

James Whelan Butchers and eircom broadband

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- Pat Whelan, MD,
James Whelan Butchers



James Whelan Butchers began life as a country business in Clonmel, servicing the surrounding area. Five generations later James Whelan Butchers is still a country business, but thanks to eircom broadband, it now caters for customers all over Ireland and has expanded into the UK.

James Whelan Butcher' philosophy has always been to provide customers with products that can be easily traced back to the local area. In the 1960s and 1970s the family butcher provided a van delivery service to clientele in the hinterland of Clonmel. As the market evolved, particularly with the advent of the supermarket culture, many traditional butchers were pushed out of the market; however James Whelan Butchers continued to thrive, due to its continued commitment to only sourcing and producing quality local produce.

The market has now come full circle from the 1990s, explains Pat Whelan, managing director of James Whelan Butchers. "We've gone back in time as such, with provenance and local produce becoming important to customers again."

Spotting the online opportunity

With consumers eager to buy fresh, locally produced artisan produce, James Whelan Butchers saw the opportunity to bring its services to a wider audience. "I saw the possibilities early on with the internet," says Pat. "The 'real' butcher experience has petered out particularly in urban areas, and I saw that we could bring our country business into urban environs, and bring it to a national and maybe even international audience."

Following trials in 2002 and 2003, Pat launched the James Whelan Butchers website at a Bord Bia organised event in Farnleigh, Dublin in September 2004. The site allows consumers to purchase locally-produced meat products from James Whelan Butchers with their purchase delivered to their home within 24 hours.

Broadband enhances website offering

In the beginning the website design and functionality was limited somewhat due to download times, explains Pat, who said he was wary of loading too many graphics onto the site as they could slow the whole site down. But then Pat signed up with eircom for a **Business Starter** broadband package, which allowed him to enhance his offering.

"With broadband we were able to add as many images as we wanted to our site, which I think is very important when it comes to sites like ours as people want to see what they're buying," said Pat. "We were also able to add a facility that enables users to take a virtual tour of our shop in Clonmel, which is also important as it creates that link to a physical place."

With so many images and the virtual tour on the website James Whelan Butchers is able to attract new customers easily and efficiently. The site is comprehensive and contains all the information a new customer needs to sign up and place an order, explains Pat.

Growing from strength to strength

The popularity of the website has continued to grow at a fast pace since its launch in 2004, with the service expanding into the UK in 2006. James Whelan Butchers' customers are located in towns from Donegal to Cork. The online butcher even has customers in Intel's facility in Leixlip, Co Kildare; over 50 employees of the multinational get their meat delivered to their workplace every Tuesday. The website has enabled the butcher to expand its target audience nationally and even further afield, without the traditional costs involved with setting up facilities around the country.

The crux of the James Whelan Butchers online offering is quality and convenience. The online butcher offers delivery anywhere in Ireland, ensuring that the busy Irish consumer can conduct their weekly meat shopping from the comfort of their own home.

Over time James Whelan Butchers has begun offering value-added services too such as a meal planning, recipe tips, and monthly newsletter. The site also securely stores all clients' information and order history so that repeat orders can be done quickly and efficiently.

"With these added extras our aim is to offer a real personal alternative to actual personal contact," explains Pat. "By providing value-added services we are able to retain our loyal customer, which is key to our continued success."

What next for James Whelan Butchers

James Whelan Butchers' online customer base continues to grow apace both in Ireland and more recently in the UK. The butcher is currently exploring the possibility of expanding its service into France.

Closer to home Pat says he would encourage other butchers to make the move online. "It's a small sector that would benefit greatly from an increase in competition."

With broadband, the possibilities are endless, according to Pat, who says that as society has changed, broadband is enabling people to create connections and to facilitate their busy lifestyles.

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