

Pub, Bar, Club & Restaurant Canopies

Isn't the smoking ban going to be a disaster?

Although overall the smoking ban has hit club incomes in Scotland and Ireland, some have done very well out of it by acting early and investing well.

So how can I be a winner?

For some clubs smokers represent a big proportion of members, and an even higher proportion of the income. Most of them are not going to give up and will be looking for somewhere comfortable to smoke and drink. If you provide a good comfortable area, and your competitors don't, you can expect lots of new customers who smoke to turn up - along with their non-smoking friends.



What does a 'good comfortable area' mean in practice?

You've got to work within the law. This is almost certain to say that if you have a roof (or an awning, umbrella or canopy - even if you don't keep it extended) you can only enclose the area with 50 per cent walls, windows or doors. So if your area had two equal long sides and two equal short sides you could have one long side and one short side walled - and the other sides open. If you wanted you could have half height walls all the way round instead. The solution is up to you - and of course the planners - to decide. Of course that's just the outside - you'll usually need heat, light, seating and tables too to make it comfortable.

What about the council?

Although the rules will be the same nationally, local authorities will probably interpret the rules in their own ways. Some will be harsh and some quite relaxed. Talk to them first; look at the planning application that they have allowed and avoid calling it a smoking shelter, or anything similar, if you want to get permission relatively easily.

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How much will it cost?

The lesson from Scotland and Ireland is 'get it right first time'. Visit any Scottish town and licensees will tell you of canopies that have sagged under the rain, awnings that have been twisted by the wind and windbreaks that blow over all the time. And these all went wrong in summer! If you want to build your business, look on this as an investment and go for the most durable and highest quality cover that you can afford. A cheap solution won't work as well and may well end up costing you just as much in repairs and replacements anyway.

How long have I got?

In Wales and Northern Ireland the ban probably starts at the beginning of April; for England it may be July 2007. This is not long. In Scotland, planning permission is taking an average 16 weeks to obtain and there is about an eight week lead time for making materials - so that's 36 weeks without counting any planning time, applying for changes to a licence or even doing the building work. All in all this work out at well over six months - so you really need to start now, or ideally a couple of weeks ago!

I'm landlocked what can I do?

Most clubs have somewhere that they can extend into. A bit of waste ground, onto the pavement or over a bit of a car park. Some even create spaces on top of buildings. There are many alternatives. Most will probably require planning permission and/or a change to your premises licence. If you serve a lot of smokers and genuinely have nowhere to convert you will probably lose a lot of their business - which means that you are going to have to attract a lot of non-smokers to take their place. This means some pretty active marketing - special events nights, wine or beer tasting, special foods, special menus, a refurbishment or major paint job at the very least. You could even try smoking cessation classes! Smoking members may nip out for a quick cigarette outside in the summer and then come back in. In winter they are much more likely to stay somewhere warm where they can smoke in the dry - it could be their homes or it could be another club down the road.



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Won't I be wasting my money if I invest?

For a lot of the year our climate is pretty pleasant outside (and global warming looks to be making it even hotter!). So look upon your smoking area not as a 'sin-bin' where smokers cluster together, but as an extension to your trading area that will be great for smokers and non-smokers. Tables with heaters and cover outside can be a big draw, and barbecues, and eating alfresco can be really enjoyable. So your investment works twice as hard - looking after and attracting smoking members while also providing great new facilities for everyone and more opportunities for them to spend money with you.

Canopies, awnings or hardtops?

It really depends on your budget. Most people that we have spoken to wish that they had spent more on their cover to make it more durable and provide better shelter. If you can, try to put up your covered zone in a sheltered area where the wind cannot get at it. Some manufacturers have wind sensors that retract the cover when the weather is bad. Of course that's exactly when you'll probably need it most. Remember this is not a bit of garden furniture that you are buying but a hard-working piece of equipment. Go for the best that you can.

Anything I should be doing now?

Apart from planning your smoking area, getting the money together, applying for planning permission, looking for various suppliers and so on? These you should get on with straight away. But one useful tip from Ireland and Scotland is to start acclimatising your smokers to the ban. If you allow smoking everywhere now, then suddenly ban it everywhere, your members will get an almighty shock and you are likely to lose them. Start with a ban at the bar counter, then some non-smoking tables and so on. When the ban comes in they will be expecting it and you will be much more likely to keep and build your member base.



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