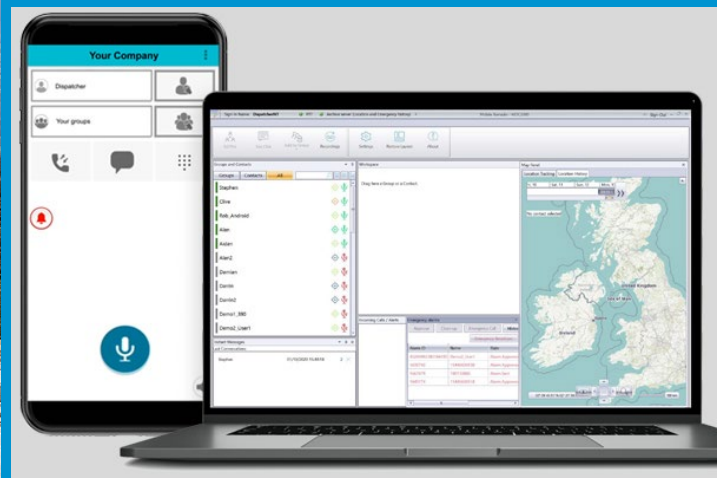




Simon Smith, Hubbcac



Start: Hubbcac

Making It Happen: How clear communications on customs is supporting one company's global growth

LEO Prepare Your Business for Customs workshop ensures Hubbcac lands on its feet

Being able to turn to its Local Enterprise Office for help with customs training has been of enormous benefit to Wicklow technology company Hubbcac.

As well as looking to develop export sales, the communications equipment company imports kit from - and through - the UK.

Indeed, the business had an international aspect to it even before it was founded, in late 2019. That's because the team behind it spent many years working together in the Caribbean, in the telecoms sector.

Chief Financial Officer Simon Smith met friends and co-founders Alan Bates and Damian Blackburn while he was on a consulting assignment in the Bahamas.

"Alan, who is from Greystones in Co. Wicklow, always wanted to come back to Ireland to start a business," explains Simon.

The founders had spotted a gap in the market for 'push to talk' (PTT) communications solutions. It allows for devices that combine walkie talkie technology with mobile phones, a better value alternative that allows people to talk instantly via the Internet.

Whether there are 10 or 100 people who need to communicate instantly, PTT can facilitate that. It works regardless of whether they are in different parts of a factory, or different parts of the globe.

Hubbcac's first office was over a mechanic's workshop near Greystones, Co. Wicklow. It wasn't ideal. "We'd have to run downstairs and ask the guys if they could stop working while we pitched for business," he laughs.



Despite the challenges this posed, one of its first wins was a major one - to supply a Covid-19 solution to the Government of the Bahamas. Hubbcats solution allows visitors to the country to be monitored as they quarantine, with app-based geofencing that emits an alarm if a person quarantining breaks the rules.

The wider applications for PTT technology are simply enormous, he points out. "It's a one size fits all communications system for workforces. They can use it as an app that sits on top of their mobile phones or via a custom device, which we supply too," he explains.

Among its most compelling use cases are hospitality and events management, where large numbers of staff often need to keep in constant contact in a cost effective and reliable manner.

Because of the pandemic however the founders have focused first on facilities management, helping personnel to keep one another safe as they move around large and possibly empty buildings. Hubbcats can provide security and peace of mind with a 'man down' alert that combines a panic button with geolocation.

Local Enterprise Office the first step for exports - and imports

One of the founders' first ports of call when setting up the business was Local Enterprise Office Wicklow which provided it with a Priming Grant, a Trading Online Voucher and mentoring.

As Hubbcats grew it moved into a local enterprise park - away from noisy car repairs - and expanded its customer base by moving into sectors such as pharmaceutical manufacturing and international food retail.

It doesn't just export its solutions overseas, it also imports equipment, including PTT devices, from a range of countries. This includes items that are either sourced from the UK or sourced elsewhere, but which travel through the UK to get here.

It's for that reason that Simon signed up for the Local Enterprise Office's Prepare Your Business for Customs workshop which, because of Covid, took place online, in three two-hour sessions.

"We are pitching for business in Northern Ireland and the UK so we needed to understand how new customs arrangements post-Brexit would impact on that," he says.

The company is currently focusing on selling to facilities management companies in Ireland which are major international businesses, such as Brinks, Bidvest Noonan and Mitie.

"These are global operators. If we can grow our customer base here in Ireland with some of these global companies, we can get recommendations from them to help us grow internationally. To do that, we need to know about customs," he explains.

"It's good to know too that, in the Local Enterprise Office, I have a support network, somewhere I can go to if I've queries in the future."

Hubbcats

The Prepare your Business for Customs programme answered all his questions. "It was really good, really detailed and the expert trainer who gave the workshop was really insightful. There are an awful lot of rules and regulations involved but the workshop helped me to get to grips with them, both in terms of software and of bringing in physical goods."

Although Hubbcats already has experience exporting to the Bahamas, "UK and EU customs are completely different," he points out. "The workshop explained about duty and International Commercial Terms (INCOTERMS) and outlined some of the risks and things to look out for, as well as where to go for help."

It was highly interactive, he says, so that all participants were able to find the specific answers to questions they had about their own business.

"It's good to know too that, in the Local Enterprise Office, I have a support network, somewhere I can go to if I've queries in the future."

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