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## GUIDELINES FOR ELECTRONIC COMMERCE

Last month, the Competition & Consumer Policy Division of the Federal Treasury Department issued the Australian Guidelines for Electronic Commerce ("Guidelines").

Treasury acknowledged the growth of electronic commerce in Australia in the use of the internet to purchase goods and services.

The Guidelines seek to enhance consumer confidence when dealing with businesses over the internet and also seeks to give guidance to businesses when dealing with consumers over the internet.

## Key Principles

Some of the key principles of the Guidelines are:

- Ø Comply with the Trade Practices Act. For example: don't engage in misleading or deceptive conduct in relation to the goods or services;
- Ø Make sure your business is clearly identifiable to the consumer. Provide basic contact details such as a business address and a phone number;
- Ø Comply with the Spam Act and do not send unsolicited commercial electronic messages to your customers or potential customers;
- Ø In the event that some of your products or services may be of interest to minors, take steps to verify the consumer's age;
- Ø Provide details of the terms, conditions & costs of the transaction. It is preferable if consumers can retain those details, as

well as confirmation of the transaction itself;

- Ø The price should be sufficiently clear and should specify whether any other fees, such as delivery and postage costs, are included in the price or whether they are in addition to the price;
- Ø Businesses should comply with the National Privacy Principles. Take particular care when collecting consumers details and how your business later uses those details.
- Ø Payment options should be easy, reliable and secure. There is still some angst amongst consumers when using credit card details over the internet. Therefore, security in this area can make a consumer feel more at ease in proceeding with the transaction, which in turn should increase sales for your business.
- Ø Your business should provide various dispute resolution avenues for the consumer. First, the ability to raise any issues with your business directly and secondly, if that fails, you should provide details of an external body who can assist in resolving the dispute.

The Guidelines provide a good concise overview of some important areas that need to be considered by businesses when developing their internet site for commercial sales.

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