



CLIENT FOCUS PIVOTING OUTSIDE THE BOX IN A CRISIS

INTOSPORT LTD in County Kilkenny

School halls, gyms and sports centres have been closed for the past few months and most companies that provide leisurewear have seen demand reduce dramatically.

But some businesses, such as Intosport LTD, a supplier of sports, schools, and leisurewear, have begun making hospital scrubs and reusable water repellent gowns in response to shortages and appeals from various sectors.

Having received a Business Priming Grant to purchase new machinery in the past along with ongoing mentoring support and business advice from Local Enterprise Office Kilkenny, the clothing company hopes to put a Trading Online Voucher towards digital marketing to further expand this new direction.

"We started to see the effects of Covid-19 very early on as clubs and schools waited to see what was going to happen and once the lockdown was confirmed, we had some large orders cancelled and found it difficult to get monies owed due to fundraisers being cancelled," says Jonny Dowling.

"We signed up for the wage subsidy scheme and began topping up the wages to ensure all staff were getting their regular income. Then after making the decision to pivot to PPE, we secured our first order of scrubs and the staff who were in a position to, returned to work - we also took on a further five people to cover the demand and speed up the processes."

Before production could take place, Dowling says the factory floor was reconfigured to allow more than two metres between machines

Pattern cutting at Intosport Ltd.

AS A RESULT OF THE PANDEMIC, MANY BUSINESSES HAVE BEEN FORCED TO SCALE BACK THEIR OPERATIONS OR EVEN CLOSE ENTIRELY. BUT OTHERS HAVE BEEN FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO PIVOT BY COMING UP WITH INNOVATIVE WAYS OF DEVELOPING NEW PRODUCTS FOR NEW CUSTOMERS.

and work stations, production was split into two teams over two floors and some staff worked either remotely or on evening shifts. They also closed the factory to the public and suspended face-to-face meetings between reps and customers.

These new measures have worked very well and production on PPE is continuing apace, with no sign in reduction of demand. And the managing director says there has never been a better time for companies to try something different.

"The new PPE garments have been manufactured from the fabrics and materials which Intosport Ltd. would ordinarily use for their main range of products, so this has been very beneficial," he says.

"And the response to the new line of production so far has been phenomenal with over 10,000 units produced to date. Production will continue as long as there is demand - which doesn't seem to be slowing any time soon - as the next phase of dentists, physiotherapists and clinics have been requesting garments for reopening.

"I don't think there will ever be a better opportunity to change things that were not working within a business."

"Although we are all in the same storm, we are in different boats – so don't look at other businesses and compare yourself to them if they appear to be doing much better - as what you see on the surface is not always the reality."

www.intosport.ie



HANSANS in South Cork

Pictured at launch [lto r] Liam Quaid, Eileen Hayes, Diarmuid Ryan, Cllr Dr John Sheehan [Lord Mayor of Cork], Séan Hayes & Noel Bracken

A few short months ago, no-one realised what an important commodity hand sanitiser would be. But not long after the global emergency took hold, Sean Hayes of MTD Precision Engineering realised that there was a shortage of push pump bottles to hold the sought-after liquid and focused his attention on creating a different receptacle.

Having availed of the Trading Online Voucher from Local Enterprise Office South Cork, the engineer developed a website and ecommerce platform to market the world's first roll-on hand sanitiser. With an alcohol content of 70%, Hansans is antiviral and antibacterial, helping to prevent the risk of infection – and due to its anti-spill design, is perfect for carrying around in handbags, briefcases, or schoolbags.

"Due to the nature of our business serving the biopharma sector, we were aware of the practices which were required to deal with the onset of Covid-19 so we adapted quickly and were able to get on with our work," says Hayes. "I split the workforce into teams of two and implemented a rota system spreading staff across seven days each week. Our teams are agile, and we already had good team communication practices in place and experience of remote working, so when we pivoted towards making hand sanitiser, we had no issues with social distancing or implementing new GMP work practices."

"Then we were asked to get involved with supporting supplies for the health sector and it was during this time that we realised there was a shortage of 100ml pumps for hand sanitiser."

The Cork based engineer began looking at other potential means of dispensing the antibacterial gel and wondered at the possibility of putting it into a container used for roll-on deodorant.

"I took apart a bottle to see if it would work for hand sanitiser, but it didn't dispense properly so I approached a company who manufacture the roller deodorant ball fitting and asked if they wanted to get involved," he says. "And after some adjustments, together we came up with a design which would work for the gel. So here at MTD, we renovated some office space to make a clean production site and got to work straight away by organising a project team internally who focused on the design of the product, the graphics and the filling line.

"Then after just seven weeks of working from 6am until midnight, Hansans was ready for market."

So in record time, the product was taken from concept to production – to date, over 20,000 units have already been sold to the retail sector and it is now ready to be launched across the country. Hayes says although it is early days, he is glad he took the challenge and would encourage other companies to try and find ways in which they can pivot during these extraordinary times.

"We all worked very hard and are delighted with the finished product," he says. "It is still in the early stages but so far we have shipped out to pharmacies, DIY stores, office supply, and various shops as well as donating some to the Gardai and local health centres and it has been very well received by all."

"There is no doubt that times are difficult for everyone at the moment, but I would encourage businesses to try and be positive, look at their strengths and believe in their own team. We shouldn't be afraid to ask for assistance and should trust our instincts – so if things don't work out at first, we must not give up because at least we will have made an effort and, if necessary, can go back to the drawing board and try again."



Martin Stapleton, of CDS Architectural Metalwork



CDS Architectural Metalwork LTD in County Kilkenny

CDS specialises in the design, manufacture, and installation of metalwork features such as staircases, balustrades, handrails, furniture, canopies and even shipping containers using a range of different metals.

Like most businesses, the company was impacted by the current pandemic but with support from Local Enterprise Office Kilkenny, it quickly pivoted to provide innovative and essential new products to help prevent the spread of the virus.

One of these include a foot-grip door handle which can be installed at the base of any door frame to enable it to be opened by foot instead of by hand.

This will help to limit the spread of Covid-19 and the company, which previously took part in the LEAN for Micro programme, has been in discussions with various industry heads with a view to installation.

CDS director, Martin Stapleton, says the new foot-grip handle came about when the company made moves to protect staff from the possibility of catching coronavirus.

And he would advise others to try and find opportunities and alternative ways of doing business during the Covid-19 crisis.



CDS foot-grip door handles

The CDS foot-grip door handle which can be installed at the base of any door frame.

This can enable the door to be opened by foot instead of by hand.

"We had put a Covid-plan in place from early on by changing work practices, using PPE and having Zoom meetings between teams," he says. "We also began using dividers, sanitisers and then removed door handles and fitted the foot handles instead which were really successful both for our team here and beyond.

"Once we have our health, we can cope with almost anything and I really believe that there are massive opportunities to be grasped from this.

"Work practices will improve and production, once stabilized, will eventually improve.

"The main thing is to realise and identify the vulnerable aspects of our client base and production capabilities and be open to the changes that are being forced on us all and investigate any opportunities that arise."

www.cdsmetalwork.ie

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