



Case Study: J.H. McLoughlin Balbriggan



Ownership type	Privately owned by McLoughlin family.
Business size	Small.
Core activities	Oil distribution; grocery and petrol retailing (two garages and a depot).
Branches	J.H. McLoughlin & Co Ltd. Newbridge and Balbriggan.
Address	84 Drogheda St., Balbriggan.
Age	21 years old (almost 80 years in industry).
Generation	Third.
Employee no	36 (five family members actively involved).
Turnover range	€1-5M.
Key Finding	Resilience across generations.

Company Background

The McLoughlin family's venture into oil distribution began in 1937 when John H. McLoughlin set up operations in Newbridge, Co. Kildare. The business gradually expanded and in 1952 they purchased an oil depot in Drogheda followed by a forecourt and garage in Balbriggan in 1953. Following the founder's passing in 1954 the eldest son, Joe, became managing director of the business, with the assistance of his brothers Dessie and John. The family moved away from their agricultural roots and focused on the domestic heating market which has remained their core operation up to the present day. On Joe's passing in 1986, John and Dessie led the continued expansion and diversification of J.H. McLoughlin Ltd. The company was de-merged into two separate entities in 1995 with John continuing the Newbridge branch and Dessie overseeing J.H. McLoughlin Balbriggan Ltd. In the Newbridge branch, the family have diversified their core business of oil supply to include a range of household, car and pet products. Now in its third generation, the McLoughlin family use their rich experience and knowledge of the oil industry coupled with their committed workforce to ensure business survival.

Interview with Bernadette McLoughlin

Director of J.H. McLoughlin Balbriggan Ltd.

Family Involvement

In 1999, Dessie McLoughlin passed away and the business was transferred to his six children who are all shareholders. Managing Director, Denis, has led the company for the last 16 years. Anne-Marie is involved in finance, Joseph works in the supply and sale of oil and gas products, and Mary and Bernadette partake in operations at the Balbriggan petrol station and forecourt. An harmonious working relationship exists between all siblings says Bernadette. In answer to whether the family intends to keep the business multi-generational, Bernadette responds: "I would hope so, *absolutely*". Some members of the next generation are involved part-time through summer and weekend jobs.



Director, Bernadette McLoughlin



Community Embeddedness

Based in a small community such as Balbriggan, J.H. McLoughlins has established strong roots in the locality. Locally, they employ approximately 30 employees with over half in full-time employment. Their customer base is strongly farmer-led but they also deliver to private homeowners, factories and supply petrol at their garage and forecourt in Balbriggan. The company has a strong philanthropic ethos. *"We run a golf classic for the Lions club. We sponsor the Bettystown races."* In 2010, the company sponsored a fundraiser for Make A Wish Ireland held in memory of a local firefighter from Rush who lost his life. Additionally, they provide a retail unit as a space for a cancer support group in Balbriggan and sponsor local schools.



J.H. McLoughlin Oil fleet delivers to a range of customers from private homeowners to factories and farms



Gary Tolan, Bernadette McLoughlin and Joe Coleman of J.H. McLoughlins Balbriggan

J.H. McLoughlin Balbriggan — Resilience across Generations in Family Business

We can see this resilient mind-set across the generations of the McLoughlin family. In the founding generation, the company had to contend with a major global incident (World War II) which saw oil supplies rationed. Not deterred by the adverse conditions, John McLoughlin found other ways to generate finance for his family and started turf haulage and sales of kerosene and tractor oil. The next disruptive incident in the company was the death of the founder. With three premises to oversee, the company needed committed leaders at its various operations. Joe and John oversaw the expansion of the Newbridge branch while their brother, Dessie, aged 18, moved to set up both Balbriggan and Drogheda.

Further to this, the oil business is a difficult, dynamic environment and a relatively low margin industry. Since the start of the 21st century, oil prices have constantly fluctuated. *"It's a tough business now, not like years ago when we were very strong. There's a lot of competitiveness in oil now."* Competing against giant oil companies has proven challenging, but McLoughlin Oil remains relevant by keeping a close connection with its Balbriggan community and sustaining a loyal cohort of customers. *"It's a small community here and we're here so long. We've built up a loyal customer base of mainly farmers, then home owners and road users."* Retaining a hard-working, competent workforce is also important to business survival. *"We have staff here a long time, some for 30 years."*