



Seamus McGowan, Managing Director, The Pallet Network.

JS: As there are a number of Pallet Networks established in Ireland, how does your company differ from the rest?

SMcG: The Pallet Network (TPN) differs from the rest in several crucial ways

- TPN has invested €10 million in a drive-thru hub specifically built for handling network pallets. This enables efficiency and quality to reach high levels that could not be achieved by using some other warehouse not designed for the job.
- TPN has invested heavily in IT tracking, marketing and sales to support network members, enabling them to grow their network business.
- TPN now has the largest network comprising 20 members, giving the network unrivalled coverage and at least one member in every Western seaboard county.
- TPN volumes are more than double our nearest rival.
- TPN is the only network in Ireland and the UK that has ISO 9001 accreditation for all its members.
- No ownership by members, which avoids preferential treatment that could compromise service.
- Our hub location on the M50 is crucial in keeping pallet cost down for Dublin freight, which is half the overall volume.

JS: TPN has a number of expansion plans in the pipeline in Ireland and the EU. What does this entail?

SMcG: TPN plans to continue to grow at thirty per cent per annum in Ireland; all its efforts will be geared to that end. Current hub capacity is 3500 pallets per night. Over the next three years, we will be providing for twice that volume - 7000 pallets per night.

The UK networks are examining expansion opportunities in Western Europe. We at TPN are in the early stages of researching prospects in Eastern Europe where we feel there may be good opportunities for this model.

JS: In mentioning Poland as part of your broader EU expansion plans, are you confident that all the services required to operate there will be available as per Ireland?

SMcG: While details are not finalised, we have a researcher on the ground in Poland and we are progressing with the project.



Wicklow based Hearty Distribution has become the latest member of TPN. Colm Hearty, Owner & Depot Principal is pictured with Owen Cooke, Chairman, TPN.

One-to-One

with Seamus McGowan,
Managing Director,
The Pallet Network

JS: Will the use of your double-deck trailers be restricted in mainland Europe?

SMcG: There are height issues anywhere you seek to use double-decked trailers but as we effectively use trailers that are capable of using the Dublin Port Tunnel, we don't expect too much difficulty with this. Truck and drag vehicles may be used instead of double-decked trailers on routes with low bridges in the Polish model.

JS: As transport has to become more eco-friendly, how is TPN becoming more environmentally aware?

SMcG: The TPN model is, by its nature, eco-friendly in that it reduces mineral oil consumed per pallet delivered by about 50 per cent. This is achieved by the extensive use of double decked trailers, two-way loading and members operating a smaller territory with a higher volume of pallets.

We are moving the fleet across to bio-diesel soon. Not only is this fuel renewable but it is also home-produced, reducing the import bill as another bonus for the economy.

Our hub is heated by burning broken pallets; no oil or gas is consumed. We are examining every aspect of our business in our effort to reduce consumption of non-renewable fuels and reduce harmful emissions.

JS: Will you be promoting this message? How?

SMcG: We will make it known that we are acting responsibly with regards to the environment and the economy, but our main motivation in bringing in these policies and practices is that it is the right thing to do. It is not essential to shout it from roof tops.

JS: Will you see further amalgamation of the Pallet Networks in Ireland and what's your take on the future of the haulage industry here?

SMcG: We have no doubt that more of the LCL (less than container load) pallet delivery market (apart from Hazchem and temperature control goods) will move to the pallet network model, as has happened in the UK.

The pallet network model is the only efficient way to do this business and the rising cost of diesel will make this move even more urgent. It is, however, not easy to get all the ingredients for a successful network together. In the UK there are eleven major networks for a population of 60 million while we already have five networks for a population of five million in Ireland.

It is our belief that there is only room for two or three good networks in the Irish market. These networks have to be prepared to invest substantial amounts of money to become successful. So far, TPN is the only network to have invested the necessary money in buildings, development, IT and service maintenance.

JS: What's your own background in the transport industry?

SMcG: I joined TNT Skypak UK in 1988 as a Financial Accountant. I transferred in 1989 to their worldwide HQ based out of Windsor and worked as an Internal Auditor reporting on more than 20 countries in a two-year spell.

Then, I worked in South Africa, Italy and Ireland in the Financial Controller role. In 1996, I was sent to Vietnam as TNT Country Manager and in 1999 I took on the same role in Poland. I returned home in 2000 worked in An Post for a short period and took up the MD role in Independent Express Cargo in 2003.

Owen Cooke, Chairman of Independent and I set up TPN Ireland in 2004.