



Pin Money Or More

WORDS: RUTH O'CONNOR

Direct selling is booming in Ireland and the profile of people working in this manner has come a long way since the Tupperware Party and the **Avon** Lady. Essentially though, it remains a flexible way to earn money by selling products to a circle of personal or wider contacts for a commission or a percentage of the sale value alongside other bonuses and incentives.

While the industry is still predominantly female-led, in Ireland the percentage of men involved has risen from ten to 25 percent since 2008. The number of people engaged in **direct selling** has increased since the recession began by 121 percent - and total figures are estimated at around 20,000 individuals.

Direct selling involves the retail of items such as household goods, health supplements, cosmetics and clothing through a representative of the company, often via door-to-door sales, parties and coffee mornings. Companies operating this way in Ireland include cosmetics brand **Oriflame**, clothing company **Captain Tortue**, Aloe Vera products **Forever Living** and Kleeneze household products.

"Traditionally this industry has been very attractive to mums who want to earn extra money but whilst they are still a dominant part of the industry we are also seeing more people of a different demographic," says **Lynda Mills**, Director of the **Direct Selling Association** of Ireland (DSAI). "More young people are coming into the industry, many of them want to run their own business and within **direct selling** you are effectively running your own business... there is a

minimal outlay financially so if it doesn't work for you, you haven't lost anything."

Based in Dublin city centre, **Lisa Morrissey** defies the stereotype of the direct seller. Familiar with the Aloe Vera products of **Forever Living** through her practice as an acupuncturist, Morrissey began working in the retail side of the business this February and says that things "keep getting better and better". It's clear that she is passionate about the brand which carries over 300 products including healthcare, sport and personal care products.

Having established her own business as a registered acupuncturist four years ago, Morrissey speaks of the minimal financial outlay involved in starting work with **Forever Living**, a US company who describe themselves as a "multilevel marketing business" for whom the representatives are the sales force. For €368 she purchased the starter pack of products which is valued at €500. Morrissey believes that it is important to be passionate and knowledgeable about your product and was herself attracted by the ethical and charitable nature of the brand which was established in the USA in 1978.

Morrissey says that while retailers will get a percentage of the value of what they sell as well as various other royalties and rewards (percentage of the company's overall profits for example) it is when you begin to manage and train other consultants and attain higher sales that you begin to see the increase in revenue.

It is perhaps extraordinary that the number of independent sales consultants earning a living this way continues to grow in the age of online shopping but **Lynda Mills** says that it is the convenience delivery, the ability to "try before



you buy" and the social side of shopping this way that consumers still enjoy.

"Even during a recession people are still interested in buying nutritional products, household products etc. and many people still want to treat themselves to a relatively inexpensive thing such as skincare or lipstick," says Mills. "One of the positive things is that the social side of **direct selling** really comes to the fore and people enjoy getting together to buy something that they would have gone to the high street to buy anyway," she says.

French clothing company **Captain Tortue** was founded in 1993 and has recently begun recruiting more sales representatives in Ireland. Mimi Bogelund, MD **Captain Tortue** UK & Ireland says that selling direct provides a better customer experience and a "positive opportunity" for both the consumer and the retailer. **Valerie Totman** is one of **Captain Tortue's** sales consultants and senior managers based outside Galway. Totman has been working for the brand part-time since 2008. Having made the "heart-breaking decision" to leave her job as office manager at a well known sporting venue in an effort to strike a work-life balance as the mother of two young children, Totman says she missed some of the social aspects and the "glamour" that went along with her full-time job.

She began retailing the childrenswear first and then the womenswear whilst working part-time. Within a year she was manager of six women and gave up her part-time job in 2012 "to focus on **direct selling** which works so well around the family". For Totman the seasonal aspect of fashion works for her as she sells two collections per year and the gap in selling coincides with her children's summer holidays. She also manages and trains several other women and has won trips to France and St. Tropez with the company. "If you are this way inclined there is a brand for you," says Totman. "I have tried jewellery, makeup and children's books but this is a brand that really excites me - you have to believe in what you sell."

For both women the positivity that goes along with working as a direct seller and manager also appeals and they feel supported by the positivity, training and networking associated with the brands they work for. "I'm surrounded by very positive people," says

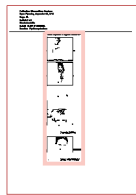
Totman. "It's about more than just selling clothes - we have great training and meet as a group a few times a year," while the representatives of **Forever Living** have monthly meetings including success days and awards. "Some people really like the fun, social aspect to the business too," says Morrissey. "It's very upbeat - there's a lot of positive thinking and motivation."

It's not all cups of tea and good times however. **Avon** is probably the brand most Irish consumers are familiar with in the **direct selling** space. The brand with the tagline "The Company for Women" showed their majority female representatives and customers little respect when they abruptly pulled out of Ireland in April last year - leaving a terse message on their website for representatives to contact their business developers and for customers to contact their representatives.

The DSAI say that the organisation endeavoured to place as many of **Avon's** sales representatives with other companies as possible and **Lynda Mills** says that becoming a member of the DSAI or working with one of the 16 member companies affiliated with the organisation offers the "safety of an ethical umbrella so the risk is reduced".

While the DSAI says that their member companies are not permitted to make a wealth statement and Valerie Totman says that it is not a "get rich quick" scheme, it is the case that for passionate, hardworking people, **direct selling** can become a way to gain an extra income. Whether that equates to a part-time or full-time income very much depends on the amount of work you put in.

Direct selling has worked well for Morrissey because she has an established base of clients through her acupuncture practice; she is also now able to take holidays as she has a regular income coming in aside from her day-to-day work as a therapist. "In some jobs you work really hard and you always earn the same money. With this type of work the harder you work the more you get out of it personally. If you want to work ten hours a week and sell to your friends you can probably earn a small income and pay some bills but if you really go for it you can start making money that can supplement or



even replace a regular income.”



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