

# AN ORGANIC ROUTE TO SUCCESS

By making use of web 2.0 tools such as blogging and social networking, Darren Grant has made his online store The Organic Supermarket a huge success



Darren Grant,  
owner manager of  
The Organic  
Supermarket

When he opened The Organic Supermarket in Blackrock in 2008, Darren Grant left a secure and very well-paid job to pursue his business idea.

"I had no experience in retail, but I really felt that food in Ireland was becoming monotonous and that some of the major supermarket chains were just taking over."

So he carried out a lot of research into the organic food area and detected a clear market niche.

"I decided to do research into it and I found out that there wasn't yet a 100pc dedicated organic supermarket in Ireland and went about building a business plan."

Now Ireland's largest organic retailer, Grant says he aims to steadily expand his business portfolio to make it Europe-wide within the next five years and has trademarked The Organic Supermarket in all EU member states.

While his original plan was to grow a physical retail business, in the "depths of the recession" he chose to set up an online store ([www.organicssupermarket.ie](http://www.organicssupermarket.ie)) as a more cost effective means of reaching new markets.

Today The Organic Supermarket employs six people, with Grant adding that good old-fashioned customer service is integral, whether interacting with customers online or in person.

"Our market went from 4,000 people to four million people overnight. In addition, our overheads remain the same yet we can exponentially grow our revenue through the same costs that we are incurring. I see the website as our core business going forward in 2010."

Live since only August 2009, The Organic Supermarket's website has already made quite an impact. At the Irish Web Awards, the website earned the accolade of 'Most Beautiful Website', while it also won 'Best Retail & Commercial Shopping Website' at the 2009 eircom Golden Spider Awards.

Realising the importance of having a web presence, Grant says he originally created the website as a

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marketing page to give people an overview of their products and to direct customers to where The Organic Supermarket was located.

However, while sales at the supermarket were growing quite well at the Blackrock store, Grant decided to really invest in the online space in early 2009.

"We took the ultimate gamble, which was the last of the capital that we had, and we pumped it into our e-business."

"We looked at a strategy of how we could keep our overheads the same, make an initial investment and expand our market beyond the surrounding area of Blackrock."

Teaming up with a web designer who had worked on The Organic Supermarket's original logo, Grant's criteria for his website was to have it non-corporate-like.

"My whole business concept is to be unique and to stand out from the crowd. To do that, I had to create a bespoke design."

"I wanted the brand to appear funky, yet functional, and to get the message across that the company is an independently-run Irish retail business selling quality goods. I wanted it to be fun and interactive."

To give online customers the feeling that they are "in-store", Grant set out to create a full visual shopping experience. That meant photographing every product that is on the website. So far, 1,750 products retail online, with the aim to have 3,500 products in place by March 2010.

"The customer can make the image larger and read the ingredients. It gives a sense of real shopping," he says.

As soon as The Organic Supermarket launched its website, Grant says people picked up on its distinctive design and graphics, with the news spreading globally via its blogs.

He has also recognised the value of integrating social media into his marketing approach and The Organic Supermarket now has a Twitter account and a Facebook page, both of which have 400 followers and fans.

"If I have a special offer or an interesting fact and I Twitter or Facebook it, I am hitting 800 people. We've integrated that technology into the website. We update our blog regularly, with celebrity chef Rozanne Steven contributing recipes to the site - we even put up our radio and TV interviews."

"For the past few months, the website has been getting 7,600 visitors per month, with an average of about 40,500 page impressions. It's getting busier and busier."

In terms of the company's broadband connection, which is with eircom, Grant says this is vital.

"Our broadband connection is absolutely critical. Being without it would be drastic for our business."