



Sinead Heffernan

Thunders Bakery

GOING FOR GROWTH PROFILE

NAME:

Sinead Heffernan

BUSINESS

Thunders Bakery

POSITION

Managing Director

WHAT WE DO

Bakery specialising in fresh cream cakes for all occasions

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Thunders
home bakery

Since it was established in 1969, Thunders Bakery has become a well-known name in households across Dublin. In 2004, the owner put the bakery up for sale. At the time of the Celtic tiger, the only interest was from property developers who wanted the sites for redevelopment. The owner hoped the bakery, started by his aunt and uncle could survive and did not accept these offers.

Sinead Heffernan had trained as an Accountant and was doing the books for the bakery, when, in 2008, the owner asked if she'd like to buy it. In her spare time, Sinead loved baking bread and often made wedding cakes. Even though the owner had the business in wind-down mode for some time, Sinead believed the bakery had the foundations of a good business. Many people would have thought purchasing a bakery was a risky investment in the midst of an economic crisis, with cutbacks and redundancy hanging over the nation. *"When the opportunity presented itself, I saw potential and decided to buy the bakery. My husband Stephen and I managed Thunders accounts for over a decade, so we knew we were making an informed decision."*

Sinead and her husband recognised the reputation they had to uphold when they bought the business. *"I'm aware of the reputation Thunders has and as a direct result of that we have had to put 100% into it. Even for quality, the basic ingredients have to be the best because there's over 40 years of history there."* Thunders Bakery was better positioned than many businesses for sale in the downturn. It had survived previous recessions in the 1980's and its products were of high quality and well-priced. When Sinead took over the bakery in 2008, production was not at full capacity, operating only at 60%.

The banks were the first point of call in January 2008. Within nine months financial and legal contracts were finalised. Since buying the bakery and three stores, Sinead has increased production capacity and opened another four stores throughout Dublin. Thunders Bakery now employs 44 staff in seven stores and two production facilities. With capacity now at 100%, bread production has been moved to another facility. Sinead is constantly looking at how she can grow the business even further. *"We could possibly have done this from scratch, but buying an existing business has sped things up. It has allowed us to look strategically at the business and how we wanted to expand."*

Sinead was a participant in the fourth cycle of Going for Growth. She highlights her positive experience and found the support was invaluable. *"As Managing Director of a growing business, it is quite difficult to find appropriate support networks for women. Going for Growth gave me the opportunity to build contacts with other women who are also trying to grow their businesses. We were able to share ideas and brainstorm solutions. Listening to the other participants was invaluable and made me realise that we were all facing similar issues."*

From her participation in the Going for Growth roundtables, Sinead set goals and began assessing her bakery's online presence. *"We are now in the process of establishing an online store, where customers can pre-order and opt for a delivery service. Going for Growth opened a door. It took me away from the day to day operations and got me to focus on the strategic aspects which impact on the growth of the business and to the success of the bakery."*

Sinead recognises that having good staff is crucial. *"I am delighted that we have been able to create jobs during a recession. It is vital that our staff remain upbeat and motivated and we have made great progress in this area through training and awareness. Happy staff makes for a happier work place and a better atmosphere for our customers."*

Thunders are currently in the process of refreshing their brand and have chosen franchising as their way forward to move into the café market. *"We are looking forward to creating a new menu for sit down in both sweet and savoury options."*

No doubt even more thunders bakery stores will open across Dublin over the next few years.



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