

Make it a green Christmas: Spend with SMEs this season

Heads of the country's main trade groups have united in calling on consumers to make it a Green Christmas 2020.

Irish economic recovery and the fate of jobs and local services is in the hands of the people, the business groups emphasised at the launch of the [Champion Green](#) Christmas campaign in Dublin.

Champion Green is a €1m consumer marketing initiative backing local jobs and enterprise. It is supported by Kilkenny Design and Visa, as well as business groups Retail Excellence, the Small Firms Association and Chambers of Commerce Ireland.

Irish retailers and manufacturers are hoping to see bumper Christmas spending this year, on account of households amassing a lockdown savings stash.

Consumer Covid cash horde

In its Quarterly Economic Outlook for Q3, Ibec, the business and employers' association, is reporting that, in the first seven months of 2020, households saved €9.8bn, €5.5bn more than the same period in 2019.

Ensuring that our lockdown cash stays in the local economy will make a real difference, Sven Spollen-Behrens, Director of the Small Firms Association (SFA), said at today's launch.

"These Covid savings represent a major stimulus opportunity for the local economy. If every adult aimed to spend €50 a week extra with a local business or service provider between now and Christmas, the €1.8bn boost to the economy will make the outlook for the New Year a lot healthier for everyone", the SFA Director said.

Consumers are also increasingly buying online. Visa data reveals that 40pc of Irish Visa cardholders, who did not shop online prior to March, are now making e-commerce transactions.

"Small businesses are the cornerstone of towns and communities across Ireland, and the next few months will be crucial to their recovery," Philip Konopik, Ireland country manager, Visa said.

"Given the growing consumer preference to shop online, we are urging consumers to think about how they can shop local and support their local businesses if they click to buy."

With the trend for online shopping set to continue, as Covid restrictions remain, many small businesses have begun to sell online as they trade through the pandemic.

In addition to launching new online sales facilities, retailers have implemented rigorous in-store safety procedures to reassure shoppers and meet consumer needs.

Spread the costs and the benefits

By starting Christmas shopping local and early, this year, consumers can not only spread the cost of Christmas, but can avoid last minute shopping crowds and help keep consumers and retail assistants safe, the trade groups maintain.

Irish small and medium enterprise may have lost between €6 and €10 billion in the months between March and June alone this year, due to Covid-19 restrictions, according to a study by the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI).

The ESRI report also highlights that, depending on how the economy fares for the rest of the year, the business shortfall could top €12.3 billion.

2019 figures showed the SME sector makes up the vast majority of firms operating in Ireland and employs over one million people, accounting for around 68 per cent of total employment.

Marian O’Gorman, Kilkenny Design CEO, says that hundreds of thousands of consumers are already engaged with Champion Green.

“We are very active online and in social media, and are mobilising people to choose consciously and support their local businesses. We are hoping for a Green Christmas, like no other, to give Irish designers and manufacturers hope for their future, they so badly need”.

More than ever, consumers need to think about supporting local businesses in their community, both online and instore, the businesswoman said.

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Consumer spending is the ultimate driver of modern, service-led economies, Duncan Graham of Retail Excellence adds.

“It is crucial that we all understand the implications of our purchasing decisions this Christmas, and spend locally to keep money in circulation locally. Both consumers and businesses are similarly encouraged to support other local service providers and industry.”

Small business owners can register to avail of PR and marketing supports, as well as business advice, as part of the national Champion Green campaign.

Image at top, the Greening of Christmas: Martin Corcoran, restaurant manager pictured at Kilkenny Design Centre Cafe. Image: Johnny Savage

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Published: 15 October, 2020