SALON
SOLUTIONS

A SALON'S GUIDE
TO THE TRADING ONLINE VOUCHER GRANT

Tips, Tricks &
Suggested Answers

ntroduction

A Salon's Guide to the Trading Online Voucher scheme

It is as important to invest as much attention into your digital or "online" Salon as you have or will spend on your physical bricks and mortar location. To your client, your virtual online Salon is an extension of your physical Salon, and vice versa, to them it's all the same. When you market your business via Instagram or Facebook you will be directing them to your virtual or online Salon and when they get there they need to understand you and your brand, what your business stands for, as well as be able to complete basic transactions like book a treatment or buy the products you have been recommending to them.

The **Trading Online Voucher Scheme** is a great opportunity for your salon to get funding to develop its online presence, grow your business and increase revenues. Studies show that Salons can boost their revenues by up to 30% by selling retail products to clients via an online shop, check out this article by Stephanie Michell and by up to 70% with the effective use of a good booking system, check out our e-book The Ultimate Guide To Salon Booking Systems

Too often Salons do not give their online strategy the attention or the investment it requires. The Trading Online Voucher Scheme give you an opportunity to address this.

What is the Trading Online Voucher Scheme

Your local Enterprise Office will **pay 50% of the costs** up to a maximum of €2,500 to improve your **Salon's online presence**. For every € you invest they will match it! This represents a huge opportunity for those of you that have yet to get a website, an online shop, a booking system or receive financial support for many other key areas of your business. This guide

details the key steps you need to take to insure your application is successful. We will be leveraging the experience we have acquired in helping many other Salons through the application process. Using this experience we have created this **"How to apply for the online voucher"** as a resource written especially for Salons and aims to provide tips and tricks to ensure you are successful in your grant application.

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The Trading Online Voucher Scheme

The **Local Enterprise Trading Online Voucher** is a government grant scheme, designed to assist small businesses with up to 10 employees. It offers financial assistance of 50% of eligible costs to a maximum of €2,500 (exclusive of VAT), to enable that business to create or develop an online capability and improve sales. This includes the purchase of technologies like websites, online shops, bookings systems and mobile apps but also includes training, advice and subscription fees.

You can also apply for a SECOND grant after the first successful grant is awarded and your project is finished. Therefore, you need to think carefully about your strategy. For example, you might use your first grant as a phase 1 using it to buy or upgrade a website and online shop and then use your Second grant to add a booking system and mobile app or invest in advertising. We believe it is perfectly possible to get a complete and high-quality online presence (Website, online shop, mobile app & booking system) for less than €3,000 of your own money when used in conjunction with the maximum grants available to you and you follow the key recommendations detailed in this guide.

Does Your Salon Qualify for the Trading Online Voucher Scheme

The vouchers are targeted at businesses with the following profile:

- Limited or no e-commerce presence.
- 10 or fewer employees.
- Turnover less than €2m;
- Applicant business must be trading for at least 6 months*.
- Your business must be located in the area covered by the LEO to whom they make their application i.e. LEOs cannot accept applications from businesses located outside their jurisdiction.
- Completed an online trading voucher seminar within the last 9 months
- Previous voucher recipients may apply for a second voucher

*applicant business must provide clear proof of trading for a minimum of 6 months to their Local Enterprise Office.

For Full Details Go to the
Local Enterprise Office Website

How to Apply

When you have confirmed that your Salon satisfies the criteria listed above you need to take the next 3 steps.

1. Register and attend the information webinar with your Local Enterprise Office.
2. Decide on your plan
3. Get 3 supplier quotes

Find your Local Enterprise Office (LEO) and register for your local information seminar.

You must register and attend a half-day Information Seminar (usually online) on how to use and get the best value for money from the voucher. This is mandatory before you can write and submit your grant application. You must attend an information seminar in the same location as your business trades. You can find when the next seminar is due to be held by looking at the events area of your local LEO office. You can find your local LEO office by using their interactive map:

https://www.localenterprise.ie/ Find-Your-Local-Enterprise-Office/

Example of events page for Wicklow: https:// www.localenterprise.ie/Wicklow/

What Can You Spend Your Voucher Money on

The information webinar will present you with ideas on how you might use the money from the grant to maximise the benefit to your business. Below is a list of areas you can use the funding for to help your salon. It is possible to use the grant to pay monthly subscription fees and you can select more than one item from the list, for example, your project could involve branding, a website with online sales and some photography. Or you could use the grant for an online shop or salon app and the monthly subscriptions - paid in advance for the year.

1. **Salon branding -** logo, social profile, branding, colour palette, brand guidelines and more

2. **Online Shop -** Development of a new e-commerce website

3. **Improve / Upgrade -** an existing website, online shop booking system etc

4. **Booking system -** Cost to deploy and pay for monthly subscription fees

5. **Subscriptions -** Website domain registration, hosting and/or low-cost online shopping platform subscriptions for the year*
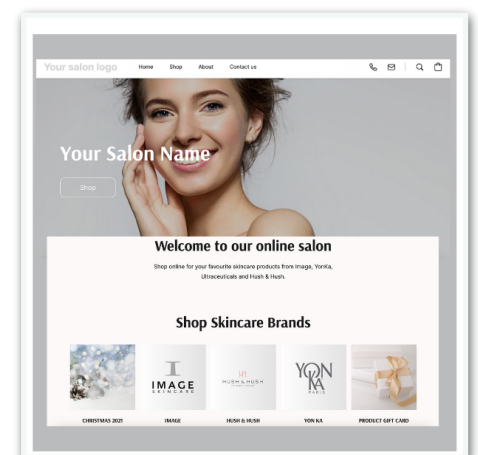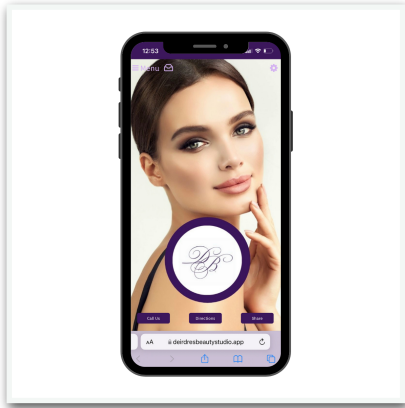
6.**Advertising** - on Google or Instagram and Facebook (max of 30% of eligible costs and drawn down only in one payment phase)

7.**Mobile Phone App** - Get a salon app for easier access for clients and include the monthly subscriptions for a year

8.**Professional Photography -** videos and advertising (capped at 80% and drawn down only in one payment phase)

9. **Digital Marketing -** pay for consultancy to develop an advertising strategy on platforms like Instagram, Facebook & Google etc.

10. **IT Consultation** - Advice on websites online shops etc.

11. **Training -** skills development specifically to establish and manage online selling activities

12. **Software -** Purchase of internet-related software

13. **Copy** - (written or graphic content) for your website

14. **Search Engine Optimisation (SEO) -** for your website

15. **Website Analytics -** Analysis of existing site analytics -analysing web data for purposes of understanding and optimising web usage

*Must be done as an annual fee with the service provider and invoice to display same.

The voucher cannot be used for

1. Brochure-style websites (with no online services, shopping or booking)
2. Purchase of non-internet related software
3. Anything other than online trading-related activities

Getting Quotes and Picking Partners

You need to get 3 quotes from your potential suppliers for your online project and these should include their company details and Vat number. It will be a critical decision on whom you choose to be your partner or partners to deliver this work for you. Getting it wrong could lead to poor quality work that is expensive and can consume a huge amount of your own time. For this reason, it is best to find a specialist
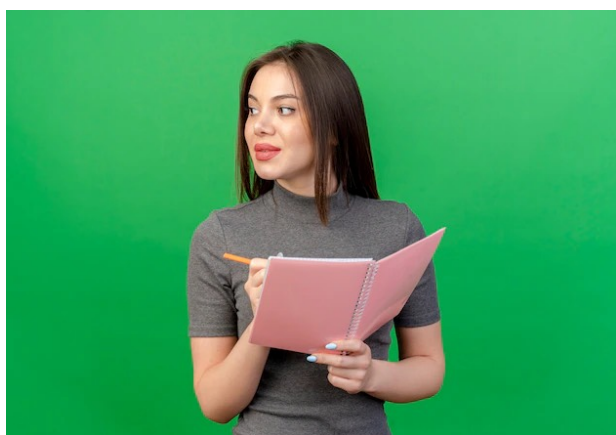
provider who designs websites for Salons and who understands the hair and beauty industries and the specific requirements of the Salon industry. For example, a web designer who specialises in websites for salons can save you a lot of time and money because they will have the product images, product and treatment descriptions to hand and ready to go.

The alternative will be a web designer that will expect you to provide all treatment and product write-ups with product images and expect you to be on hand to explain in detail what you need every step of the way.

There are some businesses that specialise in how to configure and adapt various technologies for the Salon industry and they can advise you on what is best for your needs and budget. If you are not familiar with the various pros and cons of the technical solutions in the market you should make use of these businesses and reduce your risk.

If you are using a portion of the grant for online ads with Facebook, Instagram or Google, you do not need to provide quotes. (NOTE: for

advertising, you can use up to a max of 30% of the approved project voucher value and this can only be drawn down in one payment phase.)

Understand How Your Application Is Evaluated

When you apply for the grant you are competing against other business applications in your local area for limited resources. It is essential for you to understand how your application is going to be assessed before you submit your application.

Your application is evaluated by scoring it against the framework detailed below. Your answers to the questions discussed in the following section are rated and given an overall mark. The more comprehensive your answers and

Oifig Fiontair Áitiúil
Local Enterprise Office

Trading Online Voucher

Competitive Process

Project Suitability	15	
Export Potential	15	
Job Creation	20	120 Marks Total
Increase Online Sales Potential	30	
How TOV aid Business during COVID-19	20	
Quality of ICT Proposal	20	

Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

the quality of the supporting information the better chance you will have that they mark you positively. It is important that you make sure that you answer each question carefully.

Project Suitability

Tell the story of your Salon, how you have developed and grown your business over time. Define the goals, objectives and mission of the business. State any awards or accolades your business has achieved.

Talk about your staff and the role you play in the community. Where possible use facts and figures. Be clear that the goal of the application is to develop your e-commerce capability, talk about how the online 'shop 'or 'booking system etc will increase revenue for your salon. Explain how the investment will optimise the business saving X% time or enabling you to service Y more clients.

Export Potential

The scope here might be limited but if you are applying for an online shop then you do have the opportunity to attract overseas sales. If you live in the border counties and are applying for an online booking system you may well attract cross-border trade.

Job Creation

Significant increases in sales will ultimately lead to the need for more staff. Describe how and by how much this project will grow your turnover and how it could impact your staffing levels or hours you can offer your employees. If you believe it could lead to additional employment make sure you state it.

Increase online sales potential

Facts and figures are important here. First talk about existing sales (product and treatment bookings) currently made through WhatsApp, Social Media DMs etc and how by making this more efficient and more accessible you can grow revenue. Reference the numerous external articles for the industry that suggest an online shop can increase sales by 30% and a booking system by another 30%. You can point out that social media advertising cannot work unless you have the appropriate online platforms in place but

once in place you can drive marking campaigns offering promotions and offers. You will be able to capitalise on anniversaries like mothers day and Christmas by being able to offer online gift vouchers and offer seasonal

online-only specials. You can drive clients to the shop with email campaigns too. With these technologies, your clients will be able to shop or book treatments 24/7.

How the Trading Online Voucher will Benefit The Business During Covid-19

You need to describe how your proposed project will bene fit your business during the existing pandemic and during any future viral outbreaks. Below is a list you can incorporate appropriately.

Online Shop

- Will offer the opportunity to continue some sales in the event of salon closure during a lockdown.
- Enable online Skin & Hair consultations with product recommendations to drive offline sales.

Online Booking System

- Will enable more efficient and contactless Covid-19 form completion
- Better contact tracing
- Offer contactless payment methods
- Help control numbers attending the salon by using the technology booking slots accordingly.

Mobile Phone App

- Offer contactless Payment Options

Quality Of ICT Proposal

Make sure the project you are applying for aligns with your Salon strategy and objectives for the project, be realistic and honest.

Making Your Application

The Key Business Information

You will need to provide details of some key business information so it's best to gather all this in advance of starting your application. You will need;

- The date you attended your seminar and in which LEO Business Contact Information.
- Business Registered Address and Company (CRO) number. Date the business Commenced trading and Number of Years trading.
- Description of a current online presence.
- Description of the business - (what it does, how many people, objectives etc).
- Current Turnover

Draft Your Answers To the Project Suitability Questions

You will be asked some key questions which are intended to assess your suitability for the grant. You will be evaluated on your answers so you need to take some time to consider your responses.

- You should try to insert as many facts and figures as possible. You should support any assertions you make with links to supporting reference material to support statements that you and add weight to your application.

- You should look where the evaluation criteria might apply, we have made some suggestions in the following section and working with the notes in the previous section, you can align your answers accordingly.

In the next section, we have suggested answers to guide you on the type of response you should be crafting. These are in light green font.

YOU SHOULD NOT COPY AND PASTE THESE INTO YOUR

APPLICATION 1. Describe your Business

"Description of your Business's Products / Services. Overview of your businesses activities whether related to the project or not"

POSSIBLE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Project Suitability (15 marks)

This is your first opportunity to describe yourself, your business and your objectives.

Example:

"Your Salon Name was established X years ago in 20XX in "your Salon location", by "Your Name". We service the community of "Salon Location" providing Hair, Skin Care, and Nails services. Our Team has X members of varying skills and ages. Over the last X years, we have grown from X number of clients to Y and expanded our business from 2 treatment rooms to 4. While we started our business providing nail care we have been transforming our business to provide high-quality skin treatments which command a higher fee and have higher margins. This has made it possible to increase revenue with the same number of resources by investing in training. We intend to expand still further our business by offering more online services such as online shopping and enable new clients we attract via advertising to book with us online".

2. Describe your online project?

"Business objective for your Trading Online project. What is it that your business expects this project to do that will help your business? Handle sales, generate new leads, handle customer service, etc…(please be as specific as possible)"

POSSIBLE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Job Creation (20 Marks)

Increase Online Sales Potential (20 Marks)

Export Potential (15 Marks)

In each of the examples below try to support your statement with <u>references, facts figures and estimations on</u> how the initiative will positively impact your Salon.

Example: Build / Improve a Website

"A high quality fully functioning website for the salon is an essential next step for our business. If we are to maintain our existing client base in face of stiff competition or attract new clients we need to be able to provide a better experience than our competition. A website forms the foundation for our business to present our brand and capabilities and will serve as the "hanger" to add additional capabilities such as providing the ability to book online shopping and provide online consultations. In addition, a website is an essential ingredient if we are to develop our online marketing capabilities and capture traffic via Google, Facebook and Instagram and direct it to our business."

The key functions would be
- Expand our basic website to integrate with / develop our online shopping offerings

- Provide information about treatments and information about our salon and our expertise

- Enable customer service online - Book online treatments from the comfort of home
- Clients can shop online for products 24/7
- Create more sales with online specials and up-sells and seasonal promotions
- *Use the system to bring the COVID-related forms and data captured online*
- *Sell online salon vouchers to automate this revenue line too*

Example: Online Shop

The Industry overwhelming agree that a Salon can increase its turnover by over 30% by selling products online. It achieves this by

16. Expanding the window to outside Salon visits so that the client can make a purchase of recommended products made either during their visit to the salon or via an online consultation.
17. Enabling direct marketing via promotions and offers to existing clients
18. Enables marketing campaigns via social media to capture new online audiences and direct them to the shop.

Example: Booking System

"The Industry overwhelming agree that a Salon can increase productivity by more than 30% and improve the overall customer experience. Principally this is achieved by making a self-service model and driving it to the customer. Once deployed the customer can make an appointment online via the phone at their convenience and automation technology allows confirmations and reminders to be sent appropriately. This is more convenient for the customer but also removes the unproductive interactions via phone calls or texts between the Salon staff and the customer during salon opening hours when they could be providing service and driving revenue."

Example: Mobile App

"Most interactions with the internet are now via a mobile device, mostly a phone. More and more businesses are replacing or complementing their existing websites with a branded app that enables the customer to book a treatment or buy a product using their phone. More and more businesses are replacing or complimenting their websites with an app that sits on the customer's phone. The provides a quick and effective way for the customer to engage with the Salon."

4. Develop a Project Plan

"Unique Selling Point of your Products / Services / Business processes targeted in this project. Look at your online competitors, and decide what products/services you will focus on - not all of them need to be traded online. Why did you select what you have?"

POSSIBLE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Job Creation (20 Marks)

Increase Online Sales Potential (20 Marks)

When replying to this question remember that you are a local business so look at your Local competition.

Example: Build / Improve a Website

"The experience we provide at our Salon has been created to appeal to a more mature customer and provides an alternative to local Salons that have focused on a younger audience. Our website will speak to the needs of our customers and the specific issues we can help them address."

Example: Online Shop

"Our online shop not only stocks products our competitors do not but we stock the full range оf not selected items and offer free local delivery."

Example: Booking System

"An online booking system (in conjunction with a website) would make it very clear to existing and potential customers that we offer a range of treatments that the local competition does not and that we can achieve the same result at lower prices.

Example: Mobile App

"A Mobile web app for our salon will ensure that our brand is visible to our customers every time they look at their phones while at the same time offering a faster and more convent way to access our services and products."

5. Your target market through this project

POSSIBLE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Job Creation (20 Marks)

Increase Online Sales Potential (20 Marks)

Who are your customers going to be? *(i.e. what customers will you target through your online channels?)"*

You need to be specific here such as

- Local catchment areas of all females resident within 20k (for a rural salon)
- Local client's age profiles are 20-30, 30-50 etc
- Mature Women of 45+
- Young Women / Working Mothers

6. Trading Online Competitors

POSSIBLE EVALUATION CRITERIA

Quality of ICT Proposal (20 Marks)

"When you use a search engine to look for the product /services your business offers, what companies/sites are displayed? (list 3 to 5 with a link to their websites ''

A pretty straightforward question requiring you to list 3-5 other Salons and their websites in your catchment area.

7. Scope of work

"What are the specific deliverables of the project relating back to the business objectives? Describe the work to be undertaken in this project"

Quality of ICT Proposal (20 Marks)

You should use the requirements description you used to collate your 3 quotes earlier in the process. Think through the key steps.

Example: Build / Improve a Website

- Work with web developer on overall design - define all the Sections & Content
- Connect with the photographer and get staff and Salon Photographs
- Create narratives and write-ups e.g staff bios, treatment descriptions, pricing menu etc.
- Review & edit the first draft
- Review and / sign off

Example: Booking System

- Enter / Provide Staffing Information
- List and Provide Treatment Descriptions

- Match Treatments to staff capabilities
- Define treatment durations and cycle times
- Define Treatment special tools & Machines
- Enter Business Working hours and Closure days

8. How will your voucher increase the sales potential of your business?

You will be required to estimate the increase in sales that you believe you can achieve after you have made your grant investment.

What Happens Next

Timeframe

You will usually hear back from your local LEO by email and a posted letter within 4-6 weeks of your online application. Once you accept the offer (see Voucher Administration below) you have 6 months from the offer to complete the project for your website or online shop etc.

Evaluation

- Evaluation of applications will be conducted by each LEO who will make recommendations for approval.
- An evaluation committee will assess all submitted applications and make recommendations for approval.
- A competitive process will be put in place to assist with the selection process.

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Voucher Administration

If your application is successful, a letter of offer - detailing the works and amount approved - will be sent to you for you to forward to your preferred supplier.

- The voucher is a letter of offer which is sent to the successful applicants.
- Letter of offer should be signed, accepted and returned within 2 weeks.
- Successful applicants have 6 months to complete the work as per their application.

Draw Down Of Online Trading Voucher

Payment will be made directly to the successful applicant upon satisfactory receipt of the following:

1. Declaration, completed and signed by the supplier, briefly detailing the works carried out and indicating they have been completed and fully paid for. This should be submitted by the supplier directly to the Local Enterprise Office (LEO).
2. Declaration of project completion
3. Original paid invoice(s) for the work completed from the supplier(s), with the evidence of supplier details e.g. Company Registration Office (CRO) details, or VAT details or evidence of tax compliance, or proof that the supplier is registered in the territory in which the supplier is located.
4. Bank Statement(s) showing proof of payment to the supplier(s)
5. Supplier receipts in respect of each component of work carried out.
6. Evidence of tax compliance in respect of the applicant/client business
7. A copy of applicant/client CRO registration or other proof that the applicant/client business has been trading for at least 6 months.

Other Important Information

1. Voucher approval must be gained prior to incurring any expense.
2. All work must be completed and paid for prior to claim.
3. Payments will only be made in relation to approved expenses which form part of the application form. This is again a very good reason to spend time thinking about what it is you need during the quotation process and ensuring all elements have been covered.
4. Claims can be made in either one or two instalments, and only made in respect of actual work completed (i.e. in respect of the components of the project works completed at the time the claim is being made).
5. Expenditure on the various project components can only be claimed once.
6. Applications must be accompanied by written/ emailed quotes for project works from three suppliers.

7. More here and to contact YOUR local office:

https://www.localenterprise.ie/Discover-Business-Supports/Trading-Online-Voucher-Scheme/

Conclusion

We wish you good luck with your voucher application and hope that this guide has been useful. The opportunity offered by the grant is unprecedented and you should take advantage of it while it still remains. **Salon Solutions** has been helping small to medium Salons for over a decade and is uniquely placed to assist you in all aspects of your application and in the delivery of your project.