

Trading Online Voucher Scheme

With the trend ever increasing towards online spending it is estimated that only 23% of small Irish businesses are engaged in any meaningful way in eCommerce sales. For businesses employing less than ten people this percentage could be even lower. It is now believed that, of online purchases made in Ireland, up to 70% of these are done in overseas markets.

There is now an urgency to ensure that businesses recognise that this is happening and that they are encouraged and supported to correctly respond to this digital reality.

In order to support this goal, the National Digital Strategy aims to get more businesses

trading online.

To this end, the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment, offer a Trading Online Voucher Scheme through the Local Enterprise Offices (LEO) to deliver this to Irish business. A limited number of vouchers are now available to eligible businesses.

WHAT IS IT?

The voucher is a financial incentive to small businesses to develop or enhance their ability to trade online. Under the scheme a qualifying business may apply for funding to a maximum value of €2,500 or 50% of eligible expenditure (exclusive of VAT), whichever is the lesser. Following approval of their application, a successful applicant can engage suppliers and upon completion of the work, submit a request for payment to the LEO in line with the terms and conditions of their voucher.

Information seminars will be made available online or by conference call to prospective applicants to support them in their application process and it will be a condition of applying for the vouchers that applicants participate in one of these seminars. At each seminar attendees will be informed of the purpose of the scheme and how best to use and get value from the application of the voucher.

The application process for the vouchers will be a competitive process.

WHAT ARE THE ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA?

The vouchers are targeted at businesses with the following profile:

- Limited or no e-commerce presence;
- 10 or less employees;
- Turnover less than €2m;
- Applicant business must be trading for at least 6 months;
- Business must be located in the area covered by the LEO to whom they make their application i.e. LEOs cannot accept applications from businesses located outside their jurisdiction.

Previous voucher recipients may apply for a second voucher

****Applicant business must provide clear proof of trading for a minimum of 6 months to their Local Enterprise Office.***

WHAT ARE INELIGIBLE PROJECTS FOR THIS SCHEME?

- Companies with charitable status, commercial semi-state companies, trade associations and company representation bodies such as Chambers of Commerce are not eligible to participate in the scheme;
- “Not for profit” and social entrepreneurship applicants unless they operate in a commercial domain;
- Professional services specialising in IT type services who are already capable of trading online using existing in-house systems;
- Conferences and Seminars;
- Projects which are contrary to public policy;
- Duplication of support for projects which would be eligible for assistance from other State Agencies of EU funded Operational Programmes;
- Projects with employees in excess of 10 people;
- Projects deemed to be capable of proceeding in any event without scheme assistance i.e. deadweight;
- Projects essentially comprising importation and distribution.

WHAT CAN THE VOUCHERS BE USED FOR?

- IT consultation;
- Development or upgrade of an e-commerce website;
- Implementing Online payments or booking systems;
- Purchase of Internet related software;
- Developing an app (or multiplatform webpages);
- Development of a digital marketing strategy;
- Implementing a digital marketing strategy;
- Training/skills development specifically to establish and manage an online trading activity.
- Subscriptions (excluding transaction costs) to low cost online retail platform solutions, which would allow applicants to quickly establish a retailing presence online.
- Purchase of online advertising (this purchase cannot make up any more than 30% of all other approved Voucher costs and can only be drawn down in one payment phase);
- Purchase of Professional Photography (this expenditure cannot make up any more than 80% of all other approved voucher costs and can only be drawn down in one payment phase)

What are the things the vouchers cannot be used for?

- Development of brochure websites*;
- Purchase of non-internet related software;
- Anything other than e-commerce trading related activity.

*** A brochure website is digital version of a printed brochure. They show the products or services your company provides, however, unlike an e-commerce website, they do not sell the product or service online or have an interactive booking function. With a brochure website, the goods and services are only displayed, so customers will have to contact the company to place an order.**

What else do I need to know about vouchers?

- Voucher approval must be gained prior to incurring any expense;
- Third party costs only will be considered. Own labour is not an eligible expense (labour of spouse or children also considered own labour);
- Claims can be made in either one or two instalments, and only made in respect of actual work completed (i.e. in respect of the components of the project works completed at the time the claim is being made). Expenditure on the various project components can only be claimed once.
- All third party/supplier invoices must contain proper business details (e.g. tax or business registration details or proof that the supplier is a registered business in the territory in which the supplier is located).
- Applications must be accompanied by written/emailed quotes for project works from three suppliers.

What is the voucher application and drawdown process?

Application

- Read the terms & conditions;
- If satisfied you are eligible and wish to apply register to participate in an information event;
- Participate in information session;
- Submit copy of completed and signed application form in hard copy to your local LEO;
- Soft copy of completed application to be supplied by email to your local LEO.

Evaluation

- Evaluation of applications will be conducted by each LEO who will make recommendations for approval;
- An evaluation team will assess the applications and make recommendations for approval;
- A competitive process will be put in place to assist with selection process. Selection of successful applicant will be based on the following criteria:
 - Project Suitability;
 - Value Added potential;
 - Export potential;
 - Job creation potential;
 - How will the project aid the business post the COVID-19 Pandemic;
 - Financial sustainability.
- Record decisions and report to the Local Enterprise Office approvals committee;
- As part of the application process applicants will be required to participate in an information session on how to use and get the best value for money from the voucher.

Voucher administration

- If your application is successful, a letter of offer - detailing the works and amount approved - will be sent to you for you to forward to your preferred supplier.
- The voucher is a letter of offer which is sent to the successful applicant;
- Letter of offer should be signed, accepted and returned within 2 weeks;
- Successful applicants have 4 months to complete the work as per their application.

Drawdown

Payment will be made directly to the successful applicant upon satisfactory receipt of the following:

- Declaration, completed and signed by supplier, briefly detailing the works carried out and indicating they have been completed and fully paid for. This should be submitted by the supplier directly to Local Enterprise Office (LEO).
- Applicant/Client submits:
- Declaration of project completion
- Original paid invoice(s) for the work completed from the supplier(s), with the evidence of supplier details e.g. Company Registration Office (CRO) details, or VAT details or evidence of tax compliance, or proof that the supplier is registered in the territory in which the supplier is located.
- Bank Statement(s) showing proof of payment to the supplier(s)
- Supplier receipts in respect of each component of work carried out.
- Evidence of tax compliance in respect of the applicant/client business
- A copy of applicant/client CRO registration or other proof that the applicant/client business has been trading for at least 6 months.

All work must be completed and paid for prior to claim.

Payments will only be made with relation to approved expenses which form part of this application form.

All successful applicants agree that they will allow reference be made to them in case study materials, which may be used to promote the voucher scheme more widely.

What is post-voucher reporting and how does it apply to me?

By accepting a Trading Online Voucher, successful applicants agree to report on online trading from participation in the scheme, again in 6 months and at annual intervals up to three years thereafter. Reporting will include: jobs (new or reallocated), increased turnover, exports and/or domestic market expansion, reduced costs and expected follow on investment. This may be conducted by Local Enterprise Offices, Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment or approved independent evaluators.

Suppliers will be required to report on the impact of their products and services supplied to the applicant business.

- Reporting will include how their product or service enabled trading online, improved business performance, reduced cost, opened markets etc.

What is 'De Minimis' aid?

The Trading Online Voucher Scheme funding is provided under the European Commission Regulation on 'De Minimis' aid. De Minimis aid is limited amounts of State aid – up to €200,000 in any three-year period to any one enterprise. De Minimis aid is regarded as too small to significantly affect trade or competition in the common market. The amounts of grants are regarded as falling outside the category of State aid which is banned by the EC Treaty and, therefore, they can be awarded without reference to the European Commission.

However, a Member State must track De Minimis aid and make sure that combined De Minimis aid payments from all sources to an undertaking and/or business in any three fiscal year period respects the €200,000 ceiling.

Therefore, you need to **provide details of all other grant aid that has been awarded to you or your business within the past three years**. Please note that a false declaration to show a figure under the threshold of €200,000 could later mean that you would have to pay back the grant aid with interest.

Acknowledgements

The trading online voucher scheme is an initiative of the National Digital Strategy (Doing More with Digital National Digital Strategy for Ireland Phase 1 – Digital Engagement), developed and funded by the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment on behalf of Government. It is being administered by the Local Enterprise Offices.

FURTHER TERMS

Applications for assistance for expenditure incurred prior to grant approval are ineligible. The Local Enterprise Office reserves the right to refuse any application and the right to terminate this grant scheme at any time without notice.

The approval of applications and the payment of all monies are dependent on the availability of resources under this scheme from the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment.

Applicants are advised to check availability of resources with Local Enterprise Office prior to applying. All applicants approved must draw down in full within 4 months of the date of offer.

Failure to draw down all or any portion may result in automatic de-committal without notice, i.e. loss of voucher. The Local Enterprise Office may liaise/consult other agencies/local development programmes in relation to this proposal while respecting project confidentiality.

Any false or misleading statement or the withholding of essential information from Local Enterprise Office (as

determined by Local Enterprise Office) will result in cancellation of any grant approved under this scheme.

PLEASE NOTE: *The Local Enterprise Office is not responsible for any disputes between the applicant and 3rd party suppliers. Therefore we recommend that you adhere to best business practice and get three quotes as well as carry out due diligence before selecting a supplier.*

Disclaimer – *For the avoidance of doubt it is understood and accepted that it is the applicant companies who are selecting and entering into a contract with third parties. The State and its agents (including Local Enterprise Office(s), Enterprise Ireland or any Government Department) does not accept any liability whatsoever in respect of any deficit in or consequences arising from products or services procured by or provided to companies under this scheme. In submitting your application under this scheme you are confirming that you understand and accept this disclaimer.*