



Local Enterprise Office
Making It Happen

STARTUP STORIES: GYM + COFFEE

OFF TO A FLYING START: HOW LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE DUBLIN CITY HELPED IRISH ATHLEISURE BRAND GYM + COFFEE GET FIT FOR SUCCESS

Making It Happen: Mary MacSweeney of Local Enterprise Office Dublin City with Diarmuid McSweeney and Karl Swaine of Gym + Coffee

WHEN FRIENDS DIARMUID MCSWEENEY, NIALL HORGAN AND KARL SWAINE CAME UP WITH THE IDEA FOR GYM + COFFEE, AN ATHLEISURE CLOTHING COMPANY, IT WASN'T THEIR FIRST ATTEMPT.

"We were always bouncing ideas off each other, not just for businesses but for scripts, screenplays, books, plays. We always had some sort of itch," says McSweeney.

McSweeney and Horgan are from Cork, and studied at UCC together. They met Swaine when they moved to Dublin.

McSweeney worked in advertising and had lived in Australia. Horgan worked in IT and had travelled frequently to Silicon Valley. In both places they saw a growing trend among young people not just to exercise but to combine it with

socialising. "It was all about going to the gym and grabbing a coffee afterwards," he says.

That gave them the idea not just for an online business – but its name.

They spent the first year working on the business after work. "That was one of the keys to our early success. If we were hoping to make a living from it from Day One it would have placed too much stress on the business," he says.

Having no experience in either ecommerce or the clothing industry didn't stop them. "There was a great luxury in being naive in that we weren't aware of the pitfalls."

They were highly innovative – and frugal – in how they promoted it. "We started a Summer Stretch series, running outdoor

group exercise classes over the weekend. The response we got was unbelievable. People liked that we were walking the talk. For us it's all about having a healthier weekend, not 'buy our gear'."

By the end of its first year trading they were making six figure revenues but not profitable. "We knew we needed to up our game."

They got in touch with Local Enterprise Office Dublin City. "They were really helpful. They outlined all the supports they could offer us and told us how they could help. We applied for a Business Priming Grant which enabled us to take on our first staff member, which freed us up to expand further."

Dundrum, the shopping centre, invited them to open a pop up shop for two weeks.

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It was so successful it stayed open ever since. A second store followed, in CorK’s Mahon Point.

Today both the online and the bricks and mortar side of the business are thriving. “We still liaise with LEO Dublin City a lot. They keep us up to date with all the supports available to us, and have helped introduce us to other supports, such as loans from Microfinance Ireland.”

The Business Priming Grant helped them grow their business internationally too. Currently 22% of their sales are overseas. The business has the capacity to ship anywhere but to date has focussed its marketing on the US and UK.

“The next step for us is to market into Australia and New Zealand,” he says.

Mary MacSweeney of Local Enterprise Office Dublin City understands the pressure startups are under, not least to know where to go for help.

“With so much on offer to entrepreneurs from banks, state agencies and others right now, it can be overwhelming for entrepreneurs to identify the supports suited to their stage of business development. The First Stop Shop operated by the LEO is a place to help you navigate the enterprise eco-system and identify the supports you want to examine and avail of in the short or longer term,” she says.

All LEOs offer a mix of supports including grants, training, mentoring and networking.

“Initially people want to find out about the financial supports, the Feasibility Study Grant is available to pre-startups and can

fund up to 50% of market research or prototyping or intellectual property costs. The Business Priming Grant for early stage startups can support a salary for at least one job when a business is trading for less than 18 months,” she says.

If Diarmuid McSweeney could do one thing differently it would be to approach the Local Enterprise Office even earlier than he did.

“Starting a business is the hard part - it’s easier to keep the ball rolling than it is to start it,” he says. “LEOs partner with you so my advice to anyone with an idea is to engage with them early so they can tell you what’s available to you and how they can help.”

TALK TO US TODAY. TOGETHER, WE CAN MAKE IT HAPPEN FOR YOUR STARTUP.

