

SMALL BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

The small business enterprise with 50 employees or less which, in the opinion of the judges, exemplifies best practice and achievement across the board. Entries for this premier award category can be made directly and winning entries in all other categories will also be considered.

Entry Guidelines:

- Evidence of growth and development
- A clear vision and strategy to deliver growth
- A commitment to superior customer service
- Demonstration of innovation across the business

HEALTHCARE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Another specialist category, aimed at small business enterprises in the healthcare field here in Northern Ireland. This category is open to all business-led healthcare related organisations including opticians, dental practices and enterprises such as care homes for the elderly.

Entry Guidelines:

- evidence of strong leadership and company direction
- a commitment to innovation and R&D across the business
- a commitment to superior customer care.

- a demonstrable and continued commitment to marketing

MANUFACTURING BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

A category open to all companies with 50 employees or less engaged directly in the manufacture of products for sale in Northern Ireland and in export markets. The judges will look for evidence of research and development as well as innovation in manufacturing.

Entry Guidelines:

- evidence of strong leadership and company direction
- evidence of growth and expansion – especially in export markets
- a commitment to innovation and R&D across the business
- a commitment to superior customer care.
- a demonstrable and continued commitment to marketing

TECHNOLOGY BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

This award is open to all small businesses based in Northern Ireland who provide products and/ or services in the wider technology field, including IT services, software development, technology product innovation and consultancy.

Entry Guidelines:

- evidence of strong leadership and company direction
- evidence of growth and expansion – especially in export markets
- a commitment to innovation and R&D across the business
- a commitment to superior customer care
- a demonstrable and continued commitment to marketing

CUSTOMER FOCUS AWARD

Our judging panel will single out the local small business which most effectively brings to life best practice in customer service across all of its operations. The judges will look for clear evidence of customer satisfaction.

Entry Guidelines:

- a demonstrable commitment to superior customer care
- evidence of strong leadership and company direction on instilling a customer care ethos
- evidence of active customer listening and feedback mechanisms
- a commitment to innovation in customer service delivery
- clear evidence of improving customer satisfaction levels

AGRI-FOOD BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Northern Ireland's leading small business operating in the agri-food sector, to include food and drink producers, farm-based enterprises and companies providing products and services to the agri-food industry here.

Entry Guidelines:

- evidence of strong leadership and company direction
- evidence of recent growth and expansion – especially in export markets
- a commitment to product innovation and R&D across the business
- a commitment to quality production/ superior customer care
- a demonstrable and continued commitment to marketing

INNOVATIVE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Open to companies operating in any business sector, this award will go to the organisation which best illustrates the most effective use of innovation through investment in innovative practices, leading edge products and/or services to contribute to overall business success.

Entry Guidelines:

- evidence of a strong commitment to innovation and R&D which has resulted in improved business results and financial performance

- illustrations of the types of product or service innovation undertaken and evidence of how they have driven business growth
- evidence of customer focussed innovation using research/evidence base
- demonstrable use of strategic partnerships/alliances/collaboration to deliver innovation benefits
- evidence of an “innovation culture” and its promotion within the business

SMALL BUSINESS MARKETING AWARD

Open to companies in all sectors of the local business community, this award sets out to recognise and showcase the organisation which best uses marketing – including advertising, PR or the strategic use of digital platforms and social media - to enhance business performance across the board.

Entry Guidelines:

- a demonstrable and continued commitment to marketing and brand development
- evidence of a planned and strategic approach to marketing using research/evidential base
- innovative use of marketing tools and their integration around a core marketing strategy
- evaluation of marketing activity to understand its impact
- evidence of quantifiable business benefits resulting from marketing activity

EXPORTER OF THE YEAR

An award which will recognise the top achieving exporting company from Northern Ireland's small business community, recognising sales achievement in all markets outside of Northern Ireland itself, including both the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain.

Entry Guidelines:

- evidence of a strong commitment to exporting which has resulted in improved business results and financial performance outside of Northern Ireland
- evidence of increase in export levels in relation to size of the company
- evidence of customer/market focussed innovation using research/evidence base
- identification of the barriers for export and evidence of how the business successfully overcame them
- demonstrable use of strategic partnerships/alliances/collaboration to deliver export growth

COMMUNITY CONTRIBUTION AWARD

Despite smaller budgets, corporate responsibility plays an important role for small businesses in Northern Ireland. This special award will recognise the best example

of how small businesses here can help to make a difference in the communities they serve.

Entry Guidelines:

- a demonstrable and continued commitment to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)
- development of a programme in conjunction with local community partners
- evidence of a planned and strategic approach to CSR
- demonstrable positive impact of the CSR programme on staff
- demonstrable positive impact of the CSR programme on the local community

HOSPITALITY & TOURISM BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

A special category aimed directly at Northern Ireland's growing number of small tourism and hospitality-related business enterprises, including pubs, restaurants, cafes, smaller hotels, tourism activity businesses and transport and travel providers.

Entry Guidelines:

- evidence of strong leadership and company direction
- evidence of recent growth and expansion – especially in attracting new customers

- a demonstrable commitment to product/service innovation
- a demonstrable commitment to superior customer care and quality service provision
- a demonstrable and continued commitment to marketing and marketing innovation

START-UP BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

Aimed at Northern Ireland's most promising start-up enterprise, the award will go to a young company of one year old or less which, in the view of the judging panel, best illustrates what can be achieved by start-up businesses across any sector here in Northern Ireland.

Entry Guidelines:

- evidence of strong leadership and company direction
- evidence of recent growth and expansion – especially in attracting new customers or investors
- a demonstrable commitment to product/service innovation
- a demonstrable commitment to superior customer care and quality service provision
- a demonstrable and continued commitment to marketing and marketing innovation

INDEPENDENT RETAILER OF THE YEAR

This award will set out to recognise a leading player from Northern Ireland's traditionally strong independently-owned retail sector. The category is open to locally-owned retail businesses, including both single site retailers and independent retail groups who meet the overall Small Business Awards criteria, ie 50 employees or less. The judging panel will look for dynamic local retail sites or groups meeting the needs of customers and contributing to the broader retail sector here.

Entry Guidelines:

- evidence of innovation
- strong business performance
- effective use of marketing & design
- evidence of strong business performance
- customer focus and customer satisfaction

FAMILY BUSINESS OF THE YEAR

A new addition to the line-up for 2018, the Family Business Of The Year category is open to all SME's (less than 50 employees) which remain in family ownership and are based here in Northern Ireland.

Entry Guidelines:

- * Evidence of continued family leadership and direction
- * Evidence of growth and innovation through the years
- * Evidence of sustained performance, especially in recent years
- * Evidence of ambition and strategic planning.