



Where **Owner Managers**
do the Business

What is PLATO ?

PLATO is an all island business support network dedicated to the successful development of owner managed small to medium sized businesses in every area of commercial activity.

Supported by a wide range of business development agencies, in particular the County and City Enterprise Boards, FAS, Accel, and many of the most prestigious companies operating in Ireland, PLATO offers a unique business support forum aimed at developing the business awareness and skills of **Owner Managers** in order that they can more successfully pursue their ambitions.

There are PLATO networks situated throughout Ireland and Europe with PLATO Dublin being one of the largest and most successful. Over the past 10 years more than 1100 Owner Managers have participated in and hugely benefited from the PLATO Dublin programme.

Why do so many Owner Managers join PLATO ?

Owner Managers wishing to develop their business invariably face many challenges and uncertainties and in all cases can benefit greatly from the right type of assistance and support. This is what PLATO offers. Those who successfully participate in the PLATO programme invariably show.

- **Greatly improved management awareness and effectiveness**
- **Greater business productivity**
- **Increased turnover and profits**

Participant businesses can vary from those in operation for as little as 2 years to as many as 20 years. Only businesses that have moved beyond the start up stage are eligible to join and for those businesses the only criteria that PLATO has is that participants genuinely wish to improve themselves as managers, to develop their business and to commit to full participation in the programme for its duration.

How does PLATO work ?

Every year PLATO runs a development programme which lasts 20 months. There are many strands to the assistance and support which the programme provides, including training and networking, but at its core are the monthly Owner Manager **Group Meetings**.

Participants are formed into a number of groups based in various locations and each group meets for 3 hours every month to discuss their business issues. The meetings are held in the premises of PLATO **Parent Companies** at a time and day chosen by the participants themselves and are chaired and facilitated by **Group Leaders**.

Each group typically contains 12 – 15 like minded and ambitious Owner Managers who want to develop both their own skills and the success of their business. The make up of each group is carefully considered by PLATO to incorporate the best mix of expertise and range of business experience. Every effort is made to place participants in a group location close to their business. Each programme typically contains 80 – 90 participants.

What are Parent Companies and Group Leaders ?

This is one of the most unique aspects of PLATO. A wide range of large national and international companies work with PLATO to assist in the development of small to medium sized businesses. Such PLATO Dublin 'parent companies' include

Diageo Ericsson AIB Microsoft IBM Wavin Maxol Mazars Eagle Star Shamrock Foods Readymix Sage and many others.

The business departments of major educational organisations also act as Parent Companies. These include UCD, DCU and DLIADT.

These parent companies provide some of their best and experienced managers to act as co-ordinators and facilitators in each group. These are termed 'group leaders' and are fully conversant with all aspects of small business and the needs of SME Owner Managers. Each group has two such Group Leaders.

What happens at group meetings ?

At the heart of the PLATO programme is the sharing of information, expertise and experiences that is generated at the group meetings which also act as a sounding board for ideas and suggestions raised by group members. Group members raise issues relevant to their business and the group as a whole then acts as an advisory forum to discuss these issues with the aim of providing as many options, ideas and solutions as possible.

This interactive learning is greatly enhanced by the input of a wide range of business experts who are brought into the group meetings to advise on specific topics raised by the members. Although the Group Leaders co ordinate

and facilitate the meetings it is the group members who decide what topics are discussed.

A very supportive environment very quickly develops within the group in which no competing businesses are placed so that an open and free discussion forum thrives.

Training and Networking

In addition to the group meetings there is a comprehensive range of training modules/seminars and networking events, details of which are regularly posted on the PLATO Dublin web site. While only the Owner Managers can attend the monthly group meetings their staff can attend the training and networking events.

An added dimension to PLATO is the 'progression groups'. Once an Owner Manager completes the core PLATO programme he/she can opt to join past participants of other groups in an **Advanced PLATO Group**. This can be done immediately after their core programme finishes or at a later date.

With over 2,000 business in Ireland and tens of thousands across Europe having participated in PLATO there are great networking opportunities available through the various PLATO regions.

What are the benefits of PLATO ?

Participants invariably develop a new, more dynamic and professional way of thinking about their business and indeed their own role within the business. They also acquire a new range of skills, which combined with their new way of thinking is translated into new and more successful ways of managing their business.

PLATO is not a quick fix process but addresses all the elements which effect the operation and success of a business. In this task it pursues a **very practical** approach by addressing the **real needs** of each of the programme participants. Some of these needs may be known at the start of the programme while others only become apparent to the individual participants as the programme progresses.

Every PLATO programme is subject to independent evaluation and such evaluations invariably show the benefits of participation for Owner Managers. The Enterprise Ireland/FAS 'Expert Group on Future Skills Needs' report, published in May 2006, identified PLATO as playing a significant role in SME management development.

Go2web



Web Design and Web Marketing
In business for 5 years. Staff of 7
Joined PLATO in 2002
Turnover increased 2003-4 by 26%

Ian Jackson "PLATO completely transformed the business. I couldn't recommend PLATO highly enough to any small business wishing to develop."

Artisan Image Solutions



Corporate and Architectural Signage
In business for 4 years.
Staff of 8
Turnover increased by 400% between 2002 and 2006

Bill Griffin "PLATO showed us how improved management skills has a direct relationship with better company performance and also helped us gain those improved management skills."

For further information please call 01 676 3973

Sam's Cookies



Manufacture of handmade cookies and cakes.

In business for 13 years. Staff of 13

Keith Johnson "Participation in PLATO gave me a whole new outlook on how to develop the business. The association with other like minded Owner Managers was a great source of ideas and support."

K and K Packs



Wholesale suppliers of Potatoes, Fruit and Vegetables.

In business for 25 years. Staff of 35

Deirdre Kennedy "PLATO focused my attention on developing my business through innovation and effective Strategic Planning. The vast knowledge and experience imparted by our expert high profile group leaders were invaluable."

SNC Engineering



Building services design. In business for 22 years.

Staff of 11

Sean Costelloe "Participation in PLATO has made a huge difference to how both I and the business operates. Since joining PLATO in 1999 turnover has quadrupled and we have opened branches in other parts of the country."



PLATO DUBLIN WEBSITE

Log onto www.plato.ie/dublin to get updates of PLATO news, events, opportunities and programmes.

If you are interested in finding out more about how PLATO can assist you and your business contact our office. You can also complete the **REPLY FORM** on line and email it to us requesting a meeting.

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Cover photo: PLATO National Networking Day



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