. A large number of property owners have capitalised on their architecture with signage and colours that are in keeping with the period of the building.

## Parking

- ▶ There is parallel parking in the main street and there were plenty of spaces available on the days of the site visit.
- ▶ There is parking available behind the main street (on both sides) which can be accessed through the walkways or arcades off Bridge Street.

- ▶ There is parking available at the Marketplace Mall although some of this parking area is on a slope which may be difficult for elderly people to negotiate.
- ▶ Parking does not appear to be a major issue for the CBD

## Retail Mix

### Main Street

The main street has a mix of outlets that predominantly service the needs of local residents.

The main street has many more service providers than would be expected for a town of its size. However, there are less fashion, gift, home wares and browsing shops than would be expected for a main street that services a community of 16,000 residents. I would also have expected to see more outlets or product ranges that are obviously targeting the tourist or visitor market.

The main street obviously started as the "hub" of the community and originally would have been the meeting place for locals doing their day to day shopping. As the malls have taken over the role of providing the day to day shopping needs there has been a migration of retailers to the malls which has left the CBD heavy with service businesses and a decreased number of retail outlets.

In many communities these gaps are often filled by cafes, browsing outlets and operators with new and interesting retail concepts. This has not happened in Muswellbrook at this stage. A review of the main street mix revealed:

- ▶ 18 outlets specialising in day to day needs. This included Franklins, dry cleaner, newsagency, St Vinnie's, TAB, Australia Post etc
  - This includes only 3 fresh food outlets; butcher/deli, seafood and Franklins
- ▶ 14 food outlets providing takeaway and eat in meals. This consists of
  - 4 restaurants, 3 hotels and 1 RSL Club providing evening meals
  - 1 takeaway outlet
  - 5 cafes ranging from traditional to modern. The most innovative concept is the Tea Shrine
    - This initially looks like a strong mix but much smaller towns have higher numbers of cafes and takeaways
- ▶ 8 fashion and gift shops that would appeal to browsers. (Millers are included in this mix although not strictly a browsing outlet). Other outlets that could also fit the criteria for browsing shops include Cool Hobbies, Discount Furniture and Central Music. They are currently included under daily needs outlets
- ▶ 7 banks or credit unions (including Allcard ATM)
- ▶ 6 professional services such as accountants, solicitors
- ▶ 6 outlets selling home wares ranging from carpets and whitegoods to outdoor furniture and hardware.
  - An additional business in this category is a joiner.
- ▶ 5 real estate agents
- ▶ 6 motor trade operators including Ford and Holden dealerships, Repco and Windscreens O'Brien, Auto One and Bullseye Auto Parts
- ▶ 4 Hair and/or beauty salons and 1 barber
  - This is much lower than expected for a town the size of Muswellbrook

Other drawcards to the main street include the Courthouse, Library and Arts Centre

There are 14 vacancies in the main street. Most of these are at the ends of the main street or in arcades; 7 of the vacancies are in the Central Arcade.

There are gaps in the following areas:

- ▶ Fresh food, fruit and vegetable retailer, baker/pie shop
- ▶ Fashion, gift and browsing outlets e.g. book retailer, collectables
- ▶ Hair and beauty

## Other Centres

The main street is just one retail precinct of Muswellbrook and it is interesting to see how the mix changes when additional retailers from other centres are included in the retail mix. As would be expected; both malls have a very strong "day to day" focus in their retail mix.

- ▶ The Muswellbrook Marketplace has attracted a number of chain stores including Big W, Dick Smith Electronics and Sports Power. Apart from day to day needs they seem to have their strongest mixes in takeaway food and a range of fashion outlets that are mainly pitched at the lower to mid market. The most interesting businesses in the mix from a "browsing" point of view would be Matthews Jewellers, Le Donna Lingerie and Florist and Seven Sins stocking young fashion.
  - At the time of the site visit The Marketplace had 4 vacancies.
- ▶ Muswellbrook Fair is developing their day to day mix and currently lacks a bakery/cake shop. Their strongest mix is in the home wares category with Harvey Norman, supported with The Reject Shop. They have the only independent fruit and vegetable retailer in the area and a gym.
  - There are limited outlets that would appeal to the browsing market.
- ▶ It should also be noted that there are a high number of trades, service, accommodation and convenience businesses located outside the shopping precincts. These range from pizza takeaway and 4 motels to engineering services and car hire. These fill out the mix of day to day services and should ensure there is minimal escape spending from Muswellbrook when it comes to day to day needs.
- ▶ The town's proximity to mining and power industries also means there is a thriving industrial community servicing these markets.

An overview of the mix shows that Muswellbrook is very well serviced for day to day needs but poorly serviced for recreational shopping, fresh foods and café culture. It is likely that escape spending is not driven by a need to source the basics or major purchases but more a desire for leisure shopping.

## Target Markets and Product Ranges

It is often relatively easy to judge a retail community's target customers by looking at the retail mix and products stocked in each outlet. In Muswellbrook there appear to be some conflicting messages.

The large majority of retail businesses are actively targeting the local market. Judging by the products stocked in many outlets, there also appears to be a general assumption that the local market is conservative, not affluent and is somewhat price focused.

Whilst there are no doubt residents who match that profile there is also evidence of a more affluent market. There are only a few retail outlets that are visibly targeting a higher spending market.

### Product Ranges

There is some evidence that a couple of retailers have been struggling and have added new lines of stock or diversified into other products in an attempt to attract more customers and boost revenue. Others appear to have been in business for a number of years and have diversified over a period of time. Both of these strategies have led to "mixed messages" about stock, price ranges and target markets.

There are also some retailers who have a very clear idea of their markets and have product ranges that are specifically designed to attract their targets.

There also seems to be a skew towards 40+ shoppers in the main street. This is sometimes found in established retail areas where the majority of business owners are 40 plus.

Most of the fashion outlets are targeting a 40 + age group but there is evidence of a younger market with Seven Sins, the Surf Shop, Kids Wonderland and new fashion outlet Diva in the Muswellbrook Marketplace.

## Branding

Muswellbrook has a number of images and positioning statements that are used to promote the town. The most commonly used include:

- ▶ Bursting with energy
- ▶ Bunch of grapes - Pick of the Hunter
- ▶ Blue heeler - Blue Heeler Country
- ▶ Traditionally the council have used a "shield logo". More recently they have developed a five "leaf" logo in modern colours which represents various aspects of the shire.
  - There is no obvious positioning statement associated with this logo.

Also used in marketing/tourism material are the positioning statements

- ▶ Work Hard – live easy
- ▶ Work.Live.Play

There is no consistent font or colour used for Muswellbrook when marketing.

It seems that various images and positioning statements have been introduced over time for different markets. Although they all have something to offer, the range of logos and statements can be confusing to the visitor or newcomer.

- ▶ Pick of the Hunter seems to be the oldest logo and taps into the association with the Hunter Valley and wine production but this association is actually stronger with other Hunter towns
- ▶ The gateway signs include images of grapes and horse shoe but again this image has already been "claimed" by Scone
- ▶ Blue Heeler Country is obviously targeted at the tourist market but apart from the statue in the main street there is little "evidence" of how this relates to Muswellbrook. There are no sites, events or attractions to support the positioning
- ▶ Bursting with energy references the power industry and also promises a vibrant and active local community
- ▶ The new Council logo is fresh and modern

The Council website is very modern and clean looking which matches the new logo but does not have a positioning logo attached to it at this time

## Trading Hours

- ▶ Most businesses in the main street open from 9 till 5 weekdays and till 12.30 or 1pm on Saturdays.
- ▶ Franklins, the newsagency, Go Lo, franklins in Campbells Corner and the Discount Furniture outlet trade seven days
  - Aroma traded seven days until recently, this could have been a move to Winter trading times

## Signage

Signage is generally a weak area for Muswellbrook. Some of the key issues include:

- ▶ Old fashioned, run down green directional signs throughout the CBD and major thoroughfares
  - These signs are green and carry the Muswellbrook Council logo
  - These signs are hard for motorists to comprehend as they include a large amount of information
  - These are a great concept in theory but create visual clutter and disappear into the background

- Information on these signs is sometimes inaccurate or out of date e.g. a toilet sign pointing to a toilet block that no longer exists
  - The directional sign to Muswellbrook Fair does not name the centre
  - Some of these signs promote the Old Manse B & B but not other accommodation providers
- ▶ The T intersection where motorists can turn left to Denman or right to Muswellbrook town centre is particularly bad in terms of signage
  - The green directional sign facing the motorists is confusing and hard to read
  - Behind the sign there is a cluster of competing signs and blackboards promoting the Valley Hotel Motel and CF Electronics
  - Both facades look tired and run down
- ▶ Most buildings and shop fronts were well maintained and signage is generally clean and easy to read, however there is a mix of styles and colours
  - There is a lack of under awning signage in some areas of the main street
    - This makes it difficult for shoppers to work out what is along the street
  - There is a lack of awning signage and above awning signage in the main street
    - This may be due to heritage building guidelines
  - There is out of date awning signage, where a business has closed and the new owner or tenant hasn't replaced the sign
  - Some signs are faded or peeling
- ▶ A promotional sign from a previous menswear business has been left up next to the National Bank. It is a stylish sign but looks incongruous on its own
- ▶ Some local businesses are using A boards to promote their business.

## Retail Skills

- ▶ Levels of general retailing skills vary greatly with some very professional outlets standing out from the pack
  - There was also evidence of very low level skills where owners had little or no retail experience and had chosen the wrong location or mix of stock for their target market
- ▶ There are some excellent examples of professional window displays, however, there are also a large number who are not maximising the opportunities to attract customers. Typical problems include:
  - Windows filled with posters and notices which block the view into the shop
  - Dirty windows or dated window displays that haven't been changed in months
  - Faded or old stock in the window
  - Poor lighting or lights turned off in window displays
- ▶ Merchandising also varied amongst outlets. Typical problems include:
  - Cluttered displays that are hard to navigate
  - Fixtures and fittings screening the view of stock
  - Stock not arranged in a logical or easy to find way
  - Little or no directional signage
  - Messy shelves
  - Lack of branding for the outlet within the shop
  - Lack of directional signage and branding within the outlet
- ▶ Customer service obviously varies from outlet to outlet but overall appears friendly. There was an impression that in the main street customer service was more focused towards locals
- ▶ There was generally a good differentiation between outlets in the same category i.e. carrying different ranges of stock and targeting different markets

## Tourism

- ▶ Tourism does not seem to have a strong focus in Muswellbrook, however it has a very active Visitor Information Centre
- ▶ The Visitor Information Centre is hidden away in a side street
  - There are a number of information signs which make it relatively easy to locate but it is not visible from the main road so visitors may assume it is a distance from the main street
- ▶ It is estimated that the VIC sees 15 – 20 couples a day including weekends. Given the VIC is in a side street it would be expected that there is a higher percentage that do not visit the VIC
  - There is a multiplier of 5 used in some regional communities to estimate total number of tourists in town this could translate to 7,300 visitors per annum. It should also be noted that a number of tourism experts do not agree with this method of calculating visitation
- ▶ There is a wide range of a motel and hotel accommodation in town, mostly 3.5 star older properties
- ▶ Most accommodation providers appear to target consultants, trade and business travellers rather than the recreation markets
  - It can therefore be difficult getting accommodation on weeknights
- ▶ Visitor profiles include:
  - Business travellers
  - Partners visiting contractors/employees based in the area
  - Grey Nomads and wanderers
  - People travelling the inland route
  - People visiting friends and family
  - People attending events such as Aberdeen Highland Games, Muswellbrook Cup
- ▶ Unlike most other towns in the shire Muswellbrook does not have a major event but promotes a series of events under the “banner” of Spring Festival or Carnivale. Events planned for 2009 include
  - Classic Car Show
  - International Beer Festival
  - Muswellbrook Gold Cup Race Carnival

## Marketing

### Web Presence

A web search for Muswellbrook brought up the Shire Council as the top site followed by the VIC site. Other listings included LJ Hooker, Upper Hunter Country accommodation listing.

The Shire Council site is very user friendly and features a prominent section on the site for visitors including

- ▶ A range of excellent guides to local drives
- ▶ an excellent page promoting the arts centre
- ▶ Information on horse studs in the area
- ▶ Swimming pool information
- ▶ Library information
  - I am not sure of the relevance of this to the tourist market unless they are using Library internet services
- ▶ The site does not include information on accommodation

The Visitor Information site is comprehensive but a little slow to load. The site carries the Blue Heeler Country branding and is modern and easy to navigate. The home page is very user friendly with downloadable maps, GPS coordinates, picture galleries and Latest News. The site home page also has three “launch pads” for easy access to

accommodation, wineries and events and the top menu covers a broad range of information.

- ▶ Accommodation
  - This information is arranged alphabetically across the shire but would be more user friendly grouped by town
- ▶ Events information
  - Most communities have signature events but Muswellbrook has a Spring Carnival encompassing a range of events
    - There is a link to more information but this is from 2007
- ▶ Wineries
- ▶ The arts Centre is not featured but included under the “things to do” tab
- ▶ Restaurants are listed under things to do but again alphabetically rather than by town

Interestingly the information on horse stud tours is not included on the VIC site

A search for arts centre NSW/art galleries regional NSW/ did not bring up the Muswellbrook Arts Centre in the first 5 pages or results. I would have expected the Muswellbrook Arts Centre to have its own site. There is an excellent sub site but it is “hidden” inside the Shire Council Website and is not prominent on the VIC site.

### Marketing Material

There is a range of marketing collateral available from the VIC and online through VIC and Council websites. This information includes:

- ▶ A4, 4 page photocopied map of Muswellbrook and Denman
- ▶ A4 4 page Heritage Town Walk handout
  - It is assumed this is also available as a PDF but the website link on the VIC site was not working when tested
  - This is also available as an interactive display on the Council website
- ▶ Get Lost in Upper Hunter Country full colour A4 booklet. Muswellbrook is mentioned under:
  - Festivals - Muswellbrook Festival is promoted but does not include specific dates
  - Towns – Things to do promotes Heritage Town Walk, no mention of art gallery (although included next to art galleries page).
  - Self Drive Tours
    - Drive Number 3, starts with Muswellbrook doesn't include a description of the town
    - These maps are also available as PDF's on the visit Muswellbrook and Council websites
- ▶ A4 photocopied flyer for accommodation in Muswellbrook and Denman
- ▶ Muswellbrook Shire work live play booklet
  - Comprehensive booklet which seems to be targeting potential residents but includes some information for visitors

# Muswellbrook Focus Group

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A meeting of local business owners was held on Wednesday June the 10th 2009 from 7– 9 pm. Participants were selected business owners from the area including property owners retailers and service businesses.

This was an opportunity for local business operators to have their say about the marketing of the area. They also provided valuable insights into the profile of locals and visitors to the area. This session helped identify the issues that need to be addressed before marketing can begin.

The group was asked a series of questions in relation to Muswellbrook. Responses to questions and issues are as follows. **Please note that these are the opinions of the participants and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the consultant.**

## How would you describe the local market?

- ▶ Employees of the electrical industry and Power Stations
  - Time line residents who are in Muswellbrook for a period of time e.g. for a job or planning to relocate prior to retirement
  - There is a trend of long term residents moving away to experience the sea change lifestyle and then returning
- ▶ High percentage of young people 15 – 25
- ▶ Large number of under 10's
  - Public school is bursting at the seams
  - Childcare centres are full
- ▶ Large number of children who play sport
- ▶ Large number of 52 – 65 year olds
- ▶ A small population of retirees
- ▶ Long term unemployed
- ▶ A strong community of business owners
- ▶ There are a growing number of investors attracted by the affordable properties and better return on capital investment
- ▶ Gaol inmates who stay in town
- ▶ Part time residents such as mine workers and shift workers

## How would you describe the visitor market?

- ▶ Residents of surrounding towns including
  - Aberdeen
  - Merriwa
  - Denman
  - Scone
- ▶ Consultants
- ▶ Contractors
- ▶ Trainees attending courses
- ▶ People visiting the hospital
- ▶ People visiting the Gaol

## How would you describe the tourist market?

- ▶ Grey Nomads – especially when there is flooding on the Pacific Highway
- ▶ Passing traffic – stopping at the VIC
- ▶ People visiting horse studs
- ▶ Visitors to vineyards

- ▶ People attending events at the Race Course e.g. Muswellbrook Cup
- ▶ Partners visiting part time contractors

### What are the gaps in the business mix from a resident's perspective?

- ▶ More for younger children
- ▶ Baker
- ▶ Bike shop
- ▶ Entertainment
- ▶ Wine Bar
- ▶ Menswear
- ▶ Chicken shop
- ▶ Breakfast venues
- ▶ Gifts and home wares
- ▶ Quality coffee
- ▶ Fruit and vegetable retailer in main street

### What are the gaps in the business mix from a visitor's perspective?

- ▶ Better customer service
- ▶ Parking

### What are some of the key issues for Muswellbrook?

- ▶ Security in the CBD
- ▶ Franchise operators
- ▶ Main street is only trading 5.5 days
- ▶ Locals are investing out of town in coastal markets
- ▶ The town is very generous and accepting
- ▶ There is a wide gap between the haves and have nots
- ▶ Mine workers and shift workers are well paid and stay up to 7 years
- ▶ The older consumers like the convenience of Franklins shopping, easy to access
  - The Marketplace centre has a sloped car park which can be difficult for the elderly to cope with

# Key Issues

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## Image and Branding

Muswellbrook currently has a number of “brands” and images that are used to promote the town. Over the years, logos and positioning statements have been adopted for the Shire and tourism bodies. With the exception of “Bursting with Energy” none seem to capture the spirit of Muswellbrook or promise anything exciting or different to visitors or potential residents. These brands also don’t promote the benefits of Muswellbrook or position the town in relation to other towns in the area.

## Ensuring the Survival of the Main Street

As the existing malls expand and new precincts such as the mooted development near McDonald’s come on line there is a real risk that service providers such as banks will move to where the majority of locals are shopping. This means that the CBD could become less relevant to the local shopper and may experience less and less visitation until it becomes a ghost town. There is potential to revitalise the retail mix in the CBD so it fills the gap in the current mix for browsing shops and café culture. It will also be important not to neutralise the mix by developing new areas or moving the pedestrian traffic away from Bridge Street.

## Capitalising on Existing Local Markets

Anecdotal evidence suggests that the population of Muswellbrook and surrounding areas is undergoing a change. It is likely these population changes are driven by several factors:

- ▶ Affordable local real estate when prices are compared to other areas
- ▶ Availability of work in the area
- ▶ Proximity to Gaol
- ▶ Access to hospital and health care services
- ▶ Desire for a sense of community and family values
- ▶ A growing number of young families attracted to the area by job opportunities and regional quality of life

A subset of the local market are the regular visits from residents of surrounding areas who travel to Muswellbrook for weekly shopping, health services, major purchases and professional services.

## Capitalising on the Tourism Market

The location of Muswellbrook and distance from surrounding towns makes it a perfect stopping off point for tourists and travellers. The challenge for the future will be to encourage more travellers to stop and increase the amount of time spent in the CBD.

Key attractions for visitors include:

- ▶ Easy parking
- ▶ Attractive streetscape
- ▶ Appealing cafes and food outlets
- ▶ Local tourist attractions
- ▶ Browsing shops that are visible from the vehicle
- ▶ Toilet facilities

There are several factors which will impact on the successful marketing of the area to visitors. These include:

- ▶ Lack of Saturday afternoon and Sunday trading
- ▶ Number of browsing shops
- ▶ Range and quality of food offerings for the visitor market

- ▶ The ability of food outlets to cope with growing numbers and offer consistent service levels in food outlets
- ▶ The need for retailers to stock products specifically for the tourism market

In addition to traditional tourists it is likely that Muswellbrook has a strong VFR (Visiting Friends and Relatives) market driven by the high number of people attracted to the area by job opportunities. A high proportion of these residents will be living away from families and friends who will want to visit on a regular basis

## Capitalising on the Industrial Sector

Muswellbrook is fortunate to have an excellent mix of heavy and light industrial businesses that attract workers and visitors to the town. There is potential for the wider business community to support this sector and capitalise on the destination visitors generated by this sector of the business community.

## Capitalising on Short Term Residents

Muswellbrook has a "hidden" market of short term residents that are based in the town when working on projects. There are opportunities for local businesses to generate additional revenue through these high paid contractors and their partners who visit them on a regular basis.

## Sourcing New Residents and Workers

Like many regional towns Muswellbrook is suffering a shortage of workers in some key trades. The town is also keen to attract new residents and regularly participates in NSW Country Week. There is potential for the Chamber of Commerce to assist in the attraction of new residents and work with existing businesses to capitalise on this opportunity.

## Negative Perceptions of Muswellbrook

There seems to be a perception amongst some of the business community that Muswellbrook residents are all "on benefits", vandals or struggling to survive. This view can be driven by personal experiences or concerns about security and there is no doubt that a certain percentage of the community may be disadvantaged, but the focus seems to be on the negative aspects of the community rather than the positive attributes of the majority of the town residents. There is a risk that this negative perception will be transmitted to potential residents and business owners through real estate agents or business owners servicing these markets.

There is also a perception that no one will want to open a retail outlet in Muswellbrook CBD. However major operators such as Harvey Norman and Aldi have obviously done their research and recently invested in Muswellbrook. These operators usually make their decisions based on strong financial viability which tends to suggest they see Muswellbrook as a growing, prosperous area.

## Encouraging Local Businesses to Capitalise on Business Opportunities

The Muswellbrook business community generally seems to have a passive attitude to attracting new business. This is quite common in regional businesses communities that have not suffered from drought or who have historically experienced mainly buoyant trading conditions but can be risky. This apathy can lead to a stagnant retail mix and lack of new developments along with a feeling that problems such as security are insurmountable.

This attitude may be compounded by the talk of new industrial ventures, mine closures, a town bypass and a temptation to wait until "we know what is happening". Realistically, the bypass is at least five years away and the retail mix needs to start changing now if it is to be strong enough to pull people off the main road into the main street if and when the bypass happens. From a local perspective there is a gap

in café culture and recreational shopping mix that needs to be filled to reduce escape spending to towns such as Scone.

A large number of regional communities are currently experiencing a revitalisation thanks to innovative new businesses ranging from coffee shops to delis and gift ware retailers. This trend seems to have missed Muswellbrook and there seems to be a lack of confidence in the retail economy. This is curious given the outsiders perception of Muswellbrook as a successful service town thriving on the back of the mining and power industries.

It is clear that Muswellbrook is a community with a number of significant opportunities.

New residents will continue to move into the area and the mix of new versus established populations will change significantly. In the short to medium term the town will need to attract skilled workers to jobs in the growing light industrial sector and tourists will continue to visit the area. The community of "part time" residents will also grow as contractors continue to base themselves in and around Muswellbrook.

Change will occur whether the business community want it to or not. As a representative body there is an opportunity for The Chamber to work with local businesses to capitalise on these opportunities.

# Consolidation Strategies

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## Research

The business community will find it easier to revitalise the retail mix and target specific market segments if they have a clearer idea of the needs and wants of specific groups of potential or existing shoppers. It would help to have an idea the spending power of as many groups as possible.

The Chamber can take a leadership role by establishing a sub-committee and facilitating a market research program into visitation which would enable retailers to swap information and clarify the best target markets for the town. The research program could include:

### Postcode Research

Anecdotal evidence suggests that a number of residents from surrounding areas shop in Muswellbrook. It would be useful to quantify the sources of these and other shoppers with simple postcode research (see appendix). It is recommended that postcode research be initially run for a four week period and then repeated every year.

### Average Spend Research

In addition to recording postcode participating outlets can also record average spend. This information can be kept anonymous but will give the retail community an idea

The research will also generate data about locals and visitors and will enable the business community to identify which geographic areas have the highest average spend so future advertising can be placed where it will be most effective.

### Cafes

Cafes can participate in postcode research but may also be able to play a key role collecting information on the reasons people shop in Muswellbrook. During the four week research period Cafes could also place small survey sheets on tables and collect results. (See appendix for sample questionnaire)

## Retail Mix

Muswellbrook main street currently has a mix of service and "day to day needs" businesses along with a smaller number of browsing shops and cafes.

As the malls increase their share of day to day shoppers it will be critical to maintain and grow pedestrian traffic in the main street for the benefit of existing businesses.

The biggest gap in the overall retail mix is browsing shops and café culture which is the main driver for escape spending to other towns. This means that Muswellbrook main street has an opportunity to reinvent itself as the recreational shopping precinct for the town to attract visitors and keep locals in town. It should be noted that this does not mean the CBD should "lose" day to day outlets as pharmacies, newsagents etc are lynch pin retailers for any successful main street

This approach will require a strategic approach to all retail development in the township and the Chamber and Economic Development Officer should work together to clearly define the future mix for the main street.

## Recreational shopping

It is now recognised that shoppers differentiate between day to day and recreational shopping. For day to day shopping, most people head for a mall or major centre with a large supermarket and a range of specialty stores (often known chain outlets) and usually have a set period of time to purchase everything on their list. Here they become creatures of habit; parking in the same area, following the same route

through the supermarket and visiting fresh food and specialty outlets in a certain order. If shoppers stop to have a coffee or a snack they often visit the same café on a regular basis. Day to day shopping is all about familiarity and routine.

On the other hand, recreational shopping is all about “new and different”. Although shoppers visit the area less often, they have usually budgeted to indulge themselves and spend on wants rather than needs. They are looking for independent retailers, a range of choice in their chosen category e.g. gifts, fashion, sports supplies or home wares, interesting stock and most importantly a range of eating options because lunch or coffee is an important part of the experience.

A large number of recreational shoppers travel in pairs or groups e.g. young mums catching up for coffee or mother and daughter outings, baby boomer couples shopping for their new lifestyle.

Recreational shopping has the potential to become part and parcel of the Muswellbrook experience which is a golden opportunity for the Muswellbrook main street.

A number of existing fashion and giftware outlets are already firmly positioned as recreational shopping outlets. There are also a number of retailers with a unique selling proposition or stock which could make them a destination for locals and visitors alike.

Others have stock which fits the category but their shop front and store layout sends a day to day rather than recreational message to potential customers.

Some of the gaps identified in the retail mix included:

- ▶ Baker/pie shop
- ▶ Bike shop
- ▶ Wine Bar
- ▶ Menswear
- ▶ Chicken shop
- ▶ Breakfast venues
- ▶ Gifts and home wares
- ▶ Quality coffee
- ▶ Fruit and vegetable retailer in main street
- ▶ Additional fashion outlets
- ▶ Additional gift and browsing outlets e.g. book retailer, collectables
- ▶ Hair and beauty

It should be noted that some of these gaps may exist because the market is not large enough to sustain a dedicated retail outlet in this category.

## Opportunities for Existing Businesses

In the short term, gaps such as breakfast foods and collectables and toys may primarily be opportunities for existing retailers who would like to expand their product range.

There may also be an opportunity for existing retailers to introduce a “two in one” shop concept to fill specific gaps. Muswellbrook already has an excellent example of the “two in one” concept with Le Donna Lingerie and Florist. For this concept to work there must be:

- ▶ Enough retail space to make the concept viable
- ▶ A visible difference between the two concepts from the shopper’s perspective
- ▶ A demonstrated demand for the product lines

Examples of this concept working in other communities include:

- ▶ Hairdressing and craft/gifts
- ▶ Sweetshop and coffee shop
- ▶ Hardware and appliance retail
- ▶ Homewares and cooking utensils plus coffee shop

- ▶ Beauty salon and chocolates/sweets
- ▶ Health food and delicatessen
- ▶ Fabric shop and shoe store
- ▶ Coffee shop and bookstore
- ▶ Newsagency and gifts
- ▶ Newsagency and toys
- ▶ Plant nursery/gifts/café
- ▶ Trophy store/ key cutting/engraving/gifts
- ▶ Trophy store/sporting goods

## Opportunities for New Businesses

The fact that there are a number of retail vacancies in Muswellbrook means that there are also significant opportunities to proactively add to the retail mix.

The Muswellbrook Chamber of Commerce and Shire Economic Development Officer should work together to develop a strategy for attracting target businesses. This approach has the added benefit of giving potential owners or tenant's confidence that they are meeting a need in the town and will have the support of other businesses.

This approach would involve:

- ▶ Reviewing main street vacancies to identify properties available
- ▶ Contacting property owners and real estate agents to see if they would agree to proactive marketing of their property
- ▶ Setting up a sub-committee in Chamber to investigate gaps and develop a hit list of target businesses and possible premises
- ▶ Working with real estate agents to identify appropriate use for premises. This is critical for cafes or fast food outlets
- ▶ Work with Real Estate agents to develop property profiles for each vacancy detailing Chamber recommendations for usage (see under strategies section)
  - These profiles could also be available as PDF's or "slide shows" on the Council website

It is important to note that many new businesses already have a "link" with the community they relocate to. This could be partners of people relocated to the area for work, family members in the area, people on holidays in the region or who happened to stop in the area on a trip. For this reason it is important to promote the fact that the area is looking for new businesses in as many areas as possible. Tactics might include:

Developing a retail (or business) opportunities prospectus for the town

- Distributing the prospectus via the Visitor Information Centres
- Promoting the prospectus in council newsletters or rate notices that are sent to local residents
- Placing card sized advertisements from the Council or Chamber in local real estate agents windows
- Using signs in the windows of vacant shops to identify possible usages

There may also be an opportunity for the Economic Development officer and Chamber to actively source new businesses. This would involve:

- ▶ Working with local real estate agents to promote vacant retail properties with nominated usage
- ▶ Approaching retailers in other regional communities who may wish to open a second store in Muswellbrook e.g. two members of a Chamber from a town on the South Coast of Victoria went on a 2 day road trip to find a café that would fit their existing mix and then approached owners to see if they were interested in opening a second outlet
- ▶ Directly approaching Franchise outlets that would fit the mix for Muswellbrook e.g. Bakers Delight or Brumby bakeries

- ▶ Actively marketing to business owners in specific areas of regional and metropolitan NSW and Queensland through advertising or publicity in local papers e.g. a town on the Central Coast of NSW advertised in the fast growing suburbs of western Sydney for deli operators and gift shop retailers who were looking for a “sea change”.

## Opportunities to Create New Precincts

### **Tourist Attractions**

The main street retail mix will also have a significant impact on the visitor and tourist markets as more browsing shops and cafes will increase the length of stay, average spend and number of visits per year. Once the visitor has established that Muswellbrook main street is worth the stop it will become a regular stop on that visitors itinerary.

The Visitor Information Centre is a key attraction for travellers and tourists. At the moment it is located off the main street and is not visible from the main road. Relocating the Visitor Information Centre to the main street so it adds to the retail mix is likely to increase visitation and benefit local businesses as visitors take a break and stroll along the main street. It has been mooted that the VIC could move to the old Council Chambers at the Bridge and Market Street intersection/roundabout which would be an ideal location as it has high visibility and is adjacent to Simpson Park and opposite the towns major tourist attraction, The Arts Centre.

### **Cafes**

There has been discussion around creating a “precinct” for cafes which will attract locals and visitors in Brook Street or Market Street. Brook Street is an obvious choice as it is in the centre of town and traffic would flow on to other businesses. There is a risk that developing a precinct in Market Street away from the CBD will actually decrease interest and pedestrian traffic in the main street.

There has also been mention of attracting a café to the Arts Centre which would be an excellent addition to the retail mix if a suitable operator can be found. This operation would work particularly well if the VIC is relocated to the old Council Chambers.

Anecdotal evidence suggests that it has been difficult sourcing an operator so finding a suitable operator could become a part of the overall strategy for sourcing new businesses.

It may be worth approaching café operators who have experience of running in a public space such as VIC’s, regional galleries museums etc

## Specific Vacancies

- ▶ As seven of the vacancies are located in the Central Arcade there may also be potential to develop a mini precinct of businesses.
  - The arcade already has three strong core retailers for the recreational shopping market so would be ideal for small operators selling books, collectibles, fashion, gifts or craft.
  - There also may be potential to work with the Business Enterprise Centre and the property owner to operate this as a “business incubator” for start up retail businesses
  - This concept could appeal to partners of people relocating to the area for work (often innovators in regional communities) as it would be a safer way of testing their retail concept
- ▶ Another key vacancy is the corner shop at Campbell’s Corner. (This vacancy has recently been filled by a budget priced electrical retailers)
- ▶ The complex would also be ideally suited to fresh food retailers on a full time or part time basis.
  - One concept which is a bit “outside the box” but has worked in regional Victoria is a fresh food concept which is a variation on the fresh produce markets which have proved very popular in locations across NSW and

Australia. The aim of this type of project is to build traffic and revenue for local retailers it is vital that the outlet is located in the busy shopping precinct rather than on the fringes of the precinct as is common with markets.

- The concept would involve leasing a retail outlet in the centre and then subleasing space to a number of growers for their peak season. This is similar to antiques markets who rent to individual operators.
- Initially the outlet would operate in peak times e.g. Thursday to Sunday and hours could be increased depending on demand.
- It should be noted that there would be significant logistics issues with this concept. Some of these include:
  - Does Muswellbrook have the volume of producers to make it successful
  - Acceptance and enthusiasm for the concept by local producers
  - An organisation or commercial concern would be required to take on the lease of the property
  - A coordinator would need to schedule bookings
  - Producers would need to provide staff on a roster basis to staff the outlet
  - Alternatively they would need to form a coop and employ a staff for the outlet
  - Given the logistic challenges this is not a concept recommend for the short term. However it would be worthwhile researching acceptance and planning to add the concept to the mix in the medium to long term

## Product and Service Mix

Muswellbrook generally has a good mix of products when it comes to servicing the local population, however the range of products and services offered does not always appear to match the profile of the resident community. Judging by the products stocked in many outlets, there appears to be a general assumption that the local market is older, conservative, not affluent and somewhat price focused.

Whilst there are no doubt residents who match that profile there is also anecdotal evidence of younger and less price focused market. There are several retail outlets that are visibly targeting higher spending or younger markets.

More networking and discussion amongst retailers will give better insights into the changing profile of Muswellbrook and some retailers may choose to test this market with ranges of different or higher priced product. This is not as risky a venture as it sounds as much of this product will also appeal to the visitor market.

The Chamber should aim to host a retailer event where operators can share information and discuss target markets and products which might be appropriate.

A good example of this is the “contractors” market where typically men are based in Muswellbrook and accommodated in share houses for a period of time. There may be potential for cafes to target them with hearty café meals to take home and reheated. Research may also show they need laundromat services. When their partners come to visit there is potential for motels and restaurants to offer romantic packages complete with welcome bottle of champagne or couples massage packages.

To maintain local spending, retailers should not attempt to compete solely on price but promote quality, product knowledge and customer service which usually increases average spend and number of visits. Local businesses can build loyalty with the local market by:

- ▶ Tailoring their opening hours to meet the needs of the local community.
- ▶ Researching products that customers would prefer to buy locally and tailor their product ranges to suit e.g.
  - Have a suggestion board where shoppers can fill out special requests and the retailer then responds to that request

- ▶ Increasing product training so staff can display better product knowledge and convert more sales while offering customers much better customer service
- ▶ Improving customer service so there is a loyalty which holds the shopper to the local area e.g.
  - Packing groceries
  - Home delivery
  - Ordering stock in specially
- ▶ Increased promotion of the benefits of shopping in Muswellbrook Main Street with a weekly "Shopping Around" column in a local newspaper with distribution outside the area such as Hunter Valley News.
  - This may also be an appropriate strategy for a local radio station
- ▶ This column should be designed to promote new retailers, new services, staff changes or new stock. Ideally 40% of the column should be items of interest rather than product ads.
  - This regular column could be presented by a local personality to give the material an editorial feel.

The local paper may be willing to subsidise the space or this could be paid for through a "user pays" system for anyone who wants to promote product in the column

## Food outlets

It is highly likely that there will be demand for more innovative food offerings and longer opening hours from the changing traveller and local markets in the short to medium term. Some of the products/services likely to increase in demand include:

- ▶ Well-made espresso coffee (most coffee suppliers will provide free or low cost barista workshops which train operators and their staff to produce consistently high standards of coffee)
- ▶ Gourmet sandwiches featuring gourmet breads. This may be an opportunity for a local baker to provide "café only" breads to the local cafés so they can create interesting dishes
- ▶ Healthy takeaway such as salads, wraps, yoghurts, fruit smoothies
- ▶ Picnic packs or pre prepared takeaways for the travellers that may want to have a picnic in a local park or out of town. These packs will increase revenue for takeaway outlets and allow for fast service
- ▶ Local retailers can also develop products specifically for the traveller market e.g.
  - Barbeque packs which include salad and breads
  - Picnic packs including cold meats, salads, drinks
  - Easy meals for the caravan market
  - Kids meals

## Image and Branding

### Logo and Positioning Statement

There is potential for Muswellbrook to consolidate its range of logos and positioning statements to create a more consistent image and brand.

The new Council logo is a great starting point as its multi coloured "leaf" design lends itself to a number of applications. For instance, tourism could be represented by one of the leaves and that colour used for all tourism communication.

There would also be potential for the Chamber to adopt one of the leaves and create a positioning for itself amongst the business community. Currently there is no positioning statement associated with the Council logo which means there is potential to create a strong promise to target markets such as local residents, business community, potential investors etc.

One of the positioning statements which was mentioned during the site visit was "diversity". This is certainly representative of the town but would need to be developed further to identify the "benefits" attached to diversity i.e. diversity in itself

is not likely to attract visitors, residents etc unless they understand what that might mean to them.

This is a project for professionals who specialise in Town and Chamber logos. Often they work with key people to conduct a workshop which helps draw out the essence of the town.

The graphic designer who worked on the Council logo may be able to provide this service. Other recommended specialists are Jacinta Mackey of Cre8ing Growth and Ching Ching Li of CC Designs. Both have experience of developing township and community branding.

## Chamber of Commerce

As the Chamber of Commerce is a strong force within the business community it would benefit from a distinctive logo and positioning statement.

It is also quite common for Chambers of Commerce or business organisations to operate under a project name which is motivational for the business community. Examples of project names include:

- ▶ Lismore Unlimited
- ▶ Growing Inverell
- ▶ Nambour Futures
- ▶ Coffs Streets Ahead
- ▶ Karuah Working Together
- ▶ Lifestyle Dookie
- ▶ Woodburn – stop, shop and play

In some instances, business groups have adopted a program name to fit in with Shire branding, for instance Singleton Council use the positioning statement A Better Future, their business group are considering operating a program called A Better Business Future

As the Council is keen to actively promote the region to potential businesses and residents, this logo and positioning may also work for economic development initiatives.

The logo and positioning statement could be used on all printed marketing and communication material. It could also be used on signage, flags or become an addition to gateway signs for the township and the light industrial areas.

Any new logos and positioning statements could be used on:

- ▶ Town entry signs
- ▶ CBD directional signs
- ▶ Existing printed marketing material
- ▶ Street flags
- ▶ Individual retail outlets – window strips or decals
- ▶ Dedicated pages on the Council website
- ▶ “Day in” brochures that could increase length of stay and cross promote individual businesses
- ▶ A prospectus for potential businesses

## Visibility

Muswellbrook main street needs to increase its visibility and awareness amongst locals, workers, visitors and people just passing through. The planned flags, planters and bollards detailed in the CBD Strategic Plan will certainly add personality and the suggested town colour scheme will create continuity and enhance the streetscape. These initiatives will encourage people to stop and explore the town and increase local pride in the main street business precinct.

- ▶ Once the light poles have flag frames fitted it will be relatively easy to use flags or pennants as a way of introducing more colour into the main street and strengthening the overall image and branding of Muswellbrook.

- ▶ It will also be an opportunity to promote the Arts Centre which is a key attraction in the main street.
  - Flags for the Arts Centre could be alternated with other promotional flags when there is a new exhibition.
- ▶ Flags are also an opportunity to increase promotion of key aspects of the town and business mix. Themes could include:
  - Retail mix
  - Industrial mix
  - Tourist attractions
  - Local events such as mining expo, race meeting
  - Muswellbrook logo and positioning statement
- ▶ These flags could be supplemented or replaced during the year with flags promoting retail events or promotions such as Carols By Candle light event
- ▶ Mini versions of the flags could be made available for local businesses who want to show their support for the area. This creates under awning colour to the streetscape (These look something like the Lotto flags outside newsagencies)
- ▶ Window strips that tie in to the new branding would also create strong visibility at shop level.
  - Window strips run across the top and bottom of shop windows and create a “frame” for merchandise.
  - These could be developed as a part of a retail promotion or provided at cost to interested retailers.
- ▶ A Boards are another way of adding branding and character to the main street. (This initiative will depend on Council regulations or may require negotiation of existing fees.) Only a few local retailers already use A boards in the main street and there may be potential to increase the impact of A Boards by taking a team approach. Initiatives could include
  - Placing A Boards in the same position on the pavement to create more visual impact
  - Tying colour themed balloons to A Boards for special promotions or events (this could include a win by the local football or sports team)
  - Developing a standard A Board that could be sold by the Chamber.
    - Typically A Board would have common branding and an area that can be used by the business. They could feature
    - A range of coloured borders or top and bottom borders
    - Colours could be themed according to the business category e.g. red for food retailers, green for fashion stores
    - A range of positioning statements promoting the business community
- ▶ Concepts for A Boards could be developed by a graphic designer or as a part of a community arts or school project to design A Board shells or templates for the retail community.
  - Designer boards would also add colour and continuity to the main street
- ▶ Another alternative for creating more visual interest in the business district may be to add to the existing mural and develop murals in the laneways that connect the main street to car parks and the Muswellbrook Marketplace. These types of projects can often be funded through arts grants.
  - Kurri Kurri a former mining town in NSW now has 38 murals which have become an important tourist attraction for the area. [www.kurrikurri.com](http://www.kurrikurri.com). They have recently published a book on the murals and regularly host group tours of the town.

## Signage

There is potential to dramatically improve the impact of retail signage in Muswellbrook. There is currently a lack of under awning signage and poor above awning signage in some areas. Some shop fronts and building facades are poorly

maintained with peeling and faded paintwork. It is important to upgrade signage where possible to introduce colour and activity into the main street.

The existing green directional signs are old and out of date in some areas. The signs at the turn off to Muswellbrook Fair, the T intersection leading to town centre or Denman and in the main street add visual clutter to the streetscape.

Recommendations include:

- ▶ Take a “snapshot” audit of all main street signs and retailer signs to identify
  - Redundant signs e.g. businesses no longer operating, road signs, old parking signs
  - Signs that cannot be read clearly from the road because they are too small or too cluttered
  - Handwritten signs
  - Lack of signage under the awning
  - Signs that are misleading
  - Signs that can’t be seen because they are blocked by other signs or foliage
  - Optimum positions for any new or replacement signs
- ▶ Remove or replace unsightly signs
  - Negotiate with building owners to remove or paint over redundant signs
  - Negotiate with council to remove any redundant signs
  - Repaint handwritten or cluttered signs so they will be more effective for the business
  - Reposition signs that can’t be seen

It may be possible for the Shire Council to expand the planned dollar for dollar subsidy to include the upgrade of signage as well as the external painting of buildings

## Window Displays

Window displays and store signage are vital to convince visitors to stop and spend time. As they drive through town, A-Boards, store signage, bright stock displays in the front of store and window displays will convince them to stop and spend time in Muswellbrook.

- ▶ At an individual shop level, improved window displays would enhance the image of the area and increase revenue for individual businesses.
- ▶ I would recommend a practical seminar for local retailers with additional in store advice for interested outlets.
  - It may also be possible to involve local TAFE or students studying design or retailing to practise their skills with a project in Muswellbrook. This gives local retailers some inspiration and identifies potential visual merchandisers for ongoing projects.
  - This seminar could be promoted as a part of the Business Awards program
- ▶ Another area that could be improved is in-store signage and display. In some outlets stock was not laid out logically and there was a lack of directional signage.
  - This is a topic which could be addressed in a display and merchandising seminar

## Marketing Material

### Tourists and Visitors

Muswellbrook VIC already distributes a range of marketing collateral including the excellent Heritage Walk leaflet.

The Arts Centre would benefit from its own marketing collateral as it is a major tourist attraction located in the main street. This could be as simple as a postcard promoting hours and permanent exhibitions. If a calendar of events is known months ahead of time it could also take the form of a calendar of exhibitions and also promote the website.

There is also potential to cross promote the business community with simple leaflets that will increase the visitors length of stay in the area.

- ▶ “Day In” brochures are an easy concept that links together retail, food and tourism activities. These leaflets provide suggested itineraries based on the length of time a visitor has in town e.g. “Muswellbrook Stop Over”, “Relax and Revive”, “Romantic Weekend” “Visiting the Family”. Using this format it is easy to include a range of activities for example:
  - Breakfast in a café
  - A visit to the Arts Centre
  - Fashion shopping
  - A hearty pub lunch
  - Visit the locals favourite fishing spot
  - Local wine tasting or farm gate sales
  - Heritage walk
- ▶ Another set of “day in” leaflets could be produced for the local VFR (visiting friends and relatives) market. These have the added advantage of building local pride and reminding locals of attractions in the area. These would be similar to the tourist leaflets but relevant to locals e.g. School holiday fun in your own backyard, Grandma comes to stay.
- ▶ Leaflets can be distributed through the VIC, accommodation providers, service stations, pubs and food outlets in the town.
- ▶ The local business community should also look at creating an “information pack” for motel room compendiums. This pack should focus on the contractor market as “honorary locals” and could include:
  - Places for a drink after work
  - Dinner and takeaway options including opening hours of businesses
  - Running or walking tracks for those who want to exercise
  - Promotion of individual outlets
  - A business directory
- ▶ This information can also be made available at the Visitor Information Centre.

## Website

Muswellbrook is represented online by the Council website and the Visitor Information Centre website which both rate very well with search engines.

The Arts Centre would benefit from its own website (which could be based on the current pages on the Councils website) so it rates higher on search engines. There is a dedicated group of tourists who specifically seek out galleries in regional areas and there is a risk that Muswellbrook.

## Business Directory

A key piece of marketing material for the local market should be a comprehensive Business Directory. Although time consuming to compile, these are invaluable as many residents often head out of town to shop for an item or service because they do not realise just what is available in their own town. Business Directories are also great marketing tools in towns where there is a steady inflow of new residents and/or “part-time” contractors or residents.

For maximum impact the Business Directory should include all businesses including tourism operators, professional services, light industrial businesses and any visiting health professionals. The directory details should cover business name, address and contact details, including email. It is also a good idea to include the business owners name and a 50 – 100 word description of the services offered.

This directory can be distributed as a booklet but many communities choose to distribute soft copies wherever possible producing PDF documents which can be

emailed or posted on Council or Tourism websites. An on-line directory has significant benefits because

- ▶ It is cheaper to produce as there are no printing costs
- ▶ It can be downloaded and printed by users if required
- ▶ It can be kept up to date easily and changed monthly
- ▶ It is easy to access by anyone at anytime
- ▶ It can link directly to individual business websites which provide even more information

The Business Directory should be updated every six months and could be distributed through:

- ▶ Local employers
- ▶ Local businesses
- ▶ Accommodation outlets
- ▶ Real estate agents (for new residents)

## Advertising

- ▶ Development of a weekly or fortnightly "shopping around" column or radio spot will give local businesses a cost effective way of advertising and promoting business community promotions and initiatives.

## Skills Development

Skills development seminars are the most effective way of maintaining and improving customer service and retail skills such as merchandising and display. It can be a good idea to combine skills development with an event such as the annual Business Awards. Seminars should be held three or four months before the awards are judged.

- ▶ Retailers would benefit from a workshop and one on one advice on window display and visual merchandising
- ▶ Destination outlets may benefit from a workshop on E-Marketing or a chance to work with a consultant with expertise in databases, online sales and marketing
- ▶ Food and beverage outlets would benefit from Barista and food presentation training

Given the current financial downturn some businesses are likely to need help with financial management. Ideally advice should be one on one and this may be provided by a consultant, local BEC or regional business advisory group.

# Target Marketing Strategies

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It is likely that the Muswellbrook businesses community will see revenue growth from five main areas:

- ▶ Increased average spend from the local community
- ▶ New residents moving to the area
- ▶ Contractors making return visits to the area
- ▶ Increased visits by residents from surrounding areas
- ▶ Increased number of destination visitors and travellers spending longer in the town

## Local Community

To meet the needs and wants of new residents and visitors, existing businesses will need to review their product ranges and introduce new products or upgrade existing product ranges. For instance, stock wholegrain bread in addition to white bread, carry more products for young children, stock "up market" skin care or cosmetic brands. Businesses may also have to change their customer service or adapt their trading hours.

To maintain local spending, retailers should not attempt to compete solely on price but promote quality, product knowledge and customer service. Local businesses can build loyalty with the local market by:

## Customer Service

- ▶ Tailoring their opening hours to meet the needs of the local community
  - For instance a butcher in a regional town opens till 6pm so locals working in surrounding towns can pick up their meat order on the way home from work. This is particularly relevant given the high number of shift workers who are going home at 7am, 3pm and 11pm.
- ▶ Researching products that customers would prefer to buy locally and tailor their product ranges to suit e.g.
  - Have a suggestion board where shoppers can fill out special requests and the retailer then responds to their request
- ▶ Improving customer service so there is a loyalty which holds the shopper to the local area e.g.
  - Packing groceries
  - Home delivery
  - Ordering stock in specially

## In Store Events/Promotions

- ▶ Food outlets can increase number of visits and average spend from the local market with events or promotions targeted specifically at locals. Initiatives could include:
  - "Value add" bonus for locals who bring friends and relatives e.g. free shampoo gift pack for anyone introducing a new client to a hair salon
  - Local business owners and their staff also respond well to informal bonuses like delivery of coffee during quiet times or being able to bring in their own mug for a fill up.
  - A monthly pasta night at a local café or takeaway to encourage extra visits
  - Some cafes build local loyalty by targeting specific groups in the community; some examples include: Coffee club for young mums (or retirees) offering a coffee and cake special between 9.30am and 11am, Frequent Flyer bonuses for regulars e.g. buy five cups of coffee get one free or seniors specials and coffee club.

- Some cafés also promote take home meals such as lasagne or quiche and salad towards the end of the day for the local retail and business community, contractors or busy mums.
- Groups of retailers such as fashion and beauty or home wares can also work together to promote to their joint customer base e.g. a group of fashion and gift retailers in Lismore work together to launch new seasons fashion with an out of hours “launch” function. Customers are led by a “busker” from one shop to another and are entertained with champagne, cheese platters and a chance to be the first to purchase new stock. The event lasts for around 3 hours.

## Quarterly Events

Joint promotions are a simple way of increasing visitation to the CBD through quarterly events where all retail outlets theme their stores and run “in store” promotions. Apart from the Crazy Day, these promotions should not be discount or bargain focused. Examples of promotions include:

- ▶ Sports Saturday where retailers all deck out their shops in the local team colours and invite local sporting stars to sign autographs or run sports clinics in the main street
- ▶ Christmas sales or promotions. This could tie in with a Christmas tree, Christmas lights or a Carols by Candlelight campaign
- ▶ Crazy Day with sales tables outside retail outlets, spruikers and super specials
- ▶ School Holiday Kids Day with kids meals, competitions, lucky dips for children, buskers etc. This promotion could also have a charity component where retailers collect cash or goods for a local children’s charity.

## New Residents

A New Residents Pack is an ideal way to build loyalty with newcomers to the area. The pack could include:

- ▶ A welcome letter from Council and local Chamber of Commerce
- ▶ An overview of business opportunities in the retail sector
- ▶ A link to the online business directory
- ▶ Copies of VIC information sheets re events, places to eat, things to do
- ▶ Value add offers from individual businesses e.g. free coffee with your first visit to a cafe. Free gourmet sausages with your first meat order.
- ▶ A simple, fun flyer on “tips and tricks for locals”; this might include anything from opening hours of supermarkets to information about the best local drives, fishing spots or when the baker makes their famous vanilla slices.
- ▶ This pack is also one place where junk mail in the form of takeaway menus will be welcomed rather than consigned to the rubbish bin!

This pack could be distributed by real estate agents. It could also be provided to major employers in the area to pass on to partners of new employees

## Destination Shoppers

### Business owners and retail staff

A great way to kick start the marketing of Muswellbrook is to create a sense of community amongst the local retailers. A marketing program to encourage retail staff to spend in the town can be a good way of opening up communication channels and overcoming possible complacency about the changing markets in Muswellbrook.

- ▶ A “Local Retailer” club card can be effective way to encourage staff to shop locally. These cards can entitle staff to special offers or discounts in relevant outlets. One retail community selects five special offers a month and promotes them in an email blast to all businesses in their business directory. These offers are spread across the range of businesses and services and do not have to be discount

focused. Offers can include anything from a 24 head start on an advertised special, a value add such as a free sample shampoo with a cut and colour to an invitation to a free seminar at a professional practice.

- ▶ There are also opportunities for individual outlets to market directly to retail staff in the area. For instance, direct marketing of specials or distribution of catalogues.
  - Most retail staff take lunch and tea breaks outside peak times, so cafes and takeaways can provide off peak specials or deliveries to nearby outlets.
- ▶ One regional business community got corporate sponsorship for a mug campaign where all retail staff were given a themed coffee mug as a part of the campaign. As many staff can't afford to take coffee breaks outside their retail outlet, but hate drinking out of takeaway cups their own coffee mug was a welcome gift. Cafes joined in the spirit of the promotion and filled the mug for the cost of a cup of coffee.

## Local Employees

Apart from retail business owners and staff there are a significant number of employees working in the surrounding industrial areas and there is potential to encourage them to spend more in the CBD.

The Chamber of Commerce and Economic Development Officer may be able to liaise with companies and organisations in the Industrial Areas to identify key products and services that will be useful for local employees. These can then be promoted in a simple flyer/email which can be displayed in staff rooms, distributed to all staff with company information or emailed to all new employees. Information in the flyer should be specific and include opening hours and contact details for relevant businesses.

Businesses that could be promoted in the flyer include:

- ▶ Pharmacy and medical services
- ▶ Post office services
- ▶ Health and fitness classes
- ▶ Watch batteries and jewellery repair
- ▶ Catering and food
- ▶ Banks and financial services

If cafes are willing to participate, the flyer could also include services like delivery of lunches or fax/email ahead lunch orders. (These services may not be relevant to all companies). These workers could also participate in the Retailer Club card promotion

## Visitors to professional and health services in the area

There is potential to cross promote Muswellbrook businesses to people visiting the hospital, health services and professional practices. This group is ideally targeted through a flyer displayed in the professional or health practice. This flyer should aim to increase the amount of time the visitor spends in the area. The flyer could be a DL size double sided which could be displayed in the reception area in a Perspex holder. This could be titled "While you are here" ... and detail a short itinerary of things to do and see including cafes, browsing shops and local attractions. (This is a similar approach to the "Day In" leaflets)

There is also an opportunity to get individual cafes involved in promotion to these visitors. Professional practices could be supplied with complementary "Have a coffee on us!" coffee vouchers which are given to clients or patients who have to wait to see their consultant. The practice can pay a nominal amount for this voucher if required, but most cafes find the visitor usually buys another coffee for a friend plus a cake or snack. It will be important to match the practice and café to make sure the voucher provides target customers for the operator.

## Visitors making major purchases or visiting Light Industrial Area businesses

The “while you are here leaflet” and coffee voucher strategies that are recommended to target visitors to professional practices can also be used to promote Muswellbrook to visitors frequenting other operators in the area such as car dealers, engineering works etc.

## Visitors

### Key Attractions

Streetscape improvements, flags and a revitalised retail mix will all encourage more visitors to stop and spend longer in Muswellbrook.

- ▶ A key asset in the main street is the Arts Centre and promotion of the Centre should be increased to market it to visitors. Strategies could include:
- ▶ Creating a website for the Centre and using Search Engine Optimisation to ensure it rates highly on searches
- ▶ Increasing the profile of the Centre in the Visitor Information Centre with a brochure and if funds permit posters and an installation
- ▶ Promotion of the Arts Centre on the planned main street flags
- ▶ Inclusion of the Arts Centre leaflet in Motel Compendiums
- ▶ Inclusion of the Arts Centre in “day In” flyers
- ▶ If there are entrance fees for the Centre consider a locals or frequent flyer bonus that gives them free entry when bringing friends and relatives

Another tourism asset in the main street is the heritage architecture. This is already featured in the Town Walk brochure but there is potential to create more of an attraction with plaques or signage at key sites. This type of approach has been used effectively in Euroa (Vic) and Dungog to “pull” visitors along the length of the main street.

### Opening Hours

One of the key issues for the traveller will be the lack of weekend trading.

To successfully compete in the wider market it will eventually be necessary for some of Muswellbrook’s retail businesses to open weekends. Understandably there will be resistance to this idea and it is not something that can be legislated. Ideally five or six key businesses that are keen to trade on a weekend can be identified and promoted in a campaign that will market the new opening hours.

- ▶ The businesses most likely to benefit from weekend trading will be the food outlets and browsing shops
- ▶ This concept is best trialled during peak tourism months. It is important that all participating businesses agree on a starting date and give the trial at least three months before declaring it a success or failure. An ideal trial period would be June through August.
  - It may not be possible to get agreement on seven day trading immediately and you may need to extend hours gradually. Starting with Saturday afternoon trading or Sunday morning trading
- ▶ Opening hours for each business should be decided upon and “published” in the Shopping Around column and one-colour or inexpensive flyer which can be letterbox dropped to local postcodes

### Food Outlets

- ▶ There is an opportunity to increase promotion of local produce in the food outlets. Local cafés could feature dishes with local produce such as sausages from the local butcher and also retail gourmet product from local suppliers. Local restaurants could feature a selection of local wines.
- ▶ Some of the local food and beverage operators would benefit from a visit from a food consultant who can assist them with:
  - Developing profitable menus

- Consistently producing quality product
  - Creating a distinct positioning for each outlet through menus and pricing
  - Food presentation
  - Skills to help kitchen and wait staff cope with increased volume
- ▶ This consultant may be sourced from Sydney or a regional centre such as Newcastle where there are several excellent restaurants whose chefs may be suitable to carry out this work
- ▶ The food consultant visit could be the focus to generate a meeting of local operators. Although it is a challenge, it would be ideal to get the food and beverage suppliers together to discuss key issues such as:
  - Consistent opening hours
  - Menu ranges
  - Opportunities from any gaps in the market

# Attraction Strategies

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## Attracting New Residents to the LGA

Many new residents to Muswellbrook will be attracted primarily by employment opportunities. When they are deciding between jobs they can be influenced by the facilities and attractions of the new town. There is an opportunity for Muswellbrook to promote directly to potential residents through major employers in the area and surrounding regions. Initiatives could include:

- ▶ Distributing a prospectus to all major employers in the area. This can be done through a site visit, mail out or email blast.
- ▶ This can be supplemented with additional information that is specific to that industry or target resident e.g. a flyer designed for young single trades workers and another for young families

New residents often already have a connection with the community they relocate to so it is important to promote the drive for new residents to existing residents through as many avenues as possible such as mail outs from the Council and in the Visitor Information Centre

More traditional strategies for targeting new residents include attending Country Week or similar expos to promote the benefits of living in the Muswellbrook Shire. Prior to attending these events the Council and Chamber will need to identify the skills gaps in the shire, who are the target new residents and develop marketing messages specifically related to their needs and wants, worries and concerns.

For example, if the area is targeting young families then they will be interested in kindergartens, schools, play activities and sporting clubs whereas retirees may be more interested in health care, public transport, safety etc. Towns that are most successful at these events tend to provide detailed information and create a sense of the town in their displays. Successful tactics include:

- ▶ Using similar aged people to the target markets to work on the stands
- ▶ Case studies and profiles of people who have relocated to Muswellbrook
- ▶ A core message that taps into the potential residents' desire for a new life. For example a town that was targeting the overworked city professional looking for a quiet life had a large clock on their display alongside a daily timetable which read
  - 8.55 leave for work
  - 9am arrive at work
  - 12.30 head home for home cooked lunch
  - 1.15 arrive back at work
  - 5.30 leave work
  - 5.35 arrive home in time to coach kids soccer, sit out in garden, relax, read a book

## Attracting New Businesses to Muswellbrook

The Council needs to work with the Chamber of Commerce and relevant individuals and organisations to identify target businesses for Muswellbrook.

Consultation will also be needed to identify the key benefits of the area and develop a prospectus that can be used to actively promote both the light industrial and main street areas in the LGA.

This prospectus can be hard or soft copy and ideally will include information on:

- ▶ Availability and cost of land
- ▶ Availability of retail and office space
- ▶ Availability of rental properties

- ▶ Identified gaps in the retail mix
- ▶ Infrastructure such as transport links
- ▶ Availability of services such as power, water etc
- ▶ Proximity to target clients
- ▶ Profiles of local community
- ▶ Information about sporting clubs and activities
- ▶ Profiles of tourism markets
- ▶ Support from Council in terms of DA's etc
- ▶ Labour market – skilled/unskilled
- ▶ Case studies can also be used to showcase local success stories

Once the direction is decided there are a number of ways Council can proactively target new businesses:

- ▶ Developing dedicated pages on the Council and Chamber websites for light industrial, retail and service businesses interested in starting a new business, expanding an existing business or relocating to the area
- ▶ Investigating forums for promoting the region e.g. Country Week for Businesses, regional expos or forums, Ministerial tours
- ▶ Working with local real estate agents to market properties including ideal usage e.g. “approved for café”, ideal for gift or home wares outlet, suit vehicle service or maintenance business

## Attracting Employees

There is potential to increase visibility of Muswellbrook on job search sites such as SEEK. This would effectively be a summary of jobs in the area and links to businesses individual advertisement. Premium ads will give the area and employers an increased presence on the sites

Consider a Google Ad words campaign on sites such as [www.jseeker.com.au](http://www.jseeker.com.au). This will increase overall visibility of the area with job seekers

Council or the Chamber of Commerce can also work with businesses in the area to market apprenticeships to careers advisors at high schools and Tafe colleges in surrounding areas. Initiatives could include a

- ▶ Council/employer presentations at careers days
- ▶ Brochure detailing positions available and the benefits of local employment. Promotional Vidcast or podcast that can be emailed to interested advisors
- ▶ Monthly emails to schools advising of vacancies for apprentices
- ▶ The Council could include web pages dedicated to recruitment on their website.
  - This could also feature a promotional brochure, vidcast or podcast

The Council could attend Country Week with employers to specifically recruit staff to the area. One community in regional Victoria found this strategy very effective. They took a number of young men to the expo and used displays featuring local sporting/football clubs, adventure activities in the area and details of night time venues. For this initiative to be successful the Council will need to develop a list of key benefits and attractions that would appeal to young men.

# Postcode Research

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The aim of this research is to identify where your customers are coming from and what is the average spend for each of the various destination groups. This information can also help you decide whether you should advertise or promote in specific areas.

Until you have enough data to evaluate, you won't be able to decide what the various groups may be but we could perhaps assume that they may include:

- ▶ Local
- ▶ Surrounding postcodes
- ▶ Local visitors
- ▶ Interstate visitors
- ▶ International visitors

## Suggested Methodology

You need to collect the information across the week but you don't want to run this day in/ day out as it can be tiresome for you and your customers.

It is suggested you do the research two or three half days a week until you have covered all the operating hours. Alternatively you can run the research every day for 1 – 2 hours e.g. day one 9 – 11, day two 11 – 1 etc etc. This should take you almost a month. At the end of the first week do a preliminary breakdown of the figures. At the end of the month you should have enough data to start drawing conclusions about the information.

After the initial run, the research can continue on a regular basis, perhaps two half days a week for another month. Once you are sure your conclusions are correct you can stop the research and only repeat it when we feel spending patterns are changing. You may end up running this kind of research twice a year.

On the days you are doing research you will need to:

- ▶ Ask every customer for their postcode.
  - You needn't ask people you know are local residents but you must record their post code
- ▶ Record the post code and total amount of the sale on a clip board or in a notebook.
  - It is critical that you record every sale and don't miss out people when you are busy.

All you need to say is. "Could I have your postcode please?" If you feel more comfortable you can add an explanation eg "We're doing some research into where our customers come from, could I have your postcode please?"

It is unlikely you will meet any customer resistance to this request but if you do, let it go, leaving the customer feeling happy is more important than getting their postcode!!



# Café Questionnaire

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Customers in cafes are often looking for things to read or take their attention while they are waiting for their tea or coffee. This means they are prime candidates for questionnaires. These can be used to flesh out postcode research, identify specific attributes of visitors or back up gut feel.

They can be printed on a DL envelope size piece of paper with the business group or café logo or name on the top. The questionnaire can also include a brief explanation of what it is about e.g.

The business community in Muswellbrook is working hard to improve our main street shopping area, and we need your help. Please take 2 minutes to fill out this questionnaire.

No more than 5 questions should be asked and they can be tailored for each community. Sample questions include

- ▶ How often have you visited Muswellbrook in the last 4 weeks?
- ▶ Did you come here to visit one particular retail shop or service provider?
  - Ask for details or offer a choice of boxes to tick
- ▶ How long do you usually spend shopping in Muswellbrook?
- ▶ How many shops do you visit when you come to Muswellbrook?
- ▶ What is your favourite thing about shopping in Muswellbrook?
- ▶ What do you like least about shopping in Muswellbrook?

Thank you for your feedback

These forms can be collected and collated and information shared with the local business community