



Case study: Rockabill Seafood



Ownership type	Privately owned by Price family.
Business size	Medium.
Core activity	Buyer, processor and exporter of fish and shellfish.
Businesses	Nine businesses as part of the Rockabill Group (including Rockabill N.I Ltd.).
Address	Stephenstown Industrial Estate, Balbriggan.
Age	32 years.
Generation	Second (however, the Prices' fishing lineage dates back over three generations).
Employee no	220 (four family members actively involved).
Turnover range	€20-40M (group turnover).
Export markets	24 (e.g., Spain, China, New Zealand, US).
Main Brand	"Taste of the Sea".
Key Finding	Internationalisation strategy.

Company Background

The Price family has been involved in the fishing industry for over 30 years. Bill Price became a fisherman, like his father, and bought a truck so he could purchase and sell fish. Later, he secured a boat: the first of fourteen trawlers owned by the company today. In 1983, Bill established Rockabill Seafood Ltd. and built the company's processing plant in Balbriggan in 1998. The plant processes shellfish from live to frozen for retail own brand and company brand, "Taste of the Sea". The founder's son, Alan, has driven internationalisation in the company which is now almost 100% exports. The Rockabill Group has nine operations including three processing plants nationwide and a crab factory in England. The group is an exemplar of internationalisation, exporting to 24 countries, and selling to 200 suppliers globally.

Interview with Bill and Alan Price

Father and son joint managing directors of Rockabill Seafood Ltd.

Family Involvement

The founder Bill, and his son Alan, co-manage the Rockabill Group. There are two other sons who work as employees in non-managerial roles. From a young age, Alan became involved in the business. He spent considerable time on the fishing vessels learning the skills and knowledge of the industry, just as Bill had from his father. Once Alan began working in the business full time, he introduced ideas for business growth and success.

"I wanted to grow and expand the business. I asked for a fridge van as my first vehicle so I could buy cockles for the company." Bill welcomed the ambition Alan showed. *"It (Rockabill) grew from strength to strength based on Alan's involvement."*



Bill and Alan Price, co-managers of the Rockabill Group.



The founder's risk profile has changed with time. *"I'm at the stage to be cautious. I was lucky to have him coming behind me. He was vigorous"* — Bill. While Bill is lessening his involvement, Alan is driving forward new projects and business development, including diversification. *"I still have strong opinions. We're both entrepreneurs"* — Bill.

The fishing industry is difficult both in terms of physical labour and the unpredictability of raw supply. Clearly, both Bill and Alan are passionate about their work: *"I love it, if I wasn't in this factory I'd be fishing on a boat"* — Alan.

"We eat, sleep, and breathe it. We know every decision."

— Bill Price

Plant Expansion and Development

Alan and Bill have led the upgrade of production facilities for Rockabill. In 2015, the team completed a €3.5 million extension to their processing facilities in Balbriggan, making them the largest investors in Irish seafood processing for that year. The BRC accredited processing plant now has four cold stores.



Head office in Balbriggan

Rockabill Seafood — Internationalisation in Family Business

Horizontal integration through exports has been a major strategic feature of Rockabill Seafood Ltd. The company was named "Seafood Exporter of the Year" at the Export Industry Awards 2013. With 200 international suppliers against only ten Irish, Rockabill is almost completely export driven. The reason for this is due to Irish consumer tastes, says Alan: *"Irish consumption of seafood per annum is 16 kilos per adult compared to 70 kilos on the continent"*. In 2000, the company embarked on its first international venture by selling fish to Spain. Alan drove international growth, with the company now supplying to 24 countries globally.

Later, BIM (Bord Iascaigh Mhara) approached the company to arrange a joint marketing venture in China with another Irish seafood company. In 2012, Rockabill and Atlanfish joined together to target Chinese exports and established a new brand, Atlantic Gold. Rockabill sells live product to their international markets, including €6m worth of live product into Hong Kong. *"We're developing the Dublin Bay prawns over there (China)"* says Alan. Alan and Bill quickly learnt the nuances of the Chinese market, including consumer preferences and price setting, finding that when they first branched out there the *"competition between companies was cut-throat"*.

In another important international move, Alan and Bill bought a crab factory in Scarborough. The business was a family firm, left to a son after the sudden death of his father. *"We've been with them a couple of months and already we've increased employees from 5 to 25. We're bringing a full management structure to the business"* — Alan. Undoubtedly, their combined experience operating a family firm was an important factor in this acquisition.



Rockabill Processing Locations