



Keeping the wheels in motion

GMcG's Susan Dunlop talks about the accountancy firm's resilience, adaptability and new employee working model.

Phrases like 'unprecedented times' and 'the new normal' have become familiar to many of us over the past year, featuring prominently in analyses of how the pandemic has affected business operations and consumer behaviours across virtually all sectors.

The long term impact will vary from business to business but one thing many business owners have in common is the speed at which they needed to adapt in order to remain viable. Like most business advisers, GMcG Chartered Accountants faced major decisions around its operations

and how to maintain levels of support and service to its diverse client base.

"Our success has always been about our people and our client relationships, but resilience and adaptability have taken on a new focus in terms of how the firm has evolved over the past year.

As a leading independent Accountancy firm, many of our key strengths lie in our ability to get things done quickly through local decision making and management. This really came to the fore when major decisions were needed regarding how our business should adapt".

That's the view of Susan Dunlop, GMcG Chartered Accountants Managing

Director, who shares her insights on how the firm managed changes to its operations through the pandemic.

One of seven Directors at GMcG, Susan joined the firm more than 20 years ago and became Managing Director in 2019. Between Brexit and Coronavirus, the inbox of the firm's new Managing Director quickly took on a somewhat different look from what might have been anticipated. Managing the impact of these developments presented challenges but Susan has been able to count on the support of her fellow Directors and almost 90 employees across the firm's Belfast, Lisburn and Portadown locations.

As was the case for many business owners, the announcement of each lockdown and COVID restriction meant that decisions had to be made quickly, often late at night, to protect employees and ensure a seamless continuation of client services. There is no doubt that the firm's policy of continual investment in IT played a huge part in achieving this goal in addition to having the autonomy that comes with being a local independent firm. Susan adds: "Accessibility is regularly acknowledged as being of considerable value to GMcG clients and this is something we could not allow to change.

Eye on Business

As clients were faced with the reality of pandemic related challenges, it was important that we continued to provide the levels of accessibility and support they needed. Being able to do this is testament to our employees, IT support and clients who have showed such versatility in terms of meeting the demands of virtual meetings, video conferencing and remote working."

This planning also facilitates the continuation of client meetings in each office along with the safe return of employees. The Director team feels this is important for both the firm and for clients and it has been achieved through a significant investment in protective screens, social distancing, hand sanitisation points and other equipment. Susan adds:

"The challenges of the pandemic have put into sharp focus the need for GMcG advisers to be available to support clients with the right type of expertise, when they need it."

Post lockdown, GMcG became one of the first local firms to offer a hybrid working model for employees. This arrangement facilitates the option of working from home for up to two days per week. Along with flexible working hours, the hybrid model has clear benefits for employees and is part of GMcG's drive to promote a good work-life balance without compromising the quality or level of client engagement. Susan explains: "Given the success of remote working during lockdown, we were confident this hybrid model could be implemented and managed effectively. Through teamwork and planning, employees can securely access files, meet clients and complete assignments remotely."

"Whilst Microsoft Teams still has an important role we feel there is no substitute for face to face meetings and one to one employee training. We can now do this safely and over the past year we were actually one of very few local firms to offer students a placement or internship experience in the office environment." Regardless of sector or size of business, the challenges of the pandemic have put into sharp focus the need for GMcG advisers to be available to support clients with the right type of expertise, when they need it. This highlights the importance of being positioned as the complete business advisor and having the knowledge, understanding and experience to deliver.



Gabriel Greene, Director, Forensic Accounting & Investigation

"Businesses evolve through different circumstances and with different requirements. We need to be one step ahead, knowing everything about the issues unique to their business and providing the right support at the right time.

GMcG offers this expertise through our service lines which include Audit and Business Advisory, Tax, Forensic Accounting and Investigation, Corporate Finance, GMcG Digital and International liaison, through our TIAG membership."

Notwithstanding the range of Covid support measures that have been available to businesses, the prospect of pre-pandemic levels of trading and profit remains a distant reality for

some businesses. With the easing of restrictions and increased trading activity in a number of sectors, there is optimism that an improving economic climate will provide a shot in the arm for those businesses on the road to recovery.

With the right type of expertise and experience, GMcG remains committed to ensuring clients are well equipped to overcome challenges and maximise opportunities along that road to recovery.

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L to R: Directors Susan Dunlop, Stephen Houston, Lyn Canning Hagan, Robbie Milliken, Nigel Moore, Gill Johnston