



Dr Suraya Diaz

Start: Dr Suraya Diaz

Making It Happen: Why one business owner is taking a healthy approach to customs

LEO Prepare Your Business for Customs programme is helping small businesses put their best foot forward for Brexit

Dr Suraya Diaz knows it's better to be proactive than reactive.

When it comes to wellness, prevention is better than cure. When it comes to business, it's all about preparation. For Brexit, it means signing up for a Local Enterprise Office Prepare Your Business for Customs workshop.

That's exactly what the Galway based health store owner and maker of organic food, cosmetics and wellness products did. Indeed, Brexit is the reason the Portuguese woman moved to Ireland to start a business in the first place.

She had studied biochemistry and biology in Portugal and completed a master's degree in clinical

microbiology before moving to the UK to do a PhD in biochemistry and molecular biology where she studied infectious diseases. "I wanted to understand the mechanics of infection," she explains. "But I also always wanted to start a business."

At around the time she finished her PhD, talk in the UK was turning to a Brexit referendum. That prompted a move to Galway, where she worked as a researcher, studied nutrition, herbal medicine, naturopathy and homeopathy and set up a practice helping to promote wellness in others.

When she couldn't find products with the exact blend of ingredients she needed for her clients, she decided to make them herself. She developed a range of certified organic products, opening a small manufacturing facility in 2019, which she expanded in 2020 with assistance from Local Enterprise Office Galway.

Today her products sell online and via health food stores and pharmacies.

“The Local Enterprise Office has been very helpful and I have availed of various different courses and vouchers. As well as providing me with grants for machinery and marketing, it enabled me to employ my first member of staff. I am also doing a Lean for Micro course which is very important in helping to improve efficiencies,” says Suraya.

She has also benefited from a number of LEO business mentors. “Sometimes, when you are starting a business, you can be so focused on the thing that you are doing now that it can be hard to see the whole business in its totality. Mentors really helped me with that. They gave me a new perspective and made me question things.”

Participating in Enterprise Ireland’s New Frontiers programme, Phase I and II, helped too. “It’s a very comprehensive programme and I’d definitely recommend it. I had a background in biochemistry, nutrition, naturopathy and herbal medicine but I didn’t have a business background.”

In order to be fully Brexit ready, she signed up for the Prepare Your Business for Customs workshop.

Being Brexit ready

“Because I was already aware of Brexit, I had tried to limit my UK suppliers as much as possible from the start. As a result, the majority of my suppliers are not in the UK,” she points out.

But with the UK accounting for 70% of her sales, ensuring UK exports are as seamless as possible is vital.

“I am trying to go to other markets as well including Spain, the Netherlands and Germany but the reason my exports grew in the UK so much was because of Amazon. With Covid-19, many more UK people were at home and, when a shortage of stock emerged from their usual suppliers they started looking for an alternative, and it was an opportunity for me,” she explains.

But the more she sold into the UK, the more important it was to make sure she was Brexit-ready.

“I did the Local Enterprise Office Prepare Your Business for Customs workshop because I wanted to be informed and I wanted a good overview of what was ahead of me. I also wanted to understand things like INCOTERMS. The lecturers were very informative and, at the end of the session it was very interesting to hear what the other businesses were saying and doing too.”

In terms of tariffs, regulations and possible trade restrictions, there is still a lot of uncertainty, she points out.

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“The biggest challenge is that we don’t know exactly what is coming or how expensive it will be. However, because I did the LEO Prepare Your Business for Customs programme, I know I have done all the right things, like registering for my EORI [Economic Operators Registration and Identification] number. I know the things I need to look out for and it gave me the tools I need to talk to a customs broker.”

As a result, whatever happens after midnight on December 31st, when the UK finally leaves the EU, Dr Suraya Diaz is ready for it.

“I am a positive person anyway but I think I will be okay. Although we will all feel the impact of Brexit, at the same time I think it will open many doors to us. There are so many customers out there in Europe who are currently buying from the UK. Those UK businesses might struggle to deliver in Europe,” she says.

“Ireland can find some very important opportunities there. I’m hopeful I can take advantage of that.”

If you want to ensure you are Brexit Ready contact your Local Enterprise Office or go to LocalEnterprise.ie/Brexit