



smallbusinessadvice.ie



Helping to keep your business in business



OUTLINE - SMALL BUSINESS ADVICE PROGRAMME

Introduction

The Small Business Advice Programme (smallbusinessadvice.ie) is a voluntary response by the business community to the challenges that recession brings for small business. A panel of Advisers has been assembled, with significant business experiences, who are volunteering their time to give practical advice to small businesses. Small businesses can benefit from tapping into this pool of knowledge by applying for an advice meeting through the Small Business Advice website www.smallbusinessadvice.ie. Applications may also be made by phone, fax, email or by post.

Recession forces businesses to change in order to survive. That change can be difficult and many businesses can't afford professional advice. Our business Advisers will give solid, practical advice on how to prepare for the new market challenges. It may not be possible to totally recession proof your business. However, there are practical measures small businesses can take to maximise potential, survive and even grow in tough times.

Programme benefits

- Completely confidential
- Good quality advice from experienced Advisers
- Quick response – target to have an adviser within one week of completed application
- Easy to use – it takes minutes to apply on website
- No charge to small business

Key Points

➤ ***Participation***

Participation is on a voluntary basis by small Business Owners, Advisers, Sponsors and Supporters.

➤ ***Sponsors and Supporters***

The principle Sponsor is Bord Gáis Eireann, Other Sponsor include Plato, The Cork Chamber of Commerce and The Cork Business Association. Supporters from the South-East and Mid-West regions are the local Chambers of Commerce.

➤ ***Small Business Owners***

Small Businesses Owners participate on a voluntary basis and accept that all advice is provided by the Adviser under the Terms of Engagement

➤ ***Advisers***

Advisers participate on a voluntary and completely confidential basis in accordance with a Code of Conduct. Advisers will be requested to complete a short profile which will be used to match the small business requirement with the particular expertise of the Adviser.

The Advisers come from diverse backgrounds and have a wide range of expertise including;

- Consultants
- Managers of large companies/multinationals
- Successful retailers & small business owners
- Retired executives
- Senior banking officials and managers
- Marketing specialists
- Accountants
- Engineers & project managers

➤ ***Costs***

All parties bear their own costs, Small Businesses, Advisers, Bord Gáis as Project Manager, and various service suppliers.

➤ ***Governance Structure***

A Supervisory Committee (“The Board”) of 5 people has been set up to oversee the implementation and operation of the Programme. The Supervisory Committee meet bi-monthly.

The Supervisory Committee members are:

- Simon Coveney TD (Chairman)
- Denis Kirby (Secretary)
- John Mullins – CEO, Bord Gáis Eireann
- JJ O’Connell – Plato
- Eddie Hobbs

➤ ***Programme implementation***

- (1) A website has been developed www.smallbusinessadvice.ie

- (2) A database of Advisers has been compiled and Advisers have received training on participation in the Programme
- (3) The Programme was launched in October 2009 in the Cork region
- (4) On foot of requests to extend the Programme outside Cork, the Programme was extended to the South-East Region in May 2010 (Waterford, Wexford, Carlow and Kilkenny).
- (5) On further demand the programme expanded into the Mid-West Region in October 2010 (Tipperary, Limerick and Clare).
- (6) Although the Programme is officially operational in Cork, the South East and Mid West regions, applications have been received from ten other counties in Ireland.

Applications to the Programme

To make the process as streamlined and easy to use for small business owners, there are five ways to apply for assistance;

- Website www.smallbusinessadvice.ie
- Email applications@smallbusinessadvice.ie
- Phone LoCall 1-850-763- 763
- Fax 021-453 4341
- Post The Small Business Advice Programme, PO Box 51, Gasworks Road, Cork

➤ *Process for assisting Small Businesses - what happens after an application is made:*

- (1) The Programme Project Manager will contact the small Business Owner, get further information, and request the small Business Owner to complete and submit a short questionnaire. The Project Manager will assist in this process if required.
- (2) The Project Manager will match the requirements of the small Business Owner with one or more of the Advisers.
- (3) The contact between the small Business Owner and the Adviser consists of 1 to 3 meetings. The number of meetings is capped at 3 as this should be enough time for the nature of assistance to be

delivered and avoiding over-reliance by the small Business Owner on the Adviser input. The typical duration for each meeting is 2 -3 hours.

- (4) The Adviser keeps a log or some brief notes of the discussions at the meetings and the nature of the advice given.
- (5) The Project Manager follows up with the small Business Owner after the Adviser meetings and gets feedback on how the meetings went, and critically did the small business owner get the assistance required.

➤ **Typical Issues**

- (1) Managing fixed costs
 - Rental / lease costs
 - Salary costs
- (2) Debtor management
 - Collecting payment
 - Bad debt issues
 - Credit terms – small business being squeezed by their clients and suppliers any of whom are much larger. This is a particular problem for small service companies
- (3) Raising finance
 - Working capital / overdraft facilities
 - Capital to grow the business
- (4) Cashflow management
 - How to manage cashflow - related to debtor and finance issues
 - Invoice discounting
- (5) Management accounts
 - Many small companies particularly sole traders have quite informal accounting processes. While this is not a bad thing in busy times, it is a disadvantage in a downturn.
 - A small business needs to know how profitable the business is and indeed how profitable the specific products and services provided are
- (6) Profitability Analysis
 - How profitable are the services/products supplied
 - Which are high margin and low/no margin

- How to develop high margin products/services
- (7) Marketing and growing the business
- How to increase revenues or replace lost revenues
- (8) Developing business plans
- To raise finance
 - To clarify resource requirements
- (9) How to utilise spare capacity
- Grow into new areas
- (10) Supplier Issues
- Renegotiating terms with Suppliers
 - Sourcing material from far east
 - Dealing with new suppliers
- (11) Downsizing
- How to outsource/contract out supplies/services
 - How to reduce employee numbers
 - Laying off staff and government supports
 - Discontinuing unprofitable products/services