



Chiara Keating & Barry McCabe, of Uniformal

## CLIENT FOCUS

### ADAPTING TO BUSINESS DURING COVID-19 CRISIS

*THERE IS NO ESCAPING THE FACT THAT THE CORONAVIRUS HAS DRAMATICALLY CHANGED THE WAY WE ALL DO BUSINESS. BUT SOME SMALL BUSINESSES HAVE BEEN FORTUNATE ENOUGH TO BE ABLE TO ADAPT THEIR PRODUCT DURING THESE UNPRECEDENTED TIMES.*

#### Uniformal in South Dublin

These days many uniforms signify the hugely important role countless people are playing in this fight against COVID-19. But while those in the medical, emergency, retail, postal and delivery sectors – to name just a few – are quite literally keeping society going, the demand for new uniforms has petered out.

Supplying bespoke and premium ready-to-wear uniform solutions to Irish businesses for the past three decades, Uniformal, backed by Local Enterprise Office South Dublin, saw a decline in demand with many of their clients in the hospitality and corporate sectors shutting up shop until the current crisis is over.

But recognising the demand for PPE, the Dublin-based firm decided to diversify and began producing antibacterial reusable facemasks with an anti-microbial finish.

Supported by their LEO with a Business Priming Grant, the company had expanded into a derelict unit where they installed their new state-of-the-art design studio and manufacturing facility, which Chiara Keating realised was perfect for their new production line.

“I’m a get-things-done kind of person, and inaction stresses me out as I feel a real loss of control when I’m not addressing problems,” she says. “As I was seeing what was happening in the world, I started planning a strategy for our business to

cope with the changes. This planning had three benefits for me: It kept me busy, distracted me from the horror of what was happening and provided a solution for the company.”

So although some staff had to be let go temporarily, changes were swiftly made as Uniformal began to address the increasingly changing demand and now, not only have those employees been reinstated, but others are being employed.

“Together with our head of design, we created a reusable antimicrobial face mask [and other PPE] and made the decision to retool our production line to manufacturing them,” says Keating. “Having sourced the correct specialist materials and rearranged machines in line with social distancing protocols, we brought back our staff and are now hiring more machinists.”

“We are experiencing huge demand and have been able to stay open through the crisis and create more jobs. But most importantly we are really happy to be contributing to something positive during such a difficult time. We have set the wholesale price for the reusable masks so it covers the cost of the raw materials and manufacture and we distribute them here in Dublin in the hope that we can have a positive impact during the crisis and that our business and staff will still be here when all this is over.”

[www.uniformal.ie](http://www.uniformal.ie)



Joanne Browne, founder of Jo Browne

### Jo Browne in Carlow

When she established her company in 2016, **Joanne Browne**, backed by Local Enterprise Office Carlow, relied on her passion for aromatherapy to create Jo Browne – a range of handmade solid perfume, cologne and skin-care products using only natural ingredients and organic beeswax.

Like many businesses, hers was greatly affected by the current pandemic so she began creating a product which is much sought after both for professional and personal use.

The Carlow based businesswoman began making hand sanitiser which is gentle on the skin as well as providing essential protection.

A client of Local Enterprise Office Carlow, her business has been supported with a Business Priming Grant and Technical Assistance for Micro Exporters (TAME) grant and she says she and her team have been working flat out to keep up with demand.

“We had to adapt very quickly and look at what was needed,” she says. “I had been researching the global market on cosmetics and noticed hand sanitisers were in high demand, so research happened very quickly on our side. The development was very tough and there were lots of late nights – sourcing bottles alone was a nightmare as other companies were also starting to make the same thing.”

“But so far, our adaptation has been very successful, I’m lucky as The Jo Browne factory is next door to my house. And in order to be different to others, we added Glycerin, Aloe Vera and Pro vitamin B5 to protect the hands, so the Jo Browne Fresh hands sanitizer is less harsh than others in the market.”

The response from her customers has been very positive and while making the changes took time and effort, Browne advises others to strive to keep their businesses going through the crisis.

“My advice to others would be to stay in touch with stockists, get an online shop up and running and keep pushing social media to keep the brand alive,” she says. “But above all, stay positive and use your time to develop new products or improve on old ones and come back with a bang.”

[www.jobrowne.com](http://www.jobrowne.com)



‘Sneeze Guard’, by Kilkee Forge

### Kilkee Forge in Clare

**Conor Murray** of Kilkee Forge, backed by Local Enterprise Office Clare, is a fifth-generation blacksmith and his bespoke ironwork creations earned him the coveted title of Ireland’s Best Young Entrepreneur for Clare in 2019.

And while this accolade was undoubtedly prestigious, the accompanying prize allowed him to purchase equipment, such as a CNC router and 3D printer, which were initially intended to produce scaled models of large sculptures, but in recent weeks, have enabled him to develop freestanding Perspex ‘sneeze guards’ to protect both staff and customers in the retail industry.

“Rather than using my CNC Router for its intended use, I have been using it to cut out bespoke acrylic screens/sneeze guards for the retail sector,” he says. “Each shop has different requirements and with the combination of my modelling software and my CNC, I can cater for individual needs. There has been huge demand, with most retail outlets in my area now fully kitted out.

“My 3D printer was also laying idle, so I have started manufacturing protective face shields and visors for the healthcare sector. There is currently a huge shortage of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) in the healthcare sector, so I decided to design and produce visors which would work for healthcare staff. These masks are currently being produced at my studios and we will be donating them to healthcare staff in the coming days.”

While the coronavirus greatly affected his business initially, Murray’s adaptations have been very successful, and he says thinking outside the box is crucial.

“Almost overnight, everything in business seems to have changed and if we don’t react to that change we will be left behind,” he says.

“Struggling businesses out there must react promptly to this change and attempt to understand the new needs of their customer, both through this challenging time and beyond. Don’t be left behind. If your cheese has been moved – don’t delay – go and find new cheese.”

[www.kilkeeforge.ie](http://www.kilkeeforge.ie)

**TO FIND OUT HOW YOUR LOCAL ENTERPRISE OFFICE CAN HELP YOUR BUSINESS RESPOND, PLEASE VISIT [LOCALENTERPRISE.IE/RESPONSE](http://LOCALENTERPRISE.IE/RESPONSE)**