

Preparing retailers for challenging times ahead

The Convenience Stores & Newsagents Association (CSNA) of Ireland represents retailers nationwide from independent business holders to multi-franchise owners. As the only independent retailer-driven trade organisation, they campaign for the interest of their members and seek to bring benefit to all through a range of member's deals, guidance, training and support. CEO **Vincent Jennings** tells IF&CR how the CSNA plan to assist their members through difficult circumstances in the coming year.

The primary aim of CSNA is to make sure the needs of their members are met and listened to by suppliers, local authority and government levels. CEO Vincent Jennings says: "We want to ensure that their needs in maintaining a viable business going into the future is being given every opportunity to not only survive but to thrive. It's an ongoing, constant effort to make sure this happens.

"We will work on a micro, individual basis for people who have got personal difficulties with cash flow, but also on a bigger scale we handle situations like the new alcohol licencing bill, implications of Brexit, and so on. We deal with problems that our members bring to us and try and make sure they are getting the most out of their businesses by trying to reduce the cost of insurance and utilities."

Like many other trade associations, the CSNA recognises that one of the biggest challenges to overcome this year will be the implications of Brexit. According to Vincent, a No Deal Brexit would be the worst case scenario for traders across Ireland.

"Brexit by far is going to be one of our biggest concerns. Although the implications are uncertain, it's very likely that employment rates will hit businesses all over Ireland, especially in rural areas. If you lose 100 jobs in a small town agricultural business, it could be the equivalent of 3000 jobs in a larger urban company. We need to be prepared to give a lot of help and support to smaller independent businesses so that they are able to navigate their way through a very testing time.

"We seek to overcome these issues by



keeping our ears to the ground and making sure we have action plans put in place for our members whatever the outcome may be with Brexit. Everything has to be planned for; a no deal Brexit would be catastrophic for many businesses."

As well as navigating through political change in the upcoming year, Vincent says that environmental sustainability, security and insurance costs are all issues that the CSNA are preparing to tackle.

"Outside of Brexit, there has certainly been a new lease of life when it comes to environmental changes within the industry. Our members are really starting to take matters like climate change, recycling and helping the environment into account.

The new minister in the department has very clearly alerted the industry that he's reviewing everything and challenging the way we care for the environment as we go about our business. I think we're certainly going to hear a lot more about this over the next 12 months.

"Security and insurance are also posing enormous threats to our members. I think the safety of businesses from a security point of view has to be an area that we turn our attention to. Shoplifting, cyber-crime, burglaries, and violence are all things that are intimidating our retailers and affecting them disproportionately. A lot of our members are suffering hugely from a lack of true engagement and assistance from the police.

"I think that the revelation last week that over 3,000 cases of juvenile crimes have not been dealt with properly was scandalous. Security is a big problem and we're hoping to see a big improvement with how this is dealt with by authorities over the next year."

However, as the one of the fastest growing trade organisations in the country, the CSNA are hopeful that their attempts to maximise the profits of their members and protect their interests over the next year will be successful.

"With all these issues, despite how challenging they may become, we have confidence that our members will get through them and will continue to deliver service out into their communities. It needs to be understood that they require real assistance in terms of a structure from the state that allows them to continue to provide their services."