

# YOUR BUSINESS

**Making money is art and working is art and good business is the best art**  
Andy Warhol, American artist (1928 – 1987)

## DEALS OF THE WEEK

### MetaCompliance ups staff

■ METACOMPLIANCE is to double its workforce in Derry over the next three years, bringing the total number employed at the technology firm to 102. As part of the expansion, Invest Northern Ireland has offered MetaCompliance £652,000 (€736,000) towards the creation of the new jobs.

The roles being created will be in sales and IT, as the company implements a new sales model targeting prospective customers across Europe and the US.

“Invest NI’s ongoing support is central to the continued growth of our business and we are delighted with the progress of recruitment to date and also the calibre of talent available in the North West.” Robert O’Brien, CEO of MetaCompliance, said.

### Wisetek recycling tie-up

■ WEEE Ireland, Ireland’s largest electrical and battery recycling scheme, is to partner with global provider of IT asset disposal Wisetek, in a move that will increase the nationwide collection of waste and retired IT equipment.

The agreement brings together two main players in the recycling of waste electronic equipment, data sanitisation and the management of retired IT equipment.

The collaboration aims to ensure that the security of all data on redundant IT equipment is prioritised when waste electronic equipment is disposed of in compliance with the WEEE Directive. This partnership comes ahead of next year’s General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).

### H2Ozone in €3m funding

■ WICKLOW-BASED water technology company H2Ozone has raised €3m in new investment to help support the commercialisation of its technology for purifying water.

The funds raised will be used to increase its sales and marketing capabilities as it grows international sales of its units that purify water using filtration, ultra-violet light and ozone. H2Ozone will initially focus its international sales expansion on the UK, French, Dutch, Belgian and South African markets.

“We see a global market opportunity for this technology, and we’re very pleased to have raised the funds to embark on the next phase of the company’s growth,” said H2Ozone Paul O’Grady, pictured.



### BMS Finance loan for Anam

■ DUBLIN-BASED Anam Technologies has secured loan finance from BMS Finance. The loan will assist the company with its international expansion.

Anam’s patented signalling/SMS firewall technology enables operators to safeguard subscriber trust in the mobile network, shielded from intrusion and spam through filtering billions of messages in more than 60 countries around the world.

As well as its Dublin office, Anam Technologies, a mobile messaging specialist, also has a presence in Kuala Lumpur, London, Hong Kong and Hanoi.

### SUPPORTING IRISH SMES

— Send details of your company’s deal of the week to [sundaybusiness@independent.ie](mailto:sundaybusiness@independent.ie)



Pat and Annmarie Byrne, proprietors of The Salon in Barnhall, Lexlip.  
Photo: Tony Gavin

**ENTERPRISE IRELAND**  
where innovation means business

## SME ADVICE

### Design can be key to shaping success for export sector

Stephen Hughes

IRELAND has not always considered itself a design nation. Yet our understanding of what good design means has evolved as companies recognise its commercial potential across sectors. One milestone occurred when the Design & Crafts Council introduced the year of Irish Design 2015, a series of events which promoted and celebrated design in all forms. Since then, the commercial application of Irish design continues to progress. Businesses that may once have viewed design as inessential now recognise its potential.

For today’s exporters, an approach to design should embrace two main elements: technology and user experience. Technology describes how a product functions, and user experience how customers engage with the solution, or more importantly, how the solution engages its users. The importance of both has been clear to B2C companies for some time, with the iPhone a famous example of excellence in both. Awareness has spread to less obvious applications, like the production of agricultural machinery. Manufacturers in B2B industries now understand that design can make products look efficient, so that a user’s impression of quality is often shaped by design.

Enterprise Ireland has always supported design, mostly with a small ‘d’, as a crucial component of product development. Irish businesses are actively encouraged to approach Design with a capital ‘D’, by introducing it into strategy and planning at an earlier point. That focus allows design to have a greater impact than when it is treated as one aspect of product development.

Exporters, in particular, must treat design as strategic. Customers in different markets often have different responses to technology and user experience. It cannot be assumed that design will translate across markets. Firms must, at the very least, consider how to adapt to each market targeted.

Enterprise Ireland supports more and more companies to give design the focus it deserves. The success of Marco Beverage Systems, a hot water delivery systems company, has been fuelled by design-driven innovation. Paul Stack, operations director, explains that design transcends surface styling.

“The main considerations for our design team are energy efficiency, beverage excellence and design excellence, incorporating user experience and aesthetics,” he says. With just under 100 employees globally, its products can be seen in major businesses, including Starbucks, Bewley’s and Costa Coffee. “A reputation for good design and innovation increases your brand value and drives sales all by itself,” says Stack.

For Mcoor, a Louth-headquartered company that develops the world’s only line of paper-based 3D printers, RD&I enabled a software redesign and a complete architectural change of electronics. The resulting Arke is an integrated printer, with a low price-point that opened up new markets. The benefits of design-driven innovation are clear in Mcoor’s projection that 2018 will see a doubling of staff and fivefold increase in sales revenue.

Alpha Wireless, an antenna manufacturer headquartered in Portlaoise, worked closely with customers to design a product tailored to specific regulations. “Enterprise Ireland’s Business Innovation Initiative funding allowed us to set up an advisory group of industry experts from across the globe,” says CEO Fergal Lawlor. “We worked with them to review the market, decide what technologies were needed and develop a new concept.”

Interested companies should apply for a range of Enterprise Ireland supports that include technical feasibility studies and consultation.

Stephen Hughes is Enterprise Ireland manager for construction, timber and consumer retail

# Handling complaints can be a positive way to keep clients

ALAN O’NEILL



**N**OW the fourth-largest beer manufacturer in the world, Carlsberg is a Danish institution known for its humorous TV advertisements. A few years ago, one ad showed an employee walking a quiet corridor in Head Office. Hearing an old-style telephone ringing relentlessly in the distance, he established the sound coming from behind an old door with a sign that read: Complaints Dept. Scraping back the dust, he answered the telephone. It turned out to be a wrong number. The inference here is that Carlsberg never receives complaints.

For the rest of us, that concept is highly unlikely. Even with great products and people, everyone gets complaints. Sometimes we cause them and other times it may be someone else’s fault.

Regardless, research shows us that typically 20pc of global transactions have some hitch but only 4pc of customers who had a bad experience actually complain. Of the other 96pc that don’t complain, 91pc of them defect and take their business elsewhere. That equates to a possible 17.5pc annual defection rate.

There is no room for complacency in handling and managing complaints. Customers will defect when they have an issue unresolved — which in turn has serious implications for retention and future sales. An effective complaints management programme is essential for all organisations regardless of size.

How often have you personally experienced complaints handled badly? Sadly, it seems more the norm these days. I had an experience this week, where I was overcharged by a large furniture store. Trying to get a refund turned out to be a major inconvenience and took 10 days to resolve.

### Challenges with complaints

When complaints are handled badly they often end up costing you hard cash in compensation. However, when you act professionally early on, you win with a relieved customer and possibly no financial loss. The challenge for your organisation therefore is twofold. Prevent them as much as

## SALON’S CUTTING-EDGE CUSTOMER SERVICE

PUTTING the customer first is something that every business knows to be a priority, but my experience as a Change Agent and as a consumer is that common sense is not always common practice. It’s quite shocking to find, as a customer, the number of service providers who treat the contempt as a mere cliché, rather than a basic ingredient for doing business in today’s changing world.

I’ve seen in so many industries, whether B2B or B2C, that the organisations which prioritise the customer get more sales. One example is my local hair salon in Leixlip. For more than eight years I’ve been going to The Salon on a regular basis. Still having a thick head of hair, I give salon owner Pat Byrne a run for his money. Apart from the banter and craic I have with him and his wife Anne-Marie, I do get a decent haircut. That aside, I’m always impressed with the level of premium service given to all customers. I try to arrive early to soak up the

atmosphere and watch how customers are treated. From the time they arrive to the time they leave, I’m inspired by how each is made to feel special.

From Ballygowan Water in a glass bottle to barista coffees by Lavazza, customers are made to feel comfortable and almost at home. There is a friendly familiarity with regular customers that is not intrusive. They never seem to feel rushed, and are listened to intently. And that is consistent. I see it on every visit and from every team member.

On a recent visit I observed a difficult customer complaining about a cut she had received recently. I listened as Anne-Marie initially empathised, then probed for more information about her expectations and what she felt was wrong. She then agreed a way of correcting the cut and sent the customer out smiling. What’s more impressive is that the client was a new customer to the salon. That’s putting the customer first — and it starts at the top.

possible in the first place but also handle them effectively when they do arise.

### EPCAF — a model for service recovery

For a start, change your vernacular. Stop the negative ‘complaints’ word and switch to positive ‘service recovery’ instead.

It will help to alter the mindset internally. Everyone in your organisation should be trained on how to recognise a service issue and handle it skilfully. I have been encouraging my clients for years to embrace EPCAF as an effective model. It will work in almost every situation and can be learned by all who interact with customers.

### E — Empathise

We as service providers should stop and think about the impact of our failures on our customers. I appreciate that not all issues are caused by you. The customer too can get it wrong and blame you unfairly.

But you still need to handle it effectively. If you are defensive, argumentative, blaming or pass the buck, you will inflame the situation. Use empathy instead. The customer is usually irate that they have had an issue in the first place and this approach genuinely helps to calm them down. Phrases such as ‘I’m sorry that you’ve had a bad experience’ are not an admission of fault, but will help to placate the situation.

### P — Probe

The customer will have told you their story in their own words and in their own way. It may have been peppered with jargon, with profanities or with limited or useless information which is not always helpful to you.

To understand the real issue, the implications and the causes of the problem, you will need to establish the full facts.

Gently ask appropriate questions to get the relevant detail. Open ended questions will help

you to get information in a nice softer way than closed-ended questions. By asking questions you will take control the situation.

### C — Clarify your understanding

Having heard the customer’s story, summarise your full understanding of the situation. This has the effect of showing the customer that you’ve listened and that you care. It also gives you the opportunity to check if you’ve missed an important piece of information. It acts as a bridge and sends a gentle message to the customer that you know the full story and that you are now about to move on to finding a solution.

### A — Agree an action

It is now time to agree a solution. Agreeing a solution is usually the better tactic here than telling the customer what you will do. By telling you might risk disagreement which you may have to back down from again. And do not quote company policy!

That’s like a red rag to a bull. Usually customers will be reasonable at this point, particularly if they feel you have listened, empathised and truly apologised for their inconvenience. Ask ‘what would you like us to do for you?’

### F — Follow-up

Having secured agreement on an appropriate solution and course of action, be sure to follow through on your promises. The cynical customer is of course expecting you to forget and mess up again. Prove them wrong and show that you truly have taken their service issue seriously.

### Summary

When you look on service issues in a positive way with skill and a positive attitude, the results will be much improved. There is evidence too that when customers have had their service issue handled well — they actually become stronger advocates for you in the future.

Take service recovery seriously. Document all cases so you can build up data and trends for analysis. With that you can take corrective actions to reduce or eliminate them completely in the future.

Alan O’Neill is a change consultant and non-executive director. For 25-plus years he has been supporting global and iconic brands through change. [alan-oneill.com](mailto:alan-oneill.com). **Business advice questions for Alan can be sent to [sundaybusiness@independent.ie](mailto:sundaybusiness@independent.ie)**



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Sean Gallagher returns next week