

## **Mark Loftus: "We weren't confident at all to be totally honest"**

### **We caught up with Mark Loftus from The Paddy Box to discuss the impact Covid-19 had on his business.**

Covid-19 has impacted nearly all areas of business in Ireland, including start-ups and SMEs that were showing promising signs of growth earlier this year.

For The Paddy Box and company founder Mark Loftus, 2020 has been an incredibly challenging, but rewarding year.

"The year started off nicely for us and January was a good month. We then started planning for St Patrick's Day and Easter, and we had a big campaign lined up, but overnight, Covid-19 kicked in and everything just went insane, particularly with so many countries going into lockdown," said Loftus.

When the coronavirus started to spread across Ireland, he took the decision to send staff home to work remotely, while he handled the fulfilment side of the business single-handedly.

"I was afraid to have people in the warehouse," he adds. "I was working in the warehouse by myself for a long period – starting at 5am and not finishing until about 10pm at night, while my staff were at home working on the online operation.

"The orders were flying in and it was very difficult to cope with the volume. Thankfully, we have the operation under control now and we adapted to the situation, but it was a crazy period."

#### **Lockdown**

As Ireland, along with many other countries around the world, went into lockdown, shipping and deliveries became an issue for many businesses, but for The Paddy Box, shipping was never a problem as the company's partner, DHL, was exempt from all of the national postal outages.

"We managed to stay active in nearly every country we shipped to, with the exception of one or two countries. Deliveries did take slightly longer and there were additional costs associated, but thankfully we were not really impacted.

"We're now shipping to more than 140 countries around the world. During the lockdown period alone, we shipped to 80 different countries and I really wasn't expecting that. We're hoping to hit 150 very soon," he continued.

While the company was in a fortunate position to continue growing throughout the lockdown period, Loftus admits that he was concerned that the pandemic could have a detrimental impact on the company.

“We weren’t confident at all to be totally honest. It was very scary at the time and we just focused on getting by each day.

“As time passed, we knew we’d be fine, but in those early weeks of Covid-19, it was just about keeping our heads above the water and trying to survive. It took until the end of May before we really got to grips with things and then it was June before we started to get staff back into the warehouse.”

With almost half of the Irish workforce working remotely between March and May, managing those off-site was something that Loftus didn’t enjoy very much.

“That has been a massive challenge. As much as I don’t like Zoom calls, there has been a lot of them.

“You have to rely on your staff and trust that they are doing the work, and I’ve been very fortunate that my staff have. The motivation for us is that we know we are giving people abroad a taste of Ireland as they might be going through difficult times away from family and are possibly feeling isolated.

“It’s so important to keep staff upbeat and engaged during challenging times. The fact we were so busy and working so hard, I don’t think we had time to feel demotivated, but I’ll definitely be looking to reward them in some way for their amazing work.”

Making predictions for the remaining months of the year is something Loftus is apprehensive about doing, however, he says he is looking forward to the challenges that lie ahead.

“All of our targets were shaken up. I can’t really make any projections for this year. Our business has grown massively over the last few months, but none of that was expected. It’s a good challenge to have, but there’s a lot of unknowns right now.

“If travel restrictions remain in place, it will have a positive impact on the business. I know it’s not a nice thing to say because after everything that has happened, we’d like to get back to normal as soon as possible.”

While Covid-19 has caused quite the stir for thousands of Irish businesses, he also believes that many opportunities lie ahead for those willing to take a risk in business.

“I’ve actually spoken to two different people recently who believe this is the time to start a business. If you have faith in your idea, then go for it.

“My main piece of advice is to conduct as much research as possible to ensure the idea is viable and it will help business be successful. In challenging times, opportunities often arise from places you wouldn’t normally look. It’s just about finding your niche and going for it,” he concluded.

To find out more about The Paddy Box or to place an order, you can visit <https://www.thepaddybox.com/>.

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