



# Firm is happy to deliver the goods

By Nicola Cooke

A logistics business that was set up at the height of the economic boom to make transporting freight more efficient is predicting growth, as more companies seek to cut their costs.

In 2004, Owen Cooke's freight business, Independent Express Cargo, was 20 years old but, responding to what he saw as "the ineffective transport network for goods" in Ireland, he decided to set up The **Pallet Network** (TPN) with business partner Seamus **McGowan**.

Cooke's idea was to invest in a structured logistics system that could handle the delivery of goods on pallets nationwide and to Britain. The system is based around a €10 million central storage facility in Dublin, with 23 independently owned depots across the country, including depots in every county on the west coast.

Every night, 50 double-deck trucks go from these depots to the central facility, where they unload goods and pick up others. By operating at night, they avoid any traffic delays, creating a cost-effective distribution system, according to Cooke.

The group moves about 25,000 tonnes of goods a month, from food and confectionery products to textiles and building and DIY goods. Cooke said that business was on the rise after a "fairly catastrophic" year for the freight industry in 2009, when cargo levels fell 16 per cent.

"In the first quarter of this year, we moved 76,000 tonnes, compared to 59,000 in the same period last year, and 69,000 in 2008," he said. "If the figures are adjusted to account for new business, then we are up 8.5 per cent this year to date."

The surprise shutdown of seven DHL depots across the country last year worked to TPN's benefit, when it picked

up some former DHL customers. Cooke said that TPN was now the biggest player in the highly fragmented logistics market, with about 5 per cent market share. He plans to increase this figure through initiatives including increased marketing.

"We are able to offer reductions and good prices to our customers, because our operation is cost-effective," he said. "There are no empty trucks driving around the country to pick up loads, as may be the case with some of our competitors."

The 23 companies that are part of TPN have 450 staff, and the group is predicting turnover of €9 million this year, up from €8 million last year. Cooke's own business, Independent Express Cargo, has about 25 staff and expects turnover to rise to €7 million this year.



**Owen Cooke** and, at rear, **Seamus McGowan** of The **Pallet Network**

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