

TRADING ONLINE VOUCHER SCHEME

With the trend ever increasing towards online spending it is estimated that only 23% of small Irish businesses are engaged in any meaningful way in eCommerce sales. For businesses employing less than ten people, this percentage could be even lower. It is now believed that, of online purchases made in Ireland, up to 70% of these are done in overseas markets.

There is now an urgency to ensure that businesses recognise that this is happening and that they are encouraged and supported to correctly respond to this digital reality. In order to support this goal, the National Digital Strategy aims to get more businesses trading online.

To this end, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, Enterprise, Trade and Employment offer a Trading Online Voucher Scheme through the Local Enterprise Offices (LEO) to deliver this to Irish business. A limited number of vouchers are now available to eligible businesses.

WHAT IS IT?

The voucher is a financial incentive to small businesses to develop or enhance their ability to trade online. Under the scheme a qualifying business may apply for funding to a maximum value of €2,500 or 50% of eligible expenditure (exclusive of VAT), whichever is the lesser. Following approval of their application, a successful applicant can engage suppliers and upon completion of the work, submit a request for payment to the LEO in line with the terms and conditions of their voucher.

Information seminars will be made available online or by conference call to prospective applicants to support them in their application process and it will be a condition of applying for the vouchers that applicants participate in one of these seminars. At each seminar attendees will be informed of the purpose of the scheme and how best to use and get value from the application of the voucher. The application process for the vouchers will be a competitive process.

WHAT ARE THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA?

The vouchers are targeted at businesses with the following profile:

- Limited or no e-commerce presence;
- 10 or less employees;
- Turnover less than €2m;
- Applicant business must be trading for at least 6 months;
- Business must be located in the area covered by the LEO to whom they make their application i.e. LEOs cannot accept applications from businesses located outside their jurisdiction.

Previous voucher recipients may apply for a second voucher

****Applicant business must provide clear proof of trading for a minimum of 6 months to their Local Enterprise Office.***

WHAT ARE INELIGIBLE PROJECTS FOR THIS SCHEME?

- Companies with charitable status, commercial semi-state companies, trade associations and company representation bodies such as Chambers of Commerce are not eligible to participate in the scheme;
- “Not for profit” and social entrepreneurship applicants unless they operate in a commercial domain;
- Professional services specialising in IT type services who are already capable of trading online using existing in-house systems;
- Conferences and Seminars;
- Projects which are contrary to public policy;
- Duplication of support for projects which would be eligible for assistance from other State Agencies of EU funded Operational Programmes;
- Projects with employees in excess of 10 people;
- Projects deemed to be capable of proceeding in any event without scheme assistance i.e. deadweight;
- Projects essentially comprising importation and distribution.
- Categories of business excluded from the Trading Online Voucher Scheme as defined by their NACE code. Please see *Appendix 1* at the end of this document, and on page 18 of the complete Trading Online Voucher Scheme application form, for the list of categories of business excluded from the Trading Online Voucher Scheme as defined by their NACE code.

WHAT CAN THE VOUCHERS BE USED FOR?

- IT consultation;
- Development or upgrade of an e-commerce website;
- Implementing Online payments or booking systems;
- Purchase of Internet related software;
- Developing an app (or multiplatform webpages);
- Development of a digital marketing strategy;
- Implementing a digital marketing strategy;
- Training/skills development specifically to establish and manage an online trading activity.
- Subscriptions (excluding transaction costs) to low cost online retail platform solutions, which would allow applicants to quickly establish a retailing presence online.
- Purchase of online advertising (this purchase cannot make up any more than 30% of all other approved Voucher costs and can only be drawn down in one payment phase);
- Purchase of Professional Photography (this expenditure cannot make up any more than 80% of all other approved voucher costs and can only be drawn down in one payment phase)

WHAT ARE THE THINGS THE VOUCHERS CANNOT BE USED FOR?

- Development of brochure websites*;
 - Purchase of non-internet related software;
 - Anything other than e-commerce trading related activity.
- * A brochure website is digital version of a printed brochure. They show the products or services your company provides, however, unlike an e-commerce website, they do not sell the product or service online or have an interactive booking function. With a brochure website, the goods and services are only displayed, so customers will have to contact the business to place an order.**

WHAT ELSE DO I NEED TO KNOW ABOUT VOUCHERS?

- Voucher approval must be gained prior to incurring any expense;
- Third party costs only will be considered. Own labour is not an eligible expense (labour of spouse or children also considered own labour);
- Claims can be made in either one or two instalments, and only made in respect of actual work completed (i.e. in respect of the components of the project works completed at the time the claim is being made). Expenditure on the various project components can only be claimed once.
- All third party/supplier invoices must contain proper business details (e.g. tax or business registration details or proof that the supplier is a registered business in the territory in which the supplier is located).
- Applications must be accompanied by written/mailed quotes for project works from three suppliers.

WHAT IS THE VOUCHER APPLICATION AND CLAIM PROCESS?

APPLICATION

- Read the terms & conditions;
- If satisfied you are eligible and wish to apply, register to participate in an information event;
- Participate in information session;
- Completed application to be submitted **online** to your local LEO, with 3 quotations;
- Submit copy of completed and signed application form in hard copy to your local LEO;

EVALUATION

- Evaluation of applications will be conducted by each LEO who will make recommendations for approval;
- An evaluation team will assess the applications and make recommendations for approval;
- A competitive process will be put in place to assist with selection process. Selection of successful applicant will be based on the following criteria:
 - Project Suitability;
 - Value Added potential;
 - Export potential;
 - Job creation potential;
 - How will the project aid the business post the COVID-19 Pandemic;
 - Financial sustainability.
- Record decisions and report to the Local Enterprise Office approvals committee;
- As part of the application process, applicants are required to participate in an information session on how to use and get the best value for money from the voucher.

VOUCHER ADMINISTRATION

- If your application is successful, a Letter of Offer - detailing the works and amount approved - will be sent to you for you to forward to your preferred supplier.
- The voucher is a Letter of Offer which is sent to the successful applicant;
- Letter of Offer should be signed, accepted and returned within 2 weeks;
- Successful applicants have 6 months to complete the work as per their application.

CLAIM

Payment will be made directly to the successful applicant upon satisfactory receipt of the following:

- Written correspondence from the applicant with their associated web address and confirmation that it is operational to trade online
- Supplier(s) invoice(s) for approved works
- Bank Statement(s) showing proof of payment to the supplier(s)
- Evidence of tax compliance in respect of the applicant/client business – this is your Tax Clearance Certificate, not your web developer's

All work must be completed and paid for prior to claim.

Payments will only be made with relation to approved expenses which form part of this application form.

All successful applicants agree that they will allow reference be made to them in case study materials, which may be used to promote the voucher scheme more widely.

WHAT IS POST-VOUCHER REPORTING AND HOW DOES IT APPLY TO ME?

By accepting a Trading Online Voucher, successful applicants agree to report on online trading from participation in the scheme, again in 6 months and at annual intervals up to three years thereafter. Reporting will include: jobs (new or reallocated), increased turnover, exports and/or domestic market expansion, reduced costs and expected follow on investment. This may be conducted by Local Enterprise Offices, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment or approved independent evaluators.

Suppliers will be required to report on the impact of their products and services supplied to the applicant business.

- Reporting will include how their product or service enabled trading online, improved business performance, reduced cost, opened markets etc.

WHAT IS 'DE MINIMIS' AID?

The Trading Online Voucher Scheme funding is provided under the European Commission Regulation on 'De Minimis' aid. De Minimis aid is limited amounts of State aid – up to €200,000 in any three-year period to any one enterprise. De Minimis aid is regarded as too small to significantly affect trade or competition in the common market. The amounts of grants are regarded as falling outside the category of State aid which is banned by the EC Treaty and, therefore, they can be awarded without reference to the European Commission.

However, a Member State must track De Minimis aid and make sure that combined De Minimis aid payments from all sources to an undertaking and/or business in any three fiscal year period respects the €200,000 ceiling.

Therefore, you need to **provide details of all other grant aid that has been awarded to you or your business within the past three years**. Please note that a false declaration to show a figure under the threshold of €200,000 could later mean that you would have to pay back the grant aid with interest.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Trading Online Voucher Scheme is an initiative of the National Digital Strategy (Doing More with Digital National Digital Strategy for Ireland Phase 1 – Digital Engagement), developed and funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment Enterprise, Trade and Employment on behalf of Government. It is being administered by the Local Enterprise Offices.

FURTHER TERMS

Applications for assistance for expenditure incurred prior to grant approval are ineligible. The Local Enterprise Office reserves the right to refuse any application and the right to terminate this grant scheme at any time without notice.

The approval of applications and the payment of all monies are dependent on the availability of resources under this scheme from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Applicants are advised to check availability of resources with Local Enterprise Office prior to applying. All applicants approved must draw down in full within 6 months of the date of offer.

Failure to draw down all or any portion may result in automatic de-committal without notice, i.e. loss of voucher. The Local Enterprise Office may liaise/consult other agencies/local development programmes in relation to this proposal while respecting project confidentiality.

Any false or misleading statement or the withholding of essential information from Local Enterprise Office (as determined by Local Enterprise Office) will result in cancellation of any grant approved under this scheme.

PLEASE NOTE: *The Local Enterprise Office is not responsible for any disputes between the applicant and 3rd party suppliers. Therefore we recommend that you adhere to best business practice and get three quotes as well as carry out due diligence before selecting a supplier.*

Disclaimer – *For the avoidance of doubt it is understood and accepted that it is the applicant companies who are selecting and entering into a contract with third parties. The State and its agents (including Local Enterprise Office(s), Enterprise Ireland or any Government Department) does not accept any liability whatsoever in respect of any deficit in or consequences arising from products or services procured by or provided to companies under this scheme. In submitting your application under this scheme you are confirming that you understand and accept this disclaimer.*

APPENDIX 1

Description of NACE code categories under which some sub-categories are excluded from the TOVs	NACE Code Reference for the Sub-categories which are excluded under the TOVs	Links to detailed descriptions of the sub-categories of businesses which are excluded from the TOVs
Manufacture of computer, electronic and optical products	C (26.1 – 26.4)	2611 Manufacture of electronic components 2612 Manufacture of loaded electronic boards 2620 Manufacture of computers and peripheral equipment 2630 Manufacture of communication equipment 2640 Manufacture of consumer electronics
Wholesale and retail trade; repair of motor vehicles and motorcycles	G (46.5.0 – 46.5.2, 47.4.0 – 47.4.3, 47.9.0 – 47.9.9)	4651 Wholesale of computers, computer peripheral equipment and software 4652 Wholesale of electronic and telecommunications equipment and parts 4741 Retail sale of computers, peripheral units and software in stores 4742 Retail sale of telecommunications equipment in specialised stores 4743 Retail sale of audio and video equipment in specialised stores 4791 Retail sale via mail order houses or via Internet 4799 Other retail sale not in stores, stalls or markets
Air Transport	H (51)	5110 Passenger air transport 5121 Freight air transport 5122 Space transport
Information and communications	J (58 – 63)	5811 Book publishing 5812 Publishing of directories and mailing lists 5813 Publishing of newspapers 5814 Publishing of journals and periodicals 5819 Other publishing activities 5821 Publishing of computer games 5829 Other software publishing 5911 Motion picture, video and television programme production activities 5912 Motion picture, video and television programme post-production activities 5913 Motion picture, video and television programme distribution activities 5914 Motion picture projection activities 5920 Sound recording and music publishing activities 6010 Radio broadcasting 6020 Television programming and broadcasting activities 6110 Wired telecommunications activities 6120 Wireless telecommunications activities 6130 Satellite telecommunications activities 6190 Other telecommunications activities 6201 Computer programming activities 6202 Computer consultancy activities 6203 Computer facilities management activities 6209 Other information technology and computer service activities 6311 Data processing, hosting and related activities 6312 Web portals 6391 News agency activities 6399 Other information service activities n.e.c.

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Financial and insurance activities	K (64 -66)	6411 Central banking 6419 Other monetary intermediation 6420 Activities of holding companies 6430 Trusts, funds and similar financial entities 6491 Financial leasing 6492 Other credit granting 6499 Other financial service activities, except insurance and pension funding n.e.c. 6511 Life insurance 6512 Non-life insurance 6520 Reinsurance 6530 Pension funding 6611 Administration of financial markets 6612 Security and commodity contracts brokerage 6619 Other activities auxiliary to financial services, except insurance and pension funding 6621 Risk and damage evaluation 6622 Activities of insurance agents and brokers 6629 Other activities auxiliary to insurance and pension funding 6630 Fund management activities
Real estate activities	L (68)	6810 Buying and selling of own real estate 6820 Renting and operating of own or leased real estate 6831 Real estate agencies 6832 Management of real estate on a fee or contract basis
Professional, scientific and technical activities	M (73)	7311 Advertising agencies 7312 Media representation 7320 Market research and public opinion polling
Public administration and defence; compulsory social security	O (84)	8411 General public administration activities 8412 Regulation of the activities of providing health care, education, cultural services and other social services, excluding social security 8413 Regulation of and contribution to more efficient operation of businesses 8421 Foreign affairs 8422 Defence activities 8423 Justice and judicial activities 8424 Public order and safety activities 8425 Fire service activities 8430 Compulsory social security activities

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Education	P (85)	8510 Pre-primary education 8520 Primary education 8531 General secondary education 8532 Technical and vocational secondary education 8541 Post-secondary non-tertiary education 8542 Tertiary education 8551 Sports and recreation education 8552 Cultural education 8553 Driving school activities 8559 Other education n.e.c. 8560 Educational support activities
Arts, Entertainment and recreation	R (91 – 92, 93.2.0 – 93.2.9)	9101 Library and archives activities 9102 Museums activities 9103 Operation of historical sites and buildings and similar visitor attractions 9104 Botanical and zoological gardens and nature reserves activities 9200 Gambling and betting activities 9321 Activities of amusement parks and theme parks 9329 Other amusement and recreation activities
Other activities	S (94)	9411 Activities of business and employers membership organisations 9412 Activities of professional membership organisations 9420 Activities of trade unions 9491 Activities of religious organisations 9492 Activities of political organisations 9499 Activities of other membership organisations n.e.c.