

SPRING 2025 Volume 1 Issue 27

THE **b**ISME

THE BUSINESS OF IRISH SMEs

Funding the Future: How GRID Finance is Transforming SME Lending in Ireland

An interview with Derek Butler

ISME at work for you

Navigating Global Trade Shifts

HR Focus

Maternity Leave & Employees' Protections for Postponement

The blnsight

National AI Studio Launched to Empowering SMEs in Ireland

ISME
rish **SME** Association



Growth and Sustainability Loan Scheme

CHOOSE A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE FOR YOUR BUSINESS.

INVEST WITH THE GROWTH AND SUSTAINABILITY LOAN SCHEME.

Enjoy easier access to sustainability finance and ensure future competitiveness for your business.

The scheme is open for applications for SMEs who want to future-proof the business and improve their competitiveness through sustainability.

- **LOANS** from €25,000 to €3,000,000
- **TERMS** from 7 to 10 years
- Loans up to €500,000 **UNSECURED**
- **REDUCED** interest rates



Anseo chun gnó a fhorbairt
Corparáid Beincéireachta
Straitéiseach na hÉireann
Here to build business
Strategic Banking
Corporation of Ireland



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland





Volume 1 Issue 27
SPRING 2025

17 Kildare Street,

Dublin 2, Ireland.

Phone : (01) 662 2755

E-mail: info@isme.ie

Web: isme.ie

Published by ISME

Editorial: gopika@isme.ie

Design: ciara@cnocii.ie

Advertising: marketing@isme.ie

The bISME is the official publication of ISME. Individual views expressed in the magazine do not necessarily constitute ISME policy.

Although every precaution has been taken in the preparation of this publication, the publishers assume no responsibility for errors or omissions. Copyright *The bISME* 2019. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any material form without the express written



CONTENTS

4. A Message from the Chief Executive:

ISME CEO Neil McDonnell discusses SME Resilience Amid Global Shifts

6. ISME at work for you:

Navigating Global Trade Shifts

8. The b News:

News and updates for business

11. Technology Focus:

How the right technology can empower small and scaling businesses

12. The b Interview:

The bISME chat to Derek Butler about funding the future

14. HR Focus:

Maternity Leave & Employees' Protections for Postponement

16. Finance Focus:

Key challenges for SMEs making foreign currency payments

18. Health & Safety Focus:

Proactive Safety Management & Using BeSMART.ie

20. Marketing Focus:

Strategic Marketing is the Key to Scaling Your Business

22. The b Insight

National AI Studio Launched to Empowering SMEs in Ireland

25. Business Focus:

Key People-Centric Issues for MDs, CEOs, and Business Owners in the SME Sector

26. The b Issue

How the SME Matters 50X Programme Puts Owner-Managers Back in Control

28. Learning Focus

The Skills Your Business Can't Afford to Ignore

30. New Member Feature

Unio Wealth Management

32. Legal Focus

ISME Calls for Action in Response to Rising Civil Litigation in Ireland

33. Industry Update

There's No Such Thing as Director-Lite

ISME's Push for SME Resilience Amid Global Shifts

Colleagues,

We've seen quite a bit of change in three short months.

It was hard to know at the inauguration of the new US president how many of his promises he would keep, but we appear you be on the brink of a global tariff war, and the US seems intent on cashing in on Ukrainian mineral wealth in exchange for a few missiles to protect Kyiv.

It is difficult as of the start of March to understand the impact of a tariff war on Irish SMEs. We surveyed SMEs and found

- Only 29% of them exporting, but
- There were 74% importing
- The UK is the destination for 65% of exports and the origin for 57% of imports.

So the UK remains an overwhelmingly important market for Irish SMEs. But we will need to understand if imports will be affected by any retaliatory tariffs from the EU against the US.

Since I wrote to you last, I have been appointed by Minister Peter Burke to the [Low Pay Commission](#), and John Barry of the ISME Board has been appointed to the [Employment Law Review Group](#). Rest assured we will bring the concerns of the SME community to bear in the deliberations of those bodies.

The speed with which events are moving globally does seem to have impacted our friends in the EU Commission, and President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen has announced the [Competitiveness Compass](#), and the [Omnibus Package](#) to simplify the regulatory burden for SMEs in particular. There is at least recognition of an issue in Brussels.



Neil McDonnell, Chief Executive, ISME

It is harder for us to discern if the speed of international change has registered yet with Government or with senior members of the public service. It should be clear now that "business as usual" is not sustainable into the future, and that we need to commit ourselves to radical and rapid change if Ireland is to survive the political and economic change that is about to sweep over us.

It is in that light we will soon be preparing our Pre Budget Submission 2026. It sounds early to be talking about it in the spring, but in reality, we need to have it on the desks of politicians and public servants before they go on holidays. If you have issues you wish to see prioritised in our pre-budget, please email me and let me know.

If your business does need capital in 2025, never forget to use the [ISME FINANCE FINDER](#) which allows you to access all funding solutions on the market.

Lastly, for those of you interested in becoming involved in the ISME lobbying effort, this month will see us sending ballot papers for the National Council election in May. Let us know if you want to stand for election.

Neil McDonnell
ISME CEO

PRESENTS

50X PROGRAM**Transform** Your Life, **Transform** Your Business**Launches Friday 28th March 2025.**

Lead by seasoned industry professionals, this 12-month journey will **redefine** the way you do business.

Join **ambitious** owner/managers of SME's on a transformative journey.
Experience a **community** of like minded leaders who support each other.

Unlock Your Potential in 2025!

💡 Join Our FREE 50X Masterclass 💡

Discover how to transform your business and achieve your dreams.

To learn more or reserve your seat, scan here :

**www.smematters.ie****50X@smematters.ie****What's Included**

10 Monthly in person, Morning Workshops



Expert Guest Speakers



Peer-to-Peer Support



Exclusive Events & Company Visits



Flexible Meeting Locations

Navigating Global Trade Shifts: What Irish SMEs Need to Know

Given the growing uncertainty around EU-US trade relations, ISME recently carried out a survey amongst our members to gauge their exposure to a potential trade war. The results show that while most respondents rely on imports, their exposure to potential US-EU tariffs is limited. However, the findings reinforce the systemic importance of the UK for Irish small businesses post-Brexit.

Impact of US Tariffs on Irish SMEs

US President Donald Trump's announcement of a 25% tariff on steel imports, alongside additional duties on aluminium, has raised concerns across the European Union. The EU has signalled potential retaliatory tariffs on American goods, which could escalate into a broader trade war. However, ISME's survey of 120 SMEs indicates that the impact on Irish businesses may be limited.

The survey found that while 74% of SMEs rely on imports, the majority (57%) source their goods from the UK, with only 19% of imports coming from the US. This suggests that Irish SMEs may not be significantly affected by EU-imposed tariffs on US goods. However, ISME noted that a detailed breakdown of the specific types of imported goods is necessary to fully assess the impact.

The UK's Continued Importance to Irish SMEs

Despite ongoing Brexit-related uncertainties, ISME chief executive Neil McDonnell highlighted the UK's continued systemic importance to Irish SMEs. "While ISME is hopeful that the impacts of a tariff war with the US can be avoided, a priority for the government must be to ensure that the impact on essential imports for SMEs is minimised and that the relationship with the UK post-Brexit is sustained and further strengthened," McDonnell said.

The survey reinforced the importance of the UK as both an import and export partner. Among surveyed SMEs, 66% of total exports go to the UK, making it the primary destination for Irish goods. The US, while a significant trade partner, follows at a distant second, accounting for 37% of exports.

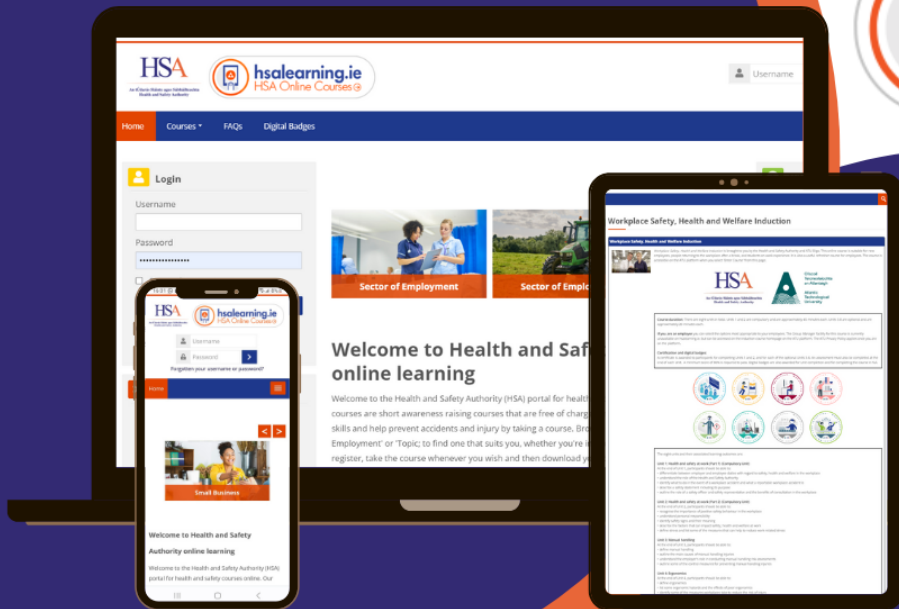
The Structure of Irish SME Trade

Most Irish SMEs operate on a relatively small scale in terms of trade. The survey revealed that 43% of SMEs import goods valued at less than €250,000 annually. On the export side, just 29% of surveyed SMEs engage in exporting activities, and more than half of these businesses generate export revenues below €250,000 per year.

The main export destinations for Irish SMEs are the UK, US, Belgium, France, and Germany. In terms of imports, key sources include the UK, Netherlands, US, Germany, China, France, and Belgium.



Irish SMEs are operating in an increasingly complex global trade environment, where factors such as Brexit and potential tariff wars pose challenges to their supply chains and export markets. While the immediate impact of US tariffs appears limited, businesses must remain proactive in monitoring policy developments and diversifying trade relationships where possible. Strengthening ties with the UK while exploring alternative markets will be crucial in ensuring long-term stability and growth. Resilience, strategic planning, and government support will play a key role in helping SMEs navigate these uncertainties successfully.



New free online courses from the Health and Safety Authority

New courses include:

- ✓ Vulnerable Workers
- ✓ Reporting Workplace Accidents
- ✓ Introduction to Managing Workplace Violence and Aggression
- ✓ 8 Health and Social Care Courses
- ✓ 3 Small Business Courses



Scan for 50+ free courses



UPCOMING ISME TRAINING & USEFUL EVENTS FOR SMES

**National
Construction Summit
Wed, 2 Apr, 09:00
Sport Ireland:
National Indoor
Arena**
[Book here](#)

**Business Writing &
Email Etiquette – 9th
April 2025. Online**
[Book here](#)

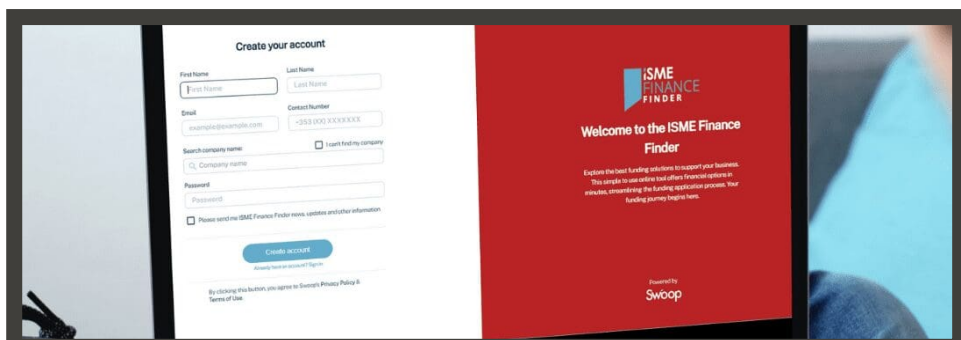
**Customer Service &
Complaints Handling
– 10 April 2025.
Online**
[Book here](#)

**Microsoft Excel
Creating & Working
with Pivots – Apr
30th 2025. Online**
[Book here](#)

**Speaking with
Confidence – 13th
May 2025. Online**
[Book here](#)

**Effective Telephone
Sales – 13th May
2025. Online**
[Book here](#)

**Business
Post**



ISME Finance Finder

The ISME Finance Finder, powered by Swoop, is offering a free 30-minute one-to-one consultation clinic. The consultations are provided on a no obligation and confidential basis.

The Swoop team provide expertise and professionalism based on their deep knowledge of the lending market both in Ireland and in the UK. During the consultation they can address such key questions as:

- Who are the key players?
- What does it mean for your business?
- What small business loans or funding is available for SMEs?

Plus

- They can advise and review your business's specific requirements?

You may want to start or expand your business, improve cashflow, refinance debt, acquire a business, purchase property, stock or invest in a new market...then there are funding opportunities available to you.

Now may not be the time to apply for a loan but the Swoop team will look at your business to see if it's loan-ready or give advice on what you need to do before applying for funding and show you the options available.

There are 3 ways to connect and set up your free consultation:

Click [here](#) to fill out a form | Email isme@swoopfunding.com |

Phone +353 1270 7658 | Visit the ISME Finance Finder [here](#).

Save Now with ISME's Affinity Programme

Take a look at the most recent addition to the ISME ADVANTAGE Affinity programme :

For the next two months (until end of May) ISME members can subscribe to The Business Post just €79 for the year, after that, the standard price of €99 per year applies. This is your chance to stay ahead with expert analysis, market insights and in-depth reporting to help businesses grow.

View all our Affinity programmes here. ISME Members can access all offers when they log into the Members Area. Members Area.

Green Business Supports

Ireland has a target to reduce carbon emissions (greenhouse gas emissions) by 51% by 2030, and to achieve a climate neutral economy by 2050. (source: Government Report). The sectoral emissions ceilings (SECs) agreed in July 2022 put in place targets for each sector to achieve this. The target for the enterprise sector is to reduce emissions by 35% by 2030. In order to do this, businesses are encouraged to invest in a greener future, through sustainable products, services and business models.

Whether your business is big or small, it is important to reduce emissions and promote sustainability in how you work. Click [here](#) to find a number of training, mentoring and financial supports for companies trying to reduce their carbon footprint

Social Media Fest 2025

Social Media Fest 2025 is scheduled for Wednesday, April 9th, 2025, from 9:00 AM to 5:00 PM at the Maldron Hotel near Dublin Airport. A "Masterclass for Success" is also planned for the evening of Tuesday, April 8th, from 6:00 PM to 8:30 PM.

The event will feature a lineup of expert speakers, including Fiona Harrold, Anita Wong, Louise McDonnell, Samantha Kelly, and Esther Ocampo. Topics to be covered include:

- How to create a lead magnet that converts followers to customers
- How to create a successful podcast for a global audience
- Strategy
- Turning followers into clients
- Video repurposing to create impactful content
- Optimising your content (SEO))

Tickets are currently available for purchase [here](#).

The event has partnered with "It's Good to Talk," a Wexford-based organization offering affordable professional counseling and support services to the community.

For more information, including ticket purchases and sponsorship opportunities, please visit the official website: <https://socialmediafest.ie/>



Join ISME's National Council and Shape the Future of Irish SMEs

Are you passionate about championing the interests of small and medium businesses in Ireland? ISME is looking for dynamic and experienced individuals to join our National Council and play a vital role in shaping the future of Irish enterprise.

As a member of ISME's National Council, you will have the opportunity to:

- Influence key policies and initiatives that support and advocate for SMEs across Ireland.
- Contribute your insights and expertise to drive ISME's strategic objectives, ensuring a stronger voice for business owners.
- Collaborate with a network of like-minded professionals committed to fostering growth, innovation, and resilience within the SME sector.

If you are passionate about supporting SMEs and making a real impact, we'd love to hear from you. To learn more about this opportunity and how you can get involved, email Neil McDonnell, ISME CEO on neil@isme.ie.

ISME 2025 Webinar Series is back. Register Now

Join our Business Advisory Webinar with Eoin Christian, CEO GRID Finance on Thursday 10th April 2025. The webinar will help you gain insight on the Funding Options For Your Business in 2025. This hour-long webinar will be hosted by ISME CEO Neil McDonnell.

Register your interest [here](#)

HSA Updates

[Occupational Health and Safety Guidance on Vulnerable Workers in the Workplace](#) guidance is written for employers and employees in all work sectors, including agency workers, contractors, migrant workers, part-time and temporary workers, and gig workers.

A new course [Vulnerable Workers: A short Course for Employees](#) is now live on [hsalearning.ie](#). This short awareness-raising course is for employees, including those who are vulnerable workers. The course will also be helpful to employers and managers, supervisors, safety personnel, and to organisations or educational bodies that are helping vulnerable persons to prepare for the workplace

[Why a Health and Safety Inspector Calls](#) to your Workplace guidance explains to you what to expect when a HSA inspector calls to your workplace to carry out an inspection or an investigation. It also explains what we do with the personal data we are required to collect during our workplace inspections and investigations.

A new course '[Protecting Vulnerable Workers](#)' is now live on [hsalearning.ie](#). The course is accessible from a new topic titled 'Vulnerable Workers' on [hsalearning.ie](#). This course is targeted at employers/managers/supervisors—across all sectors. It includes a definition of vulnerable workers (VWs), examples of VWs, some profiling around specific cohorts, accident data (including HSA accident trends data 2013 to 2022), an explanation of vulnerability and some indicative personas. In addition, we have a useful checklist which provides examples of what a prevention approach looks like.

New information sheet on occupational noise is written for employers and employees to raise awareness and control the risk of workplace noise. It is applicable to all sectors. Please see: [Sound matters - Occupational Noise](#)

New Topic Page on Human Factors: [Human Factors - Health and Safety Authority \(hsa.ie\)](#)

[Vulnerable Workers Information Sheet](#) is written for employers, managers, and supervisors. The purpose of this information sheet is to raise awareness around vulnerable workers, employer responsibilities in relation to protecting vulnerable workers, and protection practices.



Do you need to get your Remote Team back together?

Solution - NBC's Fully Serviced Offices!

- Private Office spaces for 2-23 people
- Meeting & Training Rooms
- Hot Desks
- High-Speed Internet
- Town Centre Location
- Media Room & Roof Terrace

Call Us Today:
045 833600

More Information
www.newbridgebusinesscentre.ie



Book A Tour



How the right technology can empower small and scaling businesses

CEO of OSSM, Ray Ryan



Growth – whether across operations, employees, or customers – is undoubtedly the main objective of any startup or small business. However, as your business scales, the tools and software you're using may no longer meet your needs, potentially slowing you down and hampering innovation.

Of course, many small businesses start with more basic business management software, which initially checks the necessary boxes. But as growth brings more complexity, businesses can outgrow their existing systems which stifles productivity, efficiency, and growth. If they are to truly thrive, small and scaling businesses need to equip themselves with the right technologies, insights, and support services to streamline operations, simplify decision-making, and navigate new challenges.

The challenge with supporting modern businesses

Business owners can often find themselves juggling multiple priorities, with many relying on a mix of spreadsheets, standalone accounting systems, and other disconnected processes to support the day-to-day running of the business. Therefore, a real-time view of the entire organisation – from operations and financials to supply chain, inventory, and customer relationships – is crucial for driving success and navigating the ever more complex business landscape.

In addition, in the modern workplace, dispersed teams must be able to access data from anywhere, supporting flexibility and driving collaboration. What's more, customer expectations are constantly evolving. Companies that fail to adapt to both employee and customer needs with the right solutions and processes risk losing talent and business to more agile competitors.

The problems with manual processes

Manual processes can often result in inefficiencies, errors, and missed opportunities for data-driven decision-making. Consider the time and effort spent on repetitive tasks like data reconciliation or inventory management. These activities not only consume valuable resources within a startup or small business but also introduce the risk of human error. As your

business expands, such inefficiencies can snowball, making it difficult to keep up with demand. Automating and integrating processes can not only help to maintain customer service levels but enable you to focus on strategic initiatives that drive growth and support long-term success.

Effective financial management is one of the most critical aspects of growing a small business and visibility of cashflow, expenses, and profitability allow companies to allocate resources appropriately and plan for future growth. Furthermore, technology that automates financial processes and delivers data intelligence can enhance reporting, support decision-making, and ensure compliance with regulatory requirements.

The struggle to streamline operations

Growth undoubtedly brings challenges with more customers, more data, increased inventory, additional subsidiaries and heightened operational complexity. In addition, organisations across all industries must grapple with the rising cost of doing business. According to a recent report by ISME, the top concerns for SMEs in Ireland are labour costs (74%), followed by labour shortages and energy costs (both 49%), and inflation (40%).

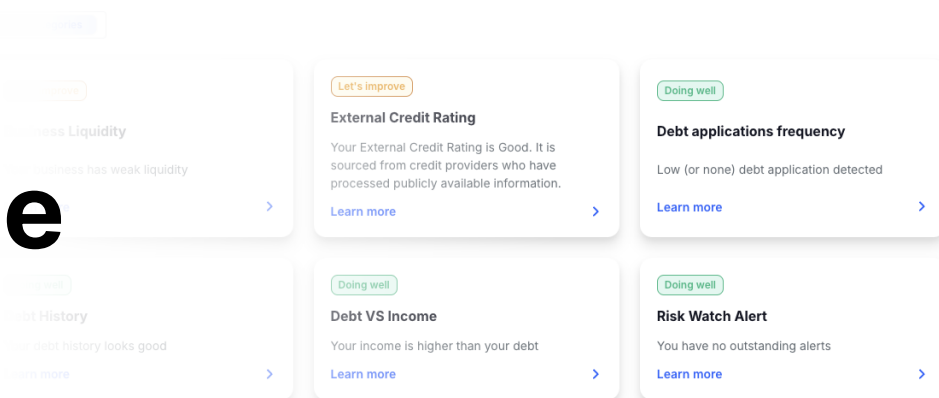
Therefore, simplifying your business operations with a centralised system that grows with you can prove invaluable and provide the foundation for business success today – and in the future. The right technology can make a transformative difference for small businesses and startups, from enabling cost management and supporting resource allocation to streamlining processes and automating tasks.

OSSM, a NetSuite Solution Provider, can partner with you to implement NetSuite Starter Edition, a single enterprise resource planning (ERP) platform for managing all aspects of your business. The team will offer expertise and support to help you manage finances, inventory, customer relationships, and operations with ease and efficiency.

If you'd like to discuss your finance system/ERP challenges, you can reach us on 01 811 3811 or email sales@ossmcloud.ie

Funding the Future

An interview with Derek Butler



Can you share the story behind the inception of GRID Finance and what inspired you to start this journey?

I founded GRID Finance having spent a number of years working for PwC and GOAL. When I came back to Ireland in 2013 I could see clearly that there was a big need to do something about the banking problem. I specifically wanted to focus in on the SME banking problem because it is small businesses who are the lifeblood of the economy.

How does GRID Finance stand out in the financial services landscape, especially for small and medium businesses?

GRID Finance stands out by offering flexible financing solutions that adapt to SMEs' real-world business patterns and challenges, including innovative benefits like payments that flex with daily revenue for both B2C and B2B businesses, and funding up to €500k. We differentiate ourselves through our deep understanding of SME needs, offering not just capital but also unique tools like Ireland's only real-time business credit score through GRID Finance Insights, while our B-Corp certification demonstrates our commitment to balancing profitability with positive social impact.

As you mentioned earlier, GRID Finance recently launched a new tool called GRID Finance Insights, Ireland's only platform providing SMEs with real-time access to their business credit scores. Can you tell us more about how this tool works and how it helps SMEs?

GRID Finance Insights is Ireland's only platform providing SMEs with real-time access to their business credit scores.

Through my conversations with business owners, I've discovered that many are unaware of how their credit score impacts their ability to grow and secure funding. This isn't just about monitoring a number – it's about understanding a key factor that influences every financial decision a lender makes about your business. Our platform not only shows you your score but provides actionable steps to improve it, helping you secure better interest rates and terms. What makes us unique is our commitment to financial empowerment without pushing financial products – we believe that when SMEs have better financial literacy and transparency, they make better decisions for their business's future. This tool is completely free to use and available to download

You also mentioned GRID Finance's B Corporation certification- which is a significant accolade. What motivated you to pursue this recognition?

As a B-Corp business we embody the philosophy of "doing good while doing business," demonstrating our commitment to creating positive environmental and community impact alongside financial success. Our motivation stems from a deep understanding that business success and social responsibility are interconnected, leading us to pursue B-Corp certification as a way to validate our impact-driven approach and commitment to supporting SMEs while making meaningful contributions to our communities.

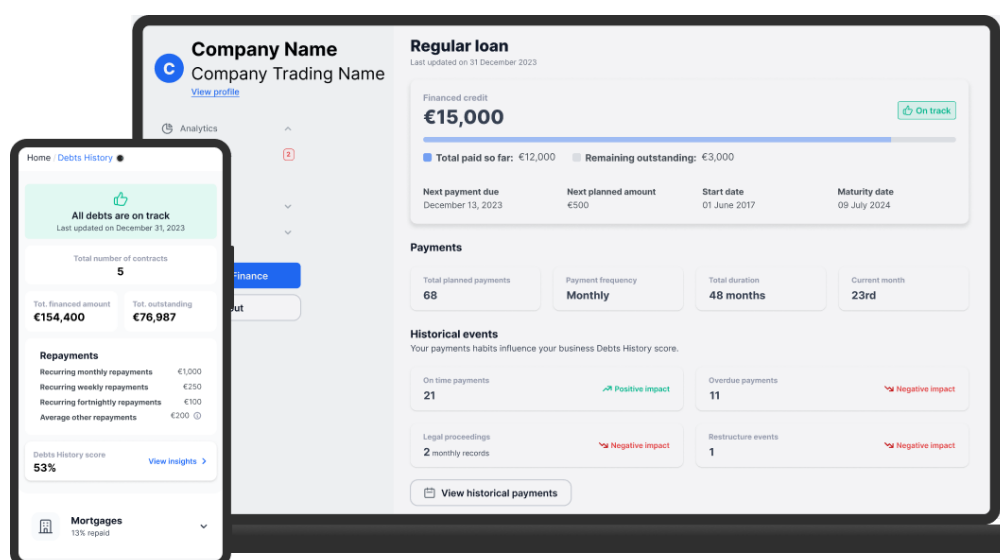
What are the emerging trends in financial services that you believe will significantly impact SMEs in the coming years?

Traditional banks will continue to struggle to provide lending solutions to small businesses. The means that all business owners will have to better understand the solutions that are out there in the market. Payment competition for the banks will also increase and SME's will benefit from a new array of payment solutions.

How do you balance the pressures of leading a financial firm with your personal life?

It's never quite in balance but you have to keep trying.

We have two small children at home so my focus is on family life and keep things moving there. I look forward to getting back to my passions of hiking and sailing. In the meantime I am blessed to have the East pier in Dun Laoghaire to walk every day that I can. Nothing like fresh sea air to keep things in perspective.



GRID Finance recently secured €1.5 million in backing from the European Investment Fund scheme. Can you elaborate on how this partnership enhances your ability to support Irish SMEs and what this backing means for your company's future?

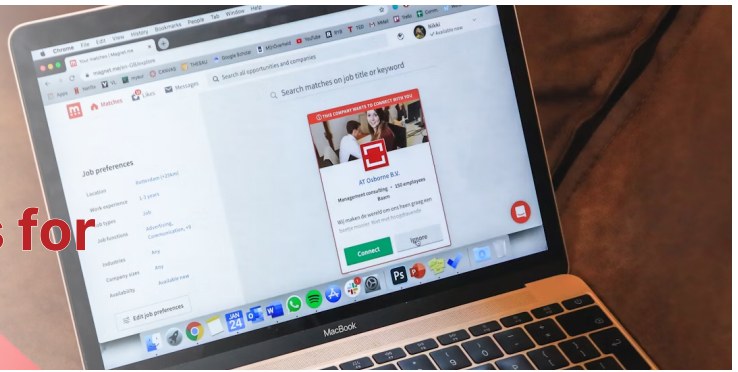
GRID Finance's €1.5 million InvestEU Capacity Building Investment from the European Investment Fund is a significant milestone as it marks the first such investment in Ireland. The funding will enable further expansion of our product offerings and enhancement of our organisational capacity, ultimately allowing us to support thousands more micro-enterprises across Ireland. As a B-Corp lender with a high impact score of 127.9, this backing from EIF validates GRID Finance's impact-driven approach to lending and strengthens our ability to serve as a genuine partner in SMEs' growth journeys, helping to keep these businesses open, growing, and thriving.

What advice would you give to other businesses aiming to balance financial success with social and environmental responsibility?

Stay true to the cause! We all have a responsibility to understand our impact on our environment and communities – if we all make small changes the impact in the long-term will be extraordinary. Great waterfalls start with just a few raindrops.



Maternity Leave & Employees' Protections for Postponement



Recent times have seen a number of changes to the Maternity Leave Act. The latest revision came in November 2024 with the [Maternity Protection, Employment Equality and Preservation of Certain Records Act 2024](#).

The introduction of the Maternity Protection provisions in the Act allows for the postponement of maternity leave in the event of a diagnosis of a serious health condition and for protections in the event of the hospitalisation of the child related to that maternity leave being hospitalised during their leave.

Postponement of maternity leave in event of serious health condition

The Act outlines provisions for employees who are pregnant or on maternity leave and face a serious health condition:

1. **Postponement of Maternity Leave:** Employees with a serious health condition can notify their employer to postpone all or part of their maternity leave for up to 52 weeks.
2. **Definition of Serious Health Condition:** A serious health condition is one that poses a significant risk to the employee's life or health, including mental health, and requires ongoing medical treatment.
3. **Notification Requirements:** Employees must provide a notice specifying the dates for postponement, which must be at least 5 weeks apart, and submit a medical certificate confirming those dates. The notification should be given at least 2 weeks before the postponement begins.
4. **Resumption of Maternity Leave:** After the postponement ends, the employee is entitled to take the remaining maternity leave in one continuous period. The employee must notify the employer in writing of the leave commencement date, as soon as reasonably practicable, but no later than on the day the leave starts.

5. **Further Postponement:** Employees who have already postponed their leave once can request one additional postponement, but no more.
6. **Restrictions on Simultaneous Postponements:** Employees cannot postpone their maternity leave under this provision and under section 14B (regarding child hospitalisation) for the same birth.

Hospitalisation of an Employee's child

Employees have the right to postpone maternity leave in cases where they are hospitalised following the birth of their child. This provision acknowledges the importance of a mother's presence during critical times, such as when her newborn requires hospitalisation.

The Maternity Protection Act 1994 allows for maternity leave to be extended if the mother's baby is hospitalised during the first 14 days after birth.

The leave can be deferred by the length of time the baby is hospitalised, ensuring that mothers have sufficient time to care for and bond with their child once they are well enough to leave the hospital.

Parents Leave

August 2024 saw the increase in Parents Leave entitlement moving from 7 weeks to 9 weeks. Within the first two years of a child's life, Parent's leave entitles each parent to 9 weeks' leave during the first 2 years of a child's life, or in the case of adoption, within 2 years of the placement of the child with the family.

This leave is available to both parents, and it can be taken anytime within the first two years of the child's life.

Unless provided within the company policy, this leave is unpaid by the employer although eligible parents may also qualify for a payment called Parent's Benefit during period they are off.

The Acts and associated policies reflects Ireland's commitment to promoting work-life balance and supporting families in the early years of a child's life.

It also ensures that mothers are not disadvantaged in their rights to bonding and recovery due to unexpected medical circumstances. By allowing an extension of maternity leave, Ireland provides a safety net that accommodates both the health of the child and the well-being of the mother. This policy helps create a more equitable and supportive work environment for new parents, allowing them to fulfill their caregiving responsibilities without the stress of losing out on their legal maternity leave entitlements.

Within the [ISME HR Hub](#), you will find template policies for Parents, Paternity, Parental and Maternity Leave along with the relevant application form.

As always, if you require any support with HR or Employment Law you can contact the ISME HR Team on 016622755 Option 2 or via HR@ISME.ie. Members also have access to a full suite of HR templates regarding Absence management on the ISME HR Hub

thrive

Your all-in-one Accounting Solution



Cloud-based - work anytime, anywhere



On-demand Phone support



Save valuable time with automation



Intuitive, easy-to-use interface



Talk To Us

📍 Elphin Street, Boyle, Roscommon

✉ info@thriveaccounts.com

☎ 071-96-62552



Joint ISME - Fexco Survey reveals key challenges for SMEs making foreign currency payments

Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (SMEs) are a critical part of the Irish economy, making up over 99% of all Irish businesses and accounting for over 65% of all private sector employment in the country. Their ability to innovate, grow, and expand internationally is critical to Ireland's long-term economic success. The ability to send and receive payments efficiently across borders is a critical enabler of global success, helping SMEs compete on an international stage without financial friction.

To better understand the challenges Irish SMEs face with cross-border payments, Kerry based Fintech Fexco International Payments recently surveyed 11824 members of the Irish Small and Medium Enterprise Association (ISME) who regularly send or receive foreign currency payments.

Key Findings

More than half (51%) of respondents both send and receive foreign payments, while 39% exclusively make payments, and 10% only receive them. The dominance of the British Pound Sterling (GBP) and US Dollar (USD) reflects Ireland's strong trade ties with the UK and US, which together accounted for over 50% of trade volume in 2023, according to the data from Central Statistics Office (CSO).

However, the findings suggest that SMEs are also engaging in transactions involving secondary currencies such as the Australian Dollar (AUD), Danish Krone (DKK), and Polish Zloty (PLN).

Payment volumes

When it comes to payment volumes, the survey revealed that:

- 60% of SMEs process under €1M annually in foreign currency transactions.
- 25% handle between €1M–€5M.
- 15% process over €15M

Technology Adoption

Small and medium sized enterprises are increasingly adopting cloud-based ERP systems to streamline their business processes and manage cross-border payments more efficiently.

40% of the SMEs surveyed revealed that they use ERP or accounting software for international payments with Sage being most popular followed by Xero, Quickbooks and Redbooks.



Key Challenges

Globally, while small businesses are transacting across borders more than ever, their experiences with cross border payments can still be costly and frustrating.

The Fexco survey revealed three key cross-border payment challenges impacting Irish SMEs with ambition to expand internationally:

- **Payment fees:** 60% of respondents found international payment fees to be challenging. This suggests a clear need for more cost-effective payment solutions. When asked to comment further, some respondents mentioned that current payment providers were charging fees as much as €15 per transaction whilst others mentioned that Irish pillar banks are charging "exorbitant margins" on FX so much so that many have switched to third party providers who can often offer much better rates.
- **Currency Volatility:** Currency volatility emerged as a significant concern with over 57% of respondents rating it as challenging. Of the respondents that found currency volatility challenging, many cited the management of FX risk to be an issue for 'smaller companies with little experience of hedging'.

- **Hedging:** The Fexco survey also revealed that only 25% of respondents currently utilise foreign exchange forwards to manage currency risk suggesting an opportunity for greater education and support around FX risk management tools.

The findings underscore the evolving needs of Irish SMEs in the international payments space. As businesses continue to expand their global footprint, there is a clear demand for:

- More competitive pricing structures for international payments
- Greater access to and education about FX risk management tools
- Improved technology integration with existing accounting systems

About Fexco International Payments

Fexco International Payments addresses the key challenges faced by SMEs in global transactions by offering cost-effective and transparent cross-border payment solutions, minimizing the impact of currency volatility through tailored risk management strategies, and providing dedicated account management and support. Its online payment platform, PayDirect, ensures efficient processing times and comprehensive transaction reporting, empowering smaller businesses to confidently expand their global reach.

To find out more about how Fexco can help you to save on foreign currency payment costs and offer a more seamless, efficient cross border payment experience, talk to John Barry today or visit www.internationalpayments.fexco.com/en-ie/isme

John Barry, Payments & FX Consultant

NetSuite SuiteSuccess Starter Edition

The perfect ERP launchpad for start-ups and small businesses



ORACLE
NetSuite
Solution Provider
Partner



SCALABLE
grows with you



BUDGET FRIENDLY
priced for small businesses



RAPID IMPLEMENTATION
go live in weeks, not months



01 811 38110 | sales@ossmcloud.ie
ossmcloud.ie

WATCH DEMO

Proactive Safety Management & Using BeSMART.ie

Dr Joan Cahil, Health and Safety Authority

Safety Management

Accidents and ill health can ruin lives. They can also affect a business if output is lost, machinery is damaged, insurance costs increase, or court proceedings are required. Safety management is the systematic approach to identifying, assessing, and controlling risks to ensure a safe and healthy working environment. The objective of a Safety Management System (SMS) is to provide a structured management approach to controlling safety risks. Typically, an SMS has four components. These are:

- Safety Policy and Objectives
- **Safety Risk Management**
- Safety Assurance
- Safety Promotion

Introduction to Risk Assessment & Management

Risk management is the process of identifying, evaluating, and controlling workplace hazards to minimize risks to employees, assets, and operations. Section 19 of the Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 requires that employers (and those who control workplaces to any extent) identify the hazards in the workplaces under their control and assess the risks to safety and health at work presented by these hazards.

Employers need to set effective preventative and protective measures. Control measures or controls are the precautions taken to ensure that a hazard will not injure anyone. The 2005 Act lays down a hierarchy of prevention to controlling risks known as the 'General Principles of Prevention'.

Employers must write down the risks and what to do about them. This is known as a risk assessment. The specific risk assessment is documented in the company's Safety Statement.

BeSMART.ie

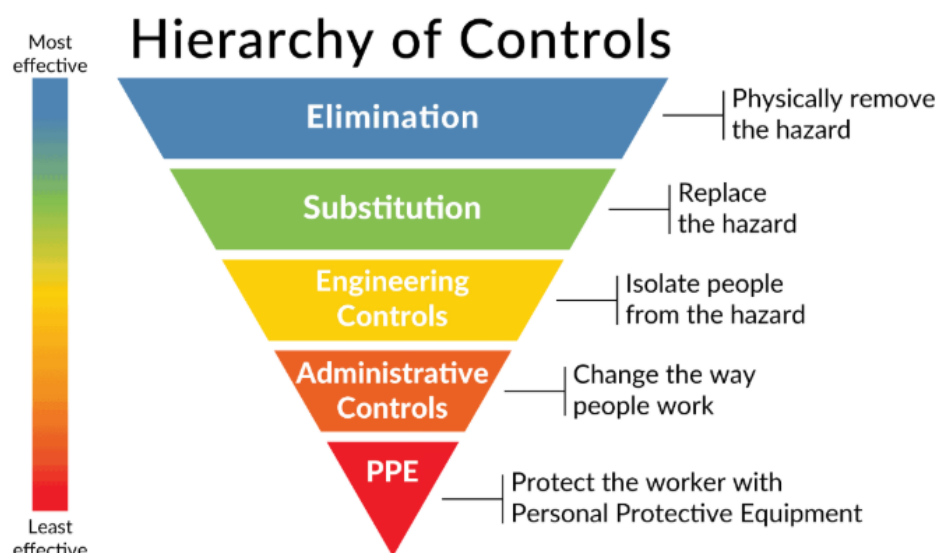
BeSMART.ie enables small businesses and the self-employed to prepare both risk assessments and safety statements, in line with their statutory requirements.

The BeSMART.ie website features a short video explaining how to create (and update) risk assessments and produce a safety statement. Over 2 million hazards have been assessed by Irish businesses using BeSMART.ie.

Proactive safety management leads to positive safety outcomes. It is important that businesses actively engage with safety and review their risk **assessment on an ongoing basis. Users must register with BeSMART.ie, to update their risk assessments/safety statement.**

Leading and Lagging Indicators

Organisations use specific occupational health and safety indicators to measure workplace safety and health performance. These indicators are divided into two types - leading and lagging indicators.



Leading indicators are proactive and preventive measures that can shed light on the effectiveness of safety and health activities and reveal potential problems in a safety and health program. These indicators focus on safety performance and risk management efforts rather than outcomes.

Lagging indicators measure the occurrence and frequency of events that occurred in the past, such as the number or rate of injuries, illnesses, and fatalities. As such, these metrics reflect the results of safety performance but do not prevent future incidents.

Information with solid fill

There are several leading indicators which relate to a company's risk assessment practices. For example,

- % completion of risk assessments for all hazards
- Employee involvement in the specification of hazards and appropriate controls
- Number of updates to risk assessments
- Frequency of updates to risk assessments and company safety statement

Further Information

- <https://besmart.ie/learn-more/>
- <https://oshwiki.osha.europa.eu/en/themes/besmartie-business-electronic-safety-management-and-risk-assessment-tool>
- https://osha.europa.eu/sites/default/files/documents/ESENER-first-findings-2024_EN.pdf

Are you a director of a company ?

Do you know your duties and responsibilities ?



Údarás um Fhorfheidhmiú Corparáideach
Corporate Enforcement Authority



Ag cur ardchaighdeáin d'iompar corparáideach chun cinn trí dhlí na gcuideachtaí a fhorfheidhmiú.

Promoting high standards of corporate behaviour through the enforcement of company law.

For more Information visit cea.gov.ie



Strategic Marketing is the Key to Scaling Your Business



You're running a business. You're juggling sales, operations, hiring, customer service, and everything in between. And somewhere in that whirlwind of responsibilities, you know marketing needs attention too. Maybe you've dabbled in it—posted on social media, run a Google Ads campaign, or updated your website. But let's be honest: marketing isn't your full-time job. Driving your business forward is.

For many founder-led companies, marketing becomes one of those hats you wear out of necessity. You know it's important—essential even—but finding the time, expertise, and resources to do it properly feels overwhelming. The result? A scattergun approach that doesn't deliver the growth you were hoping for. But here's the thing. Marketing doesn't have to be complicated or expensive, what it does need is strategy.

Why Marketing Feels So Hard

Let's start with the obvious, marketing has changed. Once upon a time, print ads and word-of-mouth referrals might have been enough to keep your business growing. But today? Customers expect more. They research online, compare options, and want to feel connected to the brands they choose.

According to Core Media's 2023 report, digital advertising now accounts for 65% of total ad spend in Ireland. That's not just big brands—it's SMEs too. From LinkedIn campaigns targeting decision-makers to Instagram ads for local businesses, digital marketing has become the go-to tool for reaching customers. But without a clear plan, it's easy to waste money on campaigns that don't deliver results.

Here's the challenge - most founders didn't start their businesses because they wanted to become marketers. You're an expert in your field, whether that's technology, manufacturing, professional services, or retail—but marketing? That's a whole other skill set.

The Trap of "Doing Marketing" Without Strategy

Picture this. You're running a B2B software company in Cork that helps manufacturers streamline their operations. You decide to spend €10,000 on Google Ads to generate leads for your flagship product. The ads drive traffic to your website, but very few visitors fill out your contact form or request a demo. Frustrating, right?

What went wrong? Maybe the ads targeted the wrong audience—people who weren't decision-makers or

didn't have the budget for your solution. Or perhaps your landing page wasn't optimised to guide visitors toward taking action. Whatever the reason, the result is the same. Wasted money and no tangible ROI.

This is where many SMEs find themselves—doing bits and pieces of marketing without a clear strategy or understanding of what works for their business. It's not because you're not trying; it's because marketing isn't your area of expertise.

Why Strategy Changes Everything

The good news is, you don't need a massive budget or endless hours to make marketing work for you—you need a plan. Strategic marketing is about focusing on what matters most:

- Who are your customers?
- What do they need from you?
- How can you reach them effectively?

It's not about being everywhere at once; it's about being in the right places with the right message.

Take LinkedIn as an example. If you're in business and want to connect with decision-makers, LinkedIn can be a goldmine—but only if you use it strategically. That means creating content that speaks directly to your audience's pain points (think case studies or thought leadership articles) and running targeted ads that reach exactly the people who need your product or service.

Or consider email marketing—a channel often overlooked by SMEs but one of the highest-performing tools when done right. A simple email campaign sharing valuable insights or updates can nurture leads and keep your brand top-of-mind without breaking the bank.

The point is this: every euro spent on marketing should serve a purpose. Without strategy, you're just throwing money at tactics and hoping something sticks.

The Impact of Investing in Strategic Marketing

A mid-sized consulting firm in Dublin specialising in IT services had relied on referrals for years to grow its business. However, as they set their sights on attracting larger corporate clients across Ireland and Europe, it became clear that this approach alone wouldn't support their long-term goals. Recognising the need for a more focused strategy, they invested in a strategic marketing expert to help them take the next step.

The first priority was to audit their existing marketing efforts, which revealed gaps in their messaging and targeting. With this insight, a clear plan was developed: LinkedIn content was tailored to engage IT directors and procurement managers, compelling case studies were created to showcase the firm's expertise, and targeted email campaigns were launched to reach key decision-makers.

The results spoke for themselves. Within six months, website traffic increased by 35%, and the firm secured two new contracts worth €200k annually. Perhaps most importantly, the internal team gained confidence in managing campaigns and maintaining momentum, ensuring the business could continue building on this success.

This example highlights the power of investing in strategic marketing. By focusing on clear objectives and understanding their audience, the firm was able to achieve measurable results that aligned with its growth ambitions—proving that a well-executed marketing strategy can deliver real impact.

Upskilling Your Team Through Mentorship and Training

Sometimes, achieving marketing success isn't just about bringing in external expertise—it's about empowering your existing team to play their part effectively. While high-level strategy should always come from an experienced leader, such as a fractional CMO, training programmes like those offered by ISME Skillnet can be invaluable for upskilling junior or mid-level staff to execute that vision.

These subsidised programmes provide practical training in areas like digital marketing, campaign management, and analytics, ensuring your team has the tools to support and implement the strategic objectives set by senior leadership. When combined with the guidance of a fractional CMO, this approach creates a seamless system where strategy and execution work hand in hand—delivering measurable results and long-term growth.

As a founder or business leader, it's natural to take on multiple roles in your company. But when it comes to marketing, trying to do everything yourself can hold your business back. Scaling requires focus and expertise, and your time is best spent steering the ship rather than navigating the complexities of marketing strategy.

If there's one takeaway here, it's this: you don't have to do it all alone. Effective marketing starts with clarity. Think about where you want your business to go and how marketing can support that journey. Ask yourself:

- What are the key priorities for growth?
- Who are the customers that will get us there?
- What tools or resources do we need to reach them effectively?

With a clear direction in mind, surround yourself with the right support. A fractional CMO can help you define and lead your strategy, while upskilling your team ensures they're equipped to execute that vision. By focusing on strategy and building a strong foundation, you'll create a system where every marketing effort works toward your larger goals—allowing you to lead with confidence and clarity.



Jenny Martin is a fractional CMO who helps businesses break through growth plateaus. With over two decades of experience, she specialises in helping companies move from founder-led sales to scalable marketing systems, bringing senior marketing expertise without the cost of a full-time hire.

Ready to add strategic marketing leadership to your growth journey? [Book your free consultation today](#), and let's discuss how a fractional CMO can help guide your business through its next phase of growth.



National AI Studio Launched to Empower SMEs in Ireland

The Advanced Innovation in Manufacturing (AIM) Centre has launched the National AI Studio, a visionary initiative designed to empower manufacturing SMEs across Ireland.

Officially launching in Q1 2025, this ground-breaking project aims to bridge the gap between the transformative potential of artificial intelligence (AI) and its practical implementation, making AI accessible to businesses of all sizes. Backed by Enterprise Ireland, the studio is set to drive competitiveness, productivity, and sustainability, further establishing Ireland as a leader in AI-driven manufacturing.

Situated in Sligo, the AIM Centre is at the forefront of advanced innovation in manufacturing and supply chain technologies. Its mission is to assist businesses, particularly SMEs, in navigating the complexities of Industry 4.0. The Centre is staffed by a multidisciplinary team of experts who bring diverse skills, including advanced technology expertise, academic achievements, and real-world industry experience.

From solving challenges to offering cutting-edge facilities, the AIM Centre plays a critical role in guiding organisations towards digital transformation and fostering a culture of innovation.

Making AI Accessible for SMEs

Manufacturing SMEs face unique challenges in adopting cutting-edge technologies, including resource constraints and a lack of technical expertise. The National AI Studio addresses these barriers through:

1. **Hands-On Demonstration Projects:** SMEs can experience AI in action through practical applications like predictive maintenance, energy optimisation, and quality control. These projects illustrate how AI can be integrated into real-world operations, offering measurable outcomes.
2. **AI Accelerator Programme:** Tailored roadmaps for AI adoption will be developed for participating SMEs, guiding them through the complexities of implementing AI solutions in their unique contexts.
3. **Travelling AI Studio:** This mobile component ensures that the benefits of AI technology are accessible to SMEs across Ireland, to ensure no company is left behind in the digital transformation journey.

Collaboration for National Progress

The National AI Studio is more than a technological initiative; it's a collaborative effort to foster a robust network of innovation and support. By working with organisations such as Irish Manufacturing Research (IMR), CeADAR, and RDI Hub, the AIM Centre is creating a cohesive national ecosystem for AI in manufacturing.

Martin Lydon, CEO of Sligo County Council, emphasised the initiative's dual significance: "The AI Studio is not just a win for the Northwest region; it's a win for Ireland. It aligns perfectly with our strategy to position the Northwest as a hub for manufacturing innovation and economic growth."

Driving Economic Growth and Sustainability

This initiative is funded under the Smart Regions Enterprise Innovation Scheme, supported by the European Regional Development Fund. By leveraging existing regional partnerships, the project complements the priorities outlined in Ireland's nine Regional Enterprise Plans, with a focus on accelerating economic growth and sustainable job creation nationwide.

Méabh Conaghan, Enterprise Ireland's Regional Director, highlighted the broader implications: "The AIM Centre's AI Studio is a critical step in Ireland's journey to becoming a leader in AI-driven manufacturing. This project ensures SMEs can remain competitive in a rapidly evolving global economy."

A Vision for the Future

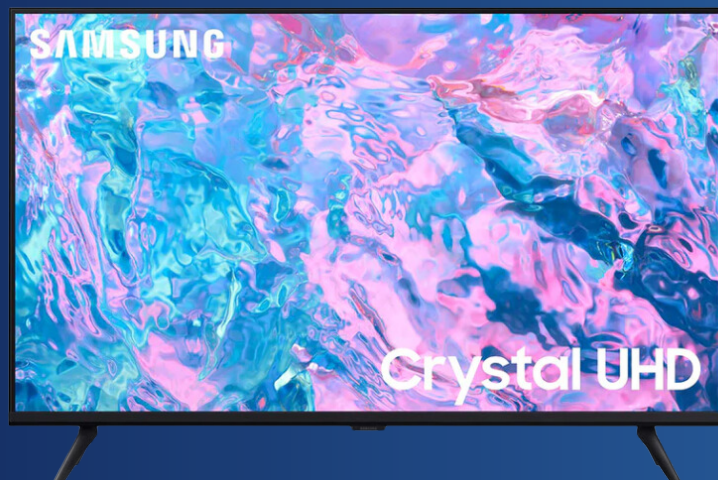
The National AI Studio aims to create a digitally skilled workforce, develop AI success stories, and promote long-term economic sustainability. For manufacturing SMEs, this initiative provides a pathway to digital transformation, enabling them to thrive in an increasingly competitive global market.

As the studio officially launches in early 2025, SMEs across Ireland will have unprecedented access to the tools and expertise needed to integrate AI into their operations. By making AI practical, actionable, and inclusive, the **AIM Centre** is ensuring that Irish manufacturing remains at the forefront of innovation in the digital era.

For more details, visit www.aimcentre.ie.



Receive a FREE 65" Samsung 4K Smart TV with any A3 MFP



Call 086 085 3149 & Use Code "ISME"

About IPS

With over 30 years of experience in Managed Print Services, alongside an impressive 99% customer retention rate, a footprint across 44 countries, and the distinguished title of Lexmark's top service provider in Europe. With our all inclusive print management solutions, we handle everything from supply replenishment to device monitoring, so you can focus on what matters most.

Our Awards

- EMEA Cloud Dealer of the year 2023
- Best New Business Partner EMEA 2023
- EMEA Cloud Dealer of the year in 2020/2021
- BSD Dealer of the Year 2020
- Lexmark Diamond Plus Partner
- Member of the Office of Government Procurement



Managed Print Services

Optimise printing, lower costs, and improve security through efficient management and monitoring.



Print Accessibility Solutions

IPS take immense pride in positioning ourselves as pioneers of accessibility and inclusion within MPS services



Cloud Print Management

Save IT time and resources with complete control of your print environment with data analytics



Print Sustainability Solutions

As part of our initiative to ensure all our devices are Net Zero, IPS will plant 10 trees for every device installed.



Print Strategy Advice

We specialise in delivering tailored print management solutions to meet the unique needs of your business



1.

**Contact our
consultancy
team**



2.

**Receive a
tailored
proposal**



3.

**Reduce your print
costs and become
an IPS customer**



info@ipsi.ie



01 832 0930



086 085 3149

**MICRO
CREDS**

**UP TO 80% FEE SUBSIDY
ON MICRO-CREDENTIAL COURSES**

DCU Ollscoil Chathair
Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University



**Maynooth
University**
National University
of Ireland Maynooth



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin



OLLSCOIL NA GAILLIMHE
UNIVERSITY OF GALWAY



UCC
University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh



University College Dublin
An Coláiste Ollscoile, Baile Átha Cliath



**UNIVERSITY OF
LIMERICK**
OLLSCOIL LUIMNIGH

**A MICRO-INVESTMENT
FOR BIG SKILL GAINS
IN 2025**

WWW.MICROCREDS.IE

iuua IRISH
UNIVERSITIES
ASSOCIATION



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Human
Capital
Initiative

This project is funded by the Higher Education Authority under
Human Capital Initiative Pillar 3 Innovation and Agility

MIND THE GAP: Key People-Centric Issues for MDs, CEOs, and Business Owners in the SME Sector



Geraldine Dolan , AC Accredited Leadership Coach,
Facilitator | Fractional HR Director | Business Consultant

As we navigate through 2025, it is crucial for business leaders in the SME sector in Ireland to stay ahead of the curve by addressing key people-centric issues. This article highlights the importance of leveraging legislative requirements and emerging trends to make smart business decisions. By aligning a company compliance and governance requirements with the overall company strategy, goals and business objectives, leaders can drive sustainable growth and foster a positive working environment.

Linking Compliance to Overall Company Strategy

Compliance should not be viewed in isolation but as an integral part of the overall company strategy. By aligning compliance initiatives with business goals, leaders can create a cohesive and forward-thinking organisation. This approach ensures that compliance efforts contribute to the company's long-term vision and objectives, rather than being seen as a mere regulatory burden.

Developing Leadership and Managerial Skills

All roads lead to your managers. Investing in the development of leadership and managerial skills is as important as addressing compliance issues. Effective leaders can drive change, inspire teams, and navigate the complexities of the modern business landscape. By providing ongoing education, training and development opportunities, SMEs can cultivate a strong and inclusive leadership pipeline that supports the company's growth and success.

Addressing the Gender Pay Gap and Promoting Transparency

Transparency in pay practices is no longer optional with EU Pay Transparency Directive; it is a business imperative. Addressing the gender pay gap is not just about compliance but about fostering an inclusive and equitable workplace. By conducting regular pay audits and implementing transparent pay structures, SMEs can ensure fair compensation for all employees. This proactive approach can enhance employee trust and loyalty, leading to higher engagement and retention rates.

The EU Pay Transparency Directive aims to strengthen the principle of equal pay for equal work between men and women through enhanced pay transparency and enforcement mechanisms.

- Adoption Date: The directive was adopted on May 10, 2023.
- Implementation Deadline: EU Member States must implement the directive by June 7, 2026

Leveraging the Benefits of AI for Organisations

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the way businesses operate. SMEs can leverage AI to streamline processes, enhance decision-making, and improve customer experiences. By integrating AI into their operations, businesses can gain a competitive edge and drive innovation. It is essential for leaders to stay informed about AI advancements and explore how these technologies can be applied to their specific business needs.

According to the World Economic Forum, there is already a significant gender gap in AI adoption, with women representing only 22% globally this highlights the need for organisations to broaden their awareness of gender gaps beyond just pay and representation on boards and in leadership roles. It is crucial to also address the disparities in skills and participation in emerging technologies like AI.

Call to Action

Embracing legislative requirements, promoting transparency, and leveraging AI are not merely compliance and governance measures; they are strategic opportunities to drive growth, foster innovation, and bridge gender and skills gaps. By proactively addressing these areas, businesses can create a more inclusive and equitable workplace, where diversity thrives, and every employee can succeed. Seizing these opportunities can build a brighter, more equitable future for all.

<https://gdolan.com/partner4potential/>

Breaking the Isolation: How the SME Matters 50X Programme Puts Owner- Managers Back in Control



Running a business is often described as a journey—but for many SME owner-managers, that journey can feel incredibly lonely. Every major decision rests on your shoulders. Who do you turn to for honest advice? Who truly understands the pressure of meeting payroll, driving growth, and steering your business through tough times?

As your business grows, so does the isolation. You can't always talk openly with your team, and while friends and family mean well, they don't experience the daily realities of running a business. That's where the SME Matters 50X Programme steps in—offering owner-managers real support, not just generic business advice.

The Evolution of 50X

The 50X Programme was developed through a partnership between ISME and SME Matters, a consultancy specializing in scaling SMEs. Since 2009, they've run high-impact programs like Transform Your Business (TYB), a 3-month intensive bootcamp, and Developing You, Developing Your Business, a 10-month expansion of TYB's learnings.

What makes 50X different is its flexible, owner-led approach. Instead of a rigid curriculum, participants set the agenda based on their needs, with expert guidance from SME Matters. The program emphasizes peer-to-peer learning—connecting you with like-minded business owners who get it and can offer honest insights to help you push forward.

More Than Advice—Real Support from Your Peers

You already know your business inside out. What you do need is space to step back, gain clarity, and receive direct, strategic input from people who understand your challenges.

50X isn't about being told what to do—it's about co-creating solutions with fellow business owners who challenge, support, and hold you accountable. Whether it's refining strategy, tackling leadership challenges, or driving growth, you'll work alongside a network of peers invested in your success.

Your Own Boardroom—Without the Price Tag

Imagine having a board of experienced business leaders—offering candid advice, challenging your thinking, and pushing you to reach your potential. For most SMEs, that kind of support is out of reach.

The “board you could not afford” concept makes it possible. As part of 50X, you'll work with experienced owner-managers who act as non-executive directors for each other. It's a powerful, no-nonsense forum where real business issues are tackled head-on.

There's no sugar-coating—just practical, straight-talking advice from people who understand the realities of running a business. And in return, you'll offer the same value back, helping others make better decisions just as they help you.

Because Leading Doesn't Have to Be Lonely

Owning a business can feel like carrying the world on your shoulders. That isolation can be draining—and it can hold your business back. The 50X Programme isn't just about strategies and tools; it's about breaking that isolation and connecting with leaders who share your challenges.

The relationships built in 50X last long after the programme ends. This isn't just networking—it's a trusted group of advisors offering real, actionable support when you need it most.

Take Back Control of Your Growth Journey

The SME Matters 50X Programme gives you the space, support, and challenge you need to lead with confidence.

For owner-managers ready to break the isolation and take their business to the next level, this isn't just another business programme—it's the strategic support you've been missing.

And now, there's even more reason to take the leap. ISME is supporting the first five registrants with a 20% contribution toward the programme fee.

The next intake starts on March 28th. Learn more and sign up at www.SMEMatters.ie.



Your next Big Step is Micro

boost skills - boost business

Future-proof your skills with Skills to Advance **Micro-Qualifications** - short, targeted courses, at little or no cost, in key areas like sustainability, digital business skills, market development, and more.

Stay ahead by contacting your local Education and Training Board or visit skillstoadvance.ie.

Supported by the SOLAS Skills to Advance initiative and the Government of Ireland.

The Skills Your Business Can't Afford to Ignore

Running a business in Ireland, especially an SME, comes with many challenges and obstacles to navigate on a daily basis. Industries are constantly shifting, new technologies are emerging, and customer expectations are evolving. To stay competitive, SMEs need more than just technical know-how—they need employees with the right skills to adapt, innovate, and grow into the future.

Transversal skills, sometimes referred to as transferable skills or soft skills, are vital abilities that can be applied across different roles, industries, and business. In a fast-paced business environment, these skills are just as important as technical expertise, and investing in their development can have a major impact on business success.

What Are Transversal Skills?

Transversal skills are the essential, future-proof skills that help employees perform at their best, regardless of their role or level of experience. Unlike job-specific technical skills, transversal skills are wide-ranging and help businesses to operate efficiently, manage challenges, and drive growth.

For SMEs in Ireland, building a workforce with strong transversal skills is one of the smartest investments to make. Key transversal skills that SMEs must develop to remain competitive include:

Communication & Collaboration – Clear communication ensures employees can engage effectively with customers, suppliers, and colleagues. Strong teamwork helps businesses run smoothly and increases overall productivity. Employees with excellent communication and problem-solving skills can also help deliver better customer service, improving client retention and satisfaction.

Problem-Solving & Critical Thinking – Employees who can analyse situations, identify challenges, and find solutions are invaluable to any business, particularly SMEs where agility is key to growth. Employees with critical thinking can help identify new business opportunities, improve products or services, and drive innovation across the organisation.

Leadership & Decision-Making – Even in small teams, leadership skills are essential. Employees who can take initiative, manage projects, and make confident decisions help the business to succeed. In a small business, roles often overlap, and responsibilities can change quickly. Staff with strong adaptability and leadership skills can handle challenges without constant supervision.

Adaptability & Digital Skills – In today's fast-changing work environment, employees need to be comfortable with new technologies, open to learning, and able to pivot when needed. Skills to support automation and the adoption of new digital technologies are non-negotiable for organisations looking to future-proof operations.

Creativity & Innovation – Businesses that encourage creativity and innovation stay ahead of competitors. Employees with entrepreneurial thinking can spot new opportunities, streamline processes, and contribute to business growth. As automation, digital transformation, and new market demands reshape industries, businesses with skilled, adaptable employees will be in the strongest position to succeed.

How To Develop Transversal Skills

Investing in skill development makes employees feel valued, leading to higher job satisfaction and lower turnover rates. A skilled and engaged workforce is more productive and committed to business success. By prioritizing the development of transversal skills, SMEs can create a more engaged, innovative, and future-ready workforce. Whether through internal training, mentoring, or structured learning like micro-credentials, investing in skills is an investment in the future of the business.

Micro-credentials have emerged as a flexible and practical way for employees to gain transversal skills in areas like leadership, communication, problem-solving, and digital literacy. These short, accredited courses, offered by leading Irish universities, allow employees to develop specific skills in a time-efficient and cost-effective way that fits around the needs of the business.



David Corscadden,
MicroCreds
Communications
Manager, Irish Universities
Association

Micro-credentials are short, industry informed courses that typically last between 6 and 12 weeks, requiring only a few hours commitment per week. The majority of courses are offered either fully online or hybrid making them practical to fit around both personal and professional commitments. The courses are fully accredited having been developed by MicroCreds partner universities including Dublin City University; Maynooth University; Trinity College Dublin; University College Cork; University College Dublin; University of Galway and University of Limerick.

Now is a brilliant time for SMEs to explore these upskilling opportunities and take advantage of the HCI Micro-credential Learner Fee Subsidy. This new learner fee subsidy is funded by the Government of Ireland through the Higher Education Authority (HEA) and offers financial support of up to 80% off course fees on eligible courses, making it more affordable for businesses to upskill their employees.

For Irish SMEs, success isn't just about keeping up with market trends—it's about having the right people with the right skills to adapt, problem-solve, and drive business forward. Transversal skills are the foundation of strong teams, satisfied customers, and long-term business resilience.

Explore upskilling opportunities to develop transversal skills at MicroCreds.ie and future-proof your business today!



Ireland's Premier Indoor Karting Arena

**Unrivalled F1 Inspired
Team Building Packages;
Corporate Outings
Stags & Hens
Family & Friends
Schools & Colleges**

Kylemore Karting, Unit 1A, Kylemore Industrial Estate, Killeen Road, Kylemore, Dublin D10 TP04

tel 01 626 1444 / email Info@kylemorekarting.ie / www.kylemorekarting.ie



T&C's: • Offer applies to Race Events only • Reference B1SME when booking to avail of 10% discount
• Offer ends 31st October 2025 • Cannot be used in conjunction with any other offers

Unio Wealth Management: Financial Wellbeing for You, Your Team and Your Business

Unio Wealth Management is a new addition to the ISME network and has emerged as a fresh name in Wealth Management in Ireland. Our mission is to ensure that, as business owners, your time is well spent, that you are informed about your financial position and have the peace of mind to build your business, while we take care of the rest.

For the ISME Network, Unio has a team of expert advisers who work with business owners every day. Unio SME understands that busy professional and personal lives often mean that time is at a premium for you.

How can we help?

Planning for your Own Future – Business owners pour everything into their company, but what about life beyond work? A strong retirement plan through your company can provide financial stability when the time comes to step back.

Tax efficiency & Smart Investments – Managing surplus cash wisely, maximising tax efficiencies and ensuring investments align with long-term goals can boost financial security for you and your business.

Protect your Team – Attracting and retaining talent is crucial. Employee benefits, including pension schemes, life and income protection plans, not only provide financial security for employees, but also strengthen your business.

Succession and Exit Strategy – Whether passing the business on or preparing for a sale, having a structured plan and advice ensures a smooth transition for all.

Gary Cullen, Head of SME at Unio, appreciates that SME owners juggle countless responsibilities daily.

"Managing personal finances and understanding how your business is intertwined with this is vital. We know that allocating time to pension planning, investment and employee benefits can be time consuming and can divert attention away from your core business activities. Our dedicated SME team is here to help and take ownership of these for you. We offer tailored financial solutions specific to your needs to give you the peace of mind to then focus on what you do best – growing your business."

Peter Walsh, a Private Client Advisor with Unio SME, explains this approach: "There are so many facets to running a business – from that initial leap, to growing and eventually passing onto the next generation, and everything in between. At Unio, we partner you on this journey, prioritising your financial wellbeing, that of your team and your business. We provide you with a comprehensive, bespoke financial life plan to achieve this – we will show where you are now and get you thinking about where you can be in future. Your business is very much part of this journey, and we will then work with you to achieve these goals."



Gary Cullen, Head of SME at Unio

We understand that SMEs are the backbone of economic Ireland and are at the heart of local communities. With offices in Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Cork, our team are there for you and can be flexible to your schedule, all to ensure that financial growth for you and your team is not a challenge, but an opportunity.

We look forward to working with the ISME Network and showcasing this expertise with you.

Feel free to reach out to the team by contacting Peter at peter.walsh@unio.ie or 086 204 2165.

Unio is the coming together of some of Ireland's leading wealth management and employee benefits companies with the backing of Great-West LifeCo, and currently has over 300 employees, overseeing €14bn of assets on behalf of personal, corporate, institutional and SME clients. Unio Employee Benefits is the consulting division of Unio, offering bespoke employee benefit solutions such as pensions, health, and wellbeing plans.

Unio Financial Services Ltd trading as Unio, Unio Employee Benefits and Unio Wealth Management is regulated by the Central Bank of Ireland. www.unio.ie

Credit where it's due.

Having difficulty getting a new business loan
or restructuring your existing debt with your bank?

Established by the Minister for Finance,
Credit Review is here to help.

**Talk to the credit experts today on 0818 211 789
or visit creditreview.ie**

Credit Review

ISME Calls for Action in Response to Rising Civil Litigation in Ireland

Recent figures from the Central Bank show that nearly 70% of personal injury claims in Ireland are going through litigation, a worrying trend for businesses. Despite the existence of the Personal Injuries Resolution Board (PIRB), which can resolve cases more quickly and at the same compensation levels, litigation volumes continue to rise. This increase in court cases is not in the financial interest of plaintiffs, yet the trend persists.

ISME also revealed that Ireland's personal injury cases exceed those in England and Wales combined, despite Ireland's population being much smaller. Additionally, the number of defamation cases is disproportionately high.

With personal injury awards already higher than in most European countries, ISME warns against further increasing them and suggests lowering the levels instead.

To address this growing issue, ISME recommends several actions:

- Codifying court rules into primary legislation, such as "costs follow the event."
- Acting on the Minority Report on civil justice reform.
- Amending the defamation reform bill to comply with European standards.
- Investigating lawyers who advise unnecessary litigation.

By implementing these steps, Ireland could address its systemic civil litigation issues and move towards a more efficient legal system.

[Read more here](#)

trojan

Success Through IT

35 YEARS SUPPORTING IRISH BUSINESSES

- ✓ Fully Managed IT Support
- ✓ Industry-leading Cyber Security
- ✓ Powerful Cloud Solutions



TALK TO US FOR A CYBER SECURITY ASSESSMENT

 www.trojan.ie

 info@trojan.ie

 071-96-62552



There's No Such Thing as Director-Lite

The Corporate Enforcement Authority (CEA) is an independent body responsible for the enforcement of the Companies Act 2014.

Directors' Duties and Responsibilities

The CEA enforces any breach of company law by companies or the directors of a company. Michael Dillon, the CEA's Director of Legal, explains that a director is anyone who is appointed, usually by the members of the company, to manage the business of a company on their behalf. Whether a person is a director is a question of 'substance over form'; the focus being on what work they do rather than the title they hold.

What is a Company?

A company has a separate legal personality. This means the law treats the company like a person, who is completely separate from the company's members. A company has the ability to:

- Sue others and be sued in its name.
- Own assets and incur debts.
- Protect members from legal action, with limited liability.

Who Can't Be a Director?

Some people are prohibited from being directors, including:

- Anyone under the age of 18.
- An undischarged bankrupt.
- Statutory auditors of the company.
- People who have been disqualified from acting as directors.

Director Duties

'All directors share the same legal responsibilities under the Companies Act, there is no such thing as director-lite; you either are or are not a director,' said Michael Dillon. If directors don't comply with their duties, they could face being restricted or disqualified from acting as a director. These include both **fiduciary duties and statutory duties** set out in the Companies Act:

Fiduciary Duties: A director must:

- act in the company's best interests,
- be honest and responsible in their management of the company affairs,
- comply with the company's constitution and only use the powers granted to them,
- not use company assets or information for personal gain (unless allowed by law),
- make decisions independently and avoid conflicts of interest,
- use care, skill, and diligence to protect the company's financial health.

Statutory Duties: A director must:

- ensure the company complies with the Companies Acts,
- be accountable if they commit a breach, or authorise or permit a breach to occur,
- provide necessary accounts, reports, documents, and certificates when required.

Compliance & Responsibilities: A director must:

- keep accurate records,
- file financial statements and other required documents,
- hold regular meetings (like Annual General Meetings),
- cooperate with liquidators if the company is wound up.

Consequences of Non-Compliance

The failure of a director to discharge their duties, can lead to serious consequences including investigation and enforcement action from the CEA, including criminal prosecution.

For more details, visit the CEA website at cea.gov.ie or email info@cea.gov.ie.



National
Enterprise Hub

ALL THE BUSINESS SUPPORTS YOU NEED, IN ONE PLACE

Support starts here
Visit www.neh.gov.ie

An initiative of the Government of Ireland

