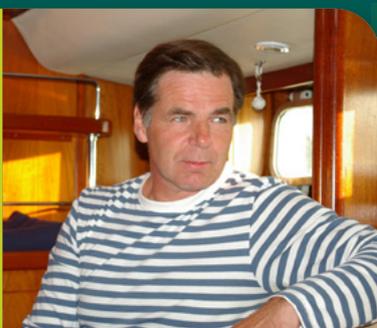


LOCAL ENTERPRISE WEEK 2022

07-11 March

Event Speaker

David Strawbridge of Strawbridge Ltd. in Wicklow



FROM FOOTFALL TO FINGERTIPS

When David Strawbridge and his wife Mary began their business in 1984, they relied solely on a steady stream of potential customers walking past the door of their workshop and showroom in Mount Usher Gardens, Ashford, Co Wicklow.

Both locals and tourists visiting the public gardens would stop by Strawbridge Limited to check out their wares and over the years their business grew by reputation as much as accessibility.

“We are fortunate to be located in the same beautiful spot where we started many years ago,” says David. “We might not be on the high street, but we have always had plenty of footfall generated by visitors to the gardens passing by and over the decades we have created footfall by design through our offering.

“We began with furniture restoration and sales and had a fairly basic workshop and retail area. We then started stocking contemporary copies of traditional country furniture as it was known at the time. But since then we’ve developed a lot in the direction of interiors, accessories and portables such as mirrors, pictures, pottery – you name it – which now accounts for 80% of our turnover. Although we still stock it and sell it, furniture now takes a back seat and often acts as a setting for our accessories – so it is a case of one hand helping the other.”

Including David and Mary, there are 9 staff working at the premises and while it ran as a traditional retail business for decades, the arrival of Covid-19 forced them to reduce their reliance on customer footfall and instead think about virtual customers sitting at their keyboards and shopping with their fingers.

“With Brexit and the Pandemic, there has been a lot going on in the past few years,” says David. “We managed the former in the same manner as anyone else whose main business was with the UK – and the same can be said of the various lockdowns as, like the rest of the non-essential retail world, we were closed for many weeks and months.

“Thankfully we came through it quite well as we had a number of Government supports which really helped us and then, with the help of our Local Enterprise Office in Wicklow, we started generating more online traffic.

“We have had two Trading Online Vouchers which we have used for the online development of a new website as well as a new system which is now fully integrated. We are still in the early

stages, but it has been a complete departure for us, as although we did have an online presence with a sort of brochure style website, it wasn’t an e-commerce site – so it was great to have this new site up and running.

“We also found that, as well as appealing to a wider audience, our local customers were using it a lot for click and collect so we were benefitting locally from our online presence even though we were building it to reach those further afield. So even though the store was closed, we ended up being very busy behind the scenes.”

The seasoned businessman says this new departure has been very beneficial and they are now looking to expand into European markets.

“We got a lot of help from our LEO with both the Trading Online Voucher and mentoring, both of which proved to be essential,” he says. “I also had a few sessions with a marketing expert which was hugely beneficial, not just for the website but with regard to our social media presence, email initiatives and other things like that.

“I honestly don’t know how we would have managed without this help as it was a difficult enough time even with the support we got. So if I could give any advice to someone who wanted to move their business forward, I would say to go straight to their Local Enterprise Office – there is no competition really when it comes to people who can point you in the right direction with advice and support. It’s a great service and I don’t know how we would have got through this last couple of years without their help.

Developing the business online was a ‘leap into the unknown’ for Strawbridge LTD, but its co-owner is delighted they had the ‘courage’ to do it as the future is looking very positive.

“We have taken on a marketing person on a part-time basis and are now looking to find more staff for the shop floor – and we are also looking to focus on the European market and see where we go from there,” he says.

“At the moment, we still trying to learn how best to use our wonderful new [digital] tools to continue targeting potential customers, firstly on our own island and then see what we can do about moving into Europe.

“There is plenty of scope for growth and I am happy to say the future is certainly not looking at all dull at the moment.”

FREE SPOTLIGHT EVENT: 10th March 9:30am – 12.30pm
Future Proofing Your Small Business Using Smart Tech Tools.

