Dear Wodonga business owner,

There are many things which can change the course of your business.

Some can be brought on by unforeseen circumstances, while others can be planned for.

Roadworks are something that happen in every city.

When you have good notice about works, you can develop an approach which will help you see your business through any challenges you might face.

Wodonga is undergoing a major change.

Your council has already undertaken major roadworks in the city centre, including the reconstruction and realignment of Elgin Boulevard, the reconstruction of South St from High St to Hovell St in 2014, as well as major works in Lawrence and Hovell streets.

This has been coupled with the earlier redevelopment of the Stanley St precinct, landscaping works and the removal of the railway line which has subsequently seen the construction of Junction Square and the area around the former railway line.

The Mann Central development is progressing and will substantially change the face of Wodonga’s CBD.

Wodonga has received $10 million for road construction in the city under the Australian Government’s National Stronger Regions Funding Round.

This work includes:

- The Promenade area between the former goods shed and railway station;
- The new Richardson Park area;
- The stretch of High St between the former railway crossing in High St to South St;
- The stretch of High St between the former railway crossing and the water tower;
- Works in South St between High St and Smythe St; and,
- The extension of Havelock St.
As well as the roadworks, it will include drainage, landscaping and beautification of the area.

Recently, it was announced that the Federal Government would provide $1.7 million of funding for works between Chapple St and the Jack in the Box Creek area of Thomas Mitchell Drive under the Black Spot Program.

These changes assist in building and enhancing Wodonga’s economic future and a better city for all.

As a council, we understand that roadworks can be an inconvenience to both yourselves as business owners and your customers.

However, if you are well prepared and have communicated to your clients, your chances of prospering during this time are better.

This guide is aimed at providing practical guidance on how to approach the construction work, but is just as applicable to other changes which your business may face.

We hope it will help you and your employees prepare for any future disruptions.

Wodonga Council is committed to working with you during the roadworks and will do all it can to support people and make sure any impact is minimised.

If you have any additional questions that you feel this guide does not address, or if you have anything you are concerned about, please let us know.

Please participate in all activities which are held to communicate and consult with you to ensure you gain information and provide feedback to our processes.

Cr Rodney Wangman
Wodonga Mayor

Patience Harrington
Chief Executive Officer
Wodonga Council
BE PROACTIVE ON SOCIAL MEDIA

Some things I found useful were creating a Facebook page, as it’s a free form of advertising, and making online ordering available on our website. We went outside of normal business to offer our services to various corporate clients. We did this by sending out letters and making appointments to drum up new business.

Emma Dixon
Jannoel Florist, High St
If your business is located in a road construction project area, your business will need to be well prepared for what’s ahead.

Once reconstruction is complete, the area affected is likely to be construction-free for several years, and your business will benefit from the project’s improvements.

Road reconstruction is necessary every few decades — pavement, sewers and utilities don’t last forever.

- Work with the council; unforeseen issues that delay or lengthen projects always arise, so recognise that local government and project contractors are doing their utmost to resolve issues. It’s in their best interests, too, to complete projects on time so we are all working towards a common goal.

- Remember that you are getting a better product in the end. As a council, we are trying to work with you to ensure that Wodonga’s CBD is a place to which people want to spend some time in – and also their money.

- By making a city more cycle and pedestrian-friendly, people are more inclined to spend more time looking at the shops. We don’t want Wodonga, and particularly its main streets, to be a traffic thoroughfare, but rather a shopping destination. While people may complain about the changes they are facing if they are driving through the city, they will learn to take alternate routes if they are travelling from A to B and don’t need to stop to shop.
Remember that your concerns, questions and suggestions are very important to the council in the early stages of planning as the city gets ready to undertake roadworks.

While it can be hard to attend things when you are running a business, at this early stage in the planning process, your input is needed.

If you do read anything the council puts out and are confused or unsure of what it means to you, phone the council. Remember, the best discussions will happen face-to-face, so make sure you have a relationship where council staff feel confident to come and talk to you. If you don’t know what they are telling you, or how it might impact you, feel free to ask.

If you are renting your premises, it is a great time to talk to your landlord about whether there can be rental relief or even whether they could take the opportunity to upgrade the premises. A revamped shop will go a long way to attracting customers and giving your business a new lease on life.
WHEN THE COUNCIL IS WORKING NEAR YOUR BUSINESS IT IS IMPORTANT THAT YOU TAKE STEPS TO STAND OUT AND REMAIN NOTICED. HERE’S SOME ADVICE FROM A BUSINESS-OWNER.

TIPS FROM THE STREETS

SIGNAGE

Customers will shy away if it looks too hard. Large clear signage is a must, spell it out clearly. Work with the council on the best and safest way to do this.

SPREAD THE WORD

Tell your customers you are open for business, this may cost you money, but if you do it smart it will help.

WORK WITH ALL THE SHOPS AROUND YOU

No matter what you do, it will affect your business, so watch your stock levels, (especially retail businesses)

GREG HAYSON
Exact Computers & Home Entertainment, South St
With the upcoming works, there has been more notice given, which will mean people can take advantage of this by making changes to their staff rosters and being more aware of the quantities they are forward ordering. Make sure you continue with your advertising and promotions.

Nadine Trist
Pour Mes Amis
High St
As a business owner, you’re always planning and improving your business model.

When you’re informed ahead of time, road construction is something you can prepare for.

It’s important to keep thinking outside the square and trying things which may be new to your business but have proven results elsewhere.

There was no doubt the works in Elgin Boulevard caused us disruption. I started working with social media during that time and it certainly helped things. I think it helped me reach an audience I hadn’t captured before and things such as competitions worked well for us.

Sue Lourie
Home Inspirations
Elgin Boulevard
Take note of all communications from the council and attend all meetings you can. Projects change, and this will ensure you have the most current information and can organise your business accordingly. If you can’t attend, be sure to read information from the council when you receive it.

Join local business organisations such as the Wodonga Chamber of Commerce. And if you’re already a member, make sure the Chamber represents you and is working hard for your best interests.

There’s strength in numbers. Make sure to communicate with other local business leaders so you can band together and make concerns heard. Also, look at pooling your advertising dollars to make the most of publicising that your businesses are still open and trading.

Call on your customers to support you through the tough times as people are loyal and just need a reminder to help you when there are disruptions. People will come for a product they like and if you treat customers well, they will remember that. Promote your point of difference.

Be aware of not using the media to your own detriment. While you may feel frustrated at times, sending the message that the roadworks are disrupting you may actually have the unwanted effect of making your customers stay away.

Work closely with city engineering staff in the pre-bid stage, before construction contracts are written, to ensure the contracts include business-friendly requirements. These might include regularly scheduled meetings before and during construction with business owners and construction staff.

Negotiate pedestrian and parking access at all possible times to make sure your customers can still access your shops.

Do your part to ensure you and the council have a co-operative arrangement where you will support and financially contribute to events to bring people to the area despite the roadworks. Don’t rely on the council to do it all as they are an organisation that is representative of all the city, so have to spread resources many ways. Help where you can and make suggestions, but show your willingness to assist to make things a success.
Talk to your employees about the process and strategies to stay prosperous during construction. Discuss marketing efforts and allow employees to share any concerns they may have. Your employees will appreciate the opportunity and the dialogue may spark new ideas that will benefit your business.

Keeping your customers informed gives them the ability to access your business. Examples can include putting up signs or passing out copies of alternative routes to the business before the project. Social media is a particularly economic way of doing this. It also allows customers to know more about road conditions, best routes and promotional specials during the construction period.

You may need to rework your budget, your business plan and your stock ordering. This may mean that you may need a bit of guess work as your stock ordering may come at a time when the council is still negotiating the finer details of a project. The council will ensure it provides you with the details it has on hand at the time to assist you in making informed decisions.
During the Elgin Boulevard works, the council worked with local businesses on a Love Wodonga campaign. This will be rolled out again during the upcoming works. The campaign is aimed at encouraging people to support their local shops and be proud of their city. The campaign was well received by customers and received many favourable comments.

To find out more about Love Wodonga, please contact the council’s Economic Development team.
Dust and noise are both inevitable during a construction project and aren’t areas where you will have a great deal of control.

Traffic delays and blocked access routes are also difficulties that may arise during construction.

These are some ideas for dealing with these issues.
Consider using a back entrance for better customer access.

Access to your business is often a problem during a construction project. Make sure there are signs directing your customers to the right entrance.

Traffic delays will also be inevitable during a construction project, but signage can help a great deal. See what sort of signs are going up to direct traffic and make sure they make sense for your customers. Construction crews aren’t aware of your needs and often it’s just a matter of asking. Also, make sure there’s signage properly directing your customers to parking spaces.

Create a friendly rapport with your on-site construction workers. Complaints are best directed to the council staff and a key contact will be provided before the project begins. In some cases, the contact will be the Economic Development team; in other situations it will be the engineers who can help you. The council’s Customer Service staff will help guide you when you make the initial contact.

Remember to keep delivery people well informed of the changes. They will appreciate the notice in knowing what is going on. It will be handy to develop a list of anyone who regularly accesses your business to keep them informed.

Don’t overlook construction teams as potential customers. Try some roadwork specials which can help strengthen your business to a new audience.

Make the construction work for you. If you’ve been considering a remodel for your business, why not do it during the construction period? Use this slower period to get things done that you haven’t had time to address.
My advice is to present a united front. You are not alone! Most of your business neighbours are in the same boat. Don’t just grumble in sympathy with those you meet in the street, before the work starts is the time to get an association of small business holders together, or form a subgroup if you already belong to a chamber. Speak with a unified voice to the council to get more attention and to present your ideas as a common quest, plus making it easier for the council employees to understand and prioritise common problems.

Sue Honey, Aaction Business Services, High St

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