

'We'll ride out the downturn,' insist retailers

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Figures this week are expected to tell Australians what they already knew: that the country has entered a technical recession.

But small business owners in south-east Queensland have told the ABC they are convinced they can ride out the downturn.

Roy Capiro, owner and manager of a Bucking Beef franchise in Brisbane's western suburbs thinks things will get worse before they get better, but with good management and a little luck he is confident his business will survive.

He is not the only one. The ABC spoke to three business owners in the Redbank Plaza shopping centre between Brisbane and Ipswich, and they all saw light at the end of the tunnel.

Retail figures out this morning lend support to their optimism, although the 0.3 per cent increase is certainly no spectacular result.

Mr Capiro has owned the Redbank business since December, after three years at a similar franchise on the New South Wales central coast.

"We just took it over and business has gone up 40 per cent at least in one month. It's been climbing about 30 or 35 per cent since December," he told the ABC.

"The (Redbank Plaza) Centre has its good days and bad days. At the moment we're finding it's OK for us personally, we're not actually being affected (by the recession). We're keeping staff employed, paying the bills on time."

Across the food court, Coffee Club owner Peter Ribes is optimistic.

The cafe is one of two franchises he owns and for the moment he says they are going well.

"Talking to the other retailers who come in for coffee here every day, it's surprising one day they've had a bad day and we've had an absolute ripper. Sometimes vice versa," he said.

"Overall I think it depends what business you're in and we chose the right business."

Downstairs Amanda Matthews has owned her Price Attack store for just three weeks. Business was struggling 12 months ago and she has been involved in a major refurbishment and staff turn-over since then.

"We've had 40 per cent growth to 70 per cent growth each week so to us it hasn't affected us," she said.

"But we did take the business back over to being a corporate store when it was quite bad, so there's definitely growth there."

'Sell the product'

The message for retailers is simple: give customers value for money and there is no reason why they will not keep buying.

Franchise Council of Australia board member Rod Wakefield says good business owners have nothing to fear from the recession, as long as they stay sensible.

"There's no doubt people in Australia are worried about the current economic climate," he said, "but the trick is making sure customers know you have a quality product that is worth buying."

Ms Matthews, 37, says she is determined to give customers the best possible service.

"Everyone needs their hair done, everyone needs the product to take home, so I don't think it'll affect us if we keep our standards up," she said.

For cafe owner Peter Ribes, the most important thing is having friendly and competent staff.

"In terms of staffing we need more staff simply because it's getting busier. We're pretty lucky our staff stay here. It's like a little family here at the coffee shop," he said.

"I'm pretty positive about the next 12 months, I'm looking forward to it."

Slideshow: Photo 1 of 3



Determined ... Amanda Matthews inspects stock at her store west of Brisbane. (ABC News: Nic MacBean)

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Carvery owner Roy Capiro may not share that degree of optimism but he says the next 12 months will give him the chance to show he deserves to be running a business.

"I'm always on the phone to my friends in England and they're always saying [the economy is] really bad. It's going to take time to filter through Europe and Asia before it really hits Australia. I'm a bit worried about the next year to be honest," he said.

"But we're just keeping the produce as fresh as we can possibly get and topping it up, cleaning and trying to attract the customer to our counter."

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