

Your Spring 2026 Financial Checklist

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Now that we're through the worst of the winter weather, the lead up to Spring is an ideal time to give your finances a refresh and to set a clear plan for 2026.

Escalating tensions in the Middle East have provided a timely reminder that markets can shift quickly. However, history shows that only conflicts with a significant economic impact tend to leave a lasting effect. From an economic standpoint, inflation has eased, interest rates appear past their peak, and market returns have been supported by solid corporate earnings. Despite what can feel like never-ending noise, staying focused and following a clear plan is what matters most. Outlined below are five key actions for consideration:

1. With interest rates declining, now is the time to review your cash savings

Higher interest rates have made holding cash more rewarding than many were used to, but the landscape is changing. As the Bank of England cuts rates, with more likely ahead, it's worth reviewing whether cash balances are still aligned with your goals. Too little cash can raise concern, but too much sitting on the sidelines for long periods may limit long-term growth. A review can help ensure your emergency fund, short-term needs and longer-term investments are clearly separated and working efficiently.

2. Understand the maths behind your retirement plans

While headline inflation has eased, the cost of living remains a challenge for many households. It's important that spending plans, savings targets, and retirement income projections still reflect reality. Even small changes in long-term inflation assumptions can have a meaningful impact on future outcomes, particularly for those approaching or already in retirement.

This is where cash flow modelling can be particularly helpful. By mapping out expected income, spending, savings and investments over time, cash flow modelling allows us to stress-test financial plans against different inflation scenarios.

Rather than relying on averages or assumptions, it helps show how rising costs may affect your lifestyle, retirement income, or long-term goals – and whether adjustments are needed now. Small changes identified early can make a significant difference to long-term confidence and outcomes.

3. Use your tax allowances

As the end of the tax year approaches, it's worth reviewing how effectively all available tax allowances are being used. Many

of these are lost if they're not used in time, which can mean paying more tax than necessary in future years. This includes ISA allowances, pension contributions and the ability to use unused pension allowances from previous years through carry forward. A review can help identify whether additional contributions are possible or appropriate, particularly for higher earners or those with variable income.

It's also important to consider investment-related allowances, such as the capital gains tax (CGT) allowance and the dividend allowance. With both having reduced in recent years, managing gains and dividend income more carefully has become increasingly important.

Good tax planning is rarely about doing something complex, it's about being organised, forward-looking, and making full use of what's already available.

4. Review your Inheritance Tax (IHT) situation

Inheritance Tax receipts for HMRC continue to rise year on year. With nil-rate bands frozen, pensions falling back into estates from April 2027 and asset values rising, more families are now affected by IHT. IHT planning is often left until much later in life, but early, gradual planning can be far more effective. A review can help assess whether your estate is structured efficiently, whether allowances and exemptions are being used appropriately, and how assets might pass to the next generation. Importantly, IHT planning isn't just about reducing tax. It's about clarity, control, and ensuring your wishes are carried out as intended.

Addressing this sooner rather than later allows more options, more flexibility, and greater peace of mind.

5. The value of a written financial plan

These actions taken together highlight why having a clear, written financial plan is so important. Markets, tax rules and personal circumstances all change over time, but a written plan provides structure, clarity, and direction amid that change.

Rather than reacting to headlines or making decisions in isolation, a financial plan brings everything together, cash flow, investments, tax planning, protection, and long-term goals, into one joined-up picture. A plan turns intentions into actions, and uncertainty into informed choices.

Most importantly, a written plan allows progress to be measured and adjusted over time, ensuring your finances continue to support the life you want to live, both now and in the future.

To turn these actions into a structured financial plan tailored to your goals, get in touch today.

Visit davyuk.co.uk for more information.

WARNING: The information in this article does not purport to be financial advice and does not take into account the investment objectives, knowledge and experience or financial situation of any particular person.

WARNING: The information contained herein is based on our understanding of current tax legislation in the UK and the current HMRC interpretation thereof and is subject to change without notice. It is intended as a guide only and not as a substitute for professional advice.

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Eye on Family Business



Eye on Family Business

FACES OF FAMILY BUSINESS

Looking Beyond the Numbers to the People Who Build What Lasts

By Darren McDowell,
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Business Forum



THE FACES OF FAMILY BUSINESS

m chartered accountants

As advisers, when we sit down with business owners, the language is usually technical.

- **Key performance indicators.**
- **Lock-up.**
- **Working capital.**
- **Margins.**
- **Growth forecasts.**

It's the language of discipline and performance and for good reason because strong financial management is the backbone of any successful enterprise.

But the launch of the recent Faces of Family Business exhibition offered a very deliberate, different perspective - it parked the numbers and let us observe what is the real secret to the success of our family business sector.

Because while financial metrics tell us how a business performs, they rarely tell us why it endures as the real power of family enterprise is often the result of leadership decisions: shaped not only by commercial objectives, but by family values, reputation legacy, deep community roots and a strong sense of responsibility to employees.

Unlike many corporates, family businesses often see themselves as stewards rather than owners.

Stewardship implies responsibility beyond personal gain. It means safeguarding the enterprise for employees, communities and future generations.

And this is what sits at the heart of this exhibition, now in its third year curated in partnership with Ulster University.

What Faces of Family Business captures is something rarely visible in annual accounts: the people, the human side of enterprise.

Each photo submitted by the families running these businesses represents individuals carrying dual responsibility, commercial and personal.

They are:

- Founders who took significant personal risk
- Successors who modernised traditional models
- Multi-generational teams working side by side
- Families who navigated economic downturns and industry disruption

These are the realities that do not appear on balance sheets and indeed one of the family members involved in the exhibition noted that "our business is not built by quarters or balance sheets alone, but by generations"

Why This Exhibition Matters

In an environment dominated by data, dashboards and digital reporting, Faces of Family Business offers something different

It reminds us that:

- Businesses are built by people.
- Success is sustained by values.
- Growth is enabled by trust.
- Longevity requires leadership that thinks generationally, not quarterly.

Most importantly, it recognises that behind every set of accounts is a story.

We would like to thank each of the family businesses involved in the project, for their time and their candour. Their stories were heartwarming to hear as well as to see, as you will experience over the next few pages in this edition and in next month's edition when their stories will be featured

Eye on Family Business

Eye on Family Business

FACES OF FAMILY BUSINESS

The Faces Of Family Business exhibition of photographs and artefacts made a welcome return to Ulster University's Belfast campus in February, organised by the NI Family Business Forum.

Six leading local family businesses were featured this year:- Representatives of all of the family businesses attended a lunch marking the end of the exhibition held at

Ulster University's Academy Restaurant. They were welcomed and thanked by Professor Gillian Armstrong, Pro Vice Chancellor and Dean of the Ulster University Business School;

Darren McDowell, Senior Partner at HM Chartered Accountants and Dr. Ian Smyth, Manager of the UUBS Centre for Sustainable Family Enterprise.

McNICHOLL CARAVANS

Operators of six holiday parks in NI, Donegal and Scotland.

MASH DIRECT

Newtownards, producers of more than 40 farm fresh added value vegetable products.

HUTCHINSON ENGINEERING

A producer of fabrications and assemblies for international machinery brands.

BRIGHTER GOLD

Rapeseed oil producers based on a family farm near Limavady.

ESF (Environmental Street Furniture)

Innovative Newtownabbey furniture supplier to some of the world's leading theme parks, among others.

CONNOLLYS OF MOY

A Family Business Built on Trust, Service and Staying Power.

HENDERSON GROUP

Retailers and wholesales and one of Northern Ireland's largest employers.



Tracy Hamilton...

Of the three photographs, the family image at the table holds the most significance. As a family, we share a strong bond and have lunch together most days in our family home at Ballyrainey, the very place where the first batch of our Champ was made. This image captures the heart of Mash Direct's heritage and a connection to the land that has nurtured six generations of farming knowledge and expertise. It also tells the story of our business journey, showing how the farm surrounds the factory and reinforces the freshness of our products with low food miles. Importantly, it highlights the next generation leading the family business, symbolising continuity, tradition and the vision for Mash Direct's future. Both the family at the table and family in the field images give a tangible sense of our roots, our values and our commitment to bringing quality, farm-to-fork produce to every table.



Collette McNicholl...

The photo of the entire McNicholl Family Group at the Mid Ulster Awards is significant to us because it captures more than just a moment at an awards night - it represents everything our business is built on. We are a family company and seeing us all sitting there together as one team reflects the hard work, commitment, and shared vision that goes into everything we do. Running a business can be challenging but doing it alongside family makes it meaningful. The image reminds us that our success is not down to one person, it is a collective effort. Every achievement has been the result of teamwork, loyalty, and people pulling in the same direction. For us, the SME Awards were not just about recognition - they were a celebration of the journey we have taken together. That photo sums up our values: family, dedication, and pride in what we have built. It is a reminder that behind every business milestone are real people who care deeply about what they do.

Eye on Family Business

From the photographs that you supplied for the Faces of Family Business event, which one has the most significance and why?



Alan Lowry...

The image that has the most significance is the image of us at the Business Eye Awards. We love to celebrate our successes together and get the whole family involved, whether they are working in the business or providing the support we all need outside of the business.



Richard Kane...

The most significant photo is the one of our family. Our legacy. The next generation of Kanes and stewardships who we hope one day will return and take over the farm and Brighter Gold as 7th generations. This was on of the first family photos we had taken after I started Brighter Gold, it is the next stage our of journey, diversifying the farm for our family and building a brand that we hope our children will be proud of one day, and develop further.



Connollys of Moy...

The image with the most significance to us would have to be the group photo outside of Connollys of Moy. We are a team and everyone plays their part!



Mark Hutchinson...

The photograph of my dad with the apple on his head holds the most significance. On the surface, it's light-hearted and humorous - but it represents something much deeper. It reflects his willingness to take risks, his personality, and the courage it took to start a business from nothing in a farm shed in 1971. More importantly, it symbolises the human side of the company. He built the business on relationships and on giving people opportunities - sometimes in unconventional ways. That belief in backing people remains central to who we are today.



Martin Agnew...

The photograph of our second, third and fourth generation leaders together is very special to us, capturing a time span of more than 80 years and stretching back to the Second World War. It reflects the heritage of our business and reminds us of the ongoing responsibilities which we hold as custodians for future generations.

Eye on Family Business

Growing with Purpose: A Family Business Built from the Ground Up



Mash Direct is one of those Northern Ireland family businesses whose story neatly reflects how tradition and innovation can coexist when the long-term view is taken seriously.

Rooted in six generations of farming and built with a clear sense of purpose, it has grown from a small on-farm idea into a nationally recognised food brand - while remaining firmly grounded in its family origins.

The business has been operating for 22 years, having been founded in 2004 by Martin and Tracy Hamilton on their family farm in Comber. What began as a response to declining vegetable prices on a sixth-generation farm has evolved into a €34 million turnover business supplying more than 9,000 stores across the UK, Ireland and beyond.

The origins of Mash Direct are firmly anchored in both necessity and tradition. Facing the realities of farming margins, Martin and Tracy recognised that the future of the farm depended on diversification. Drawing on generations of experience, they set about creating a range of potato and vegetable side dishes that replicated the taste and texture of home cooking.

The spark for the business, as the story goes, came over a glass of whisky, when Martin discussed recreating Champ just as his grandmother had made it. The first batch was cooked at home in Ballyrainey,

using the family cooker, with a recipe steeped in tradition. That combination of heritage and practicality would become the cornerstone of the brand.

Early sales through St George's Market proved pivotal, not just commercially but culturally.

"From the outset, it was about being open with customers - where the food came from, how it was made and why that mattered," Tracy Hamilton MBE explains. "Speaking directly to people at the markets helped us build trust and understand what they valued."

Those early conversations informed the business as it secured its first retail listing with independents in Killinchy and the Mace in Killyleagh. As demand grew Mash Direct moved into Spar (Henderson's) followed by Dunnes and Supervalu, before a major milestone in 2006 when it began supplying Tesco and Asda. From there, the business scaled rapidly, expanding across Ireland and into the wider UK market.

Today, Mash Direct produces more than 30 'field-to-fork' potato and vegetable dishes and has accumulated 34 Great Taste Awards, making it the most awarded vegetable company in the UK and Ireland. Alongside retail,

the business supplies foodservice and manufacturing customers, extending its reach into professional kitchens while maintaining close ties to its farming roots.

Despite that growth, the company remains proudly family owned and family led. Founder Martin Hamilton now serves as Executive Chairman, while Tracy Hamilton MBE has played a central role in shaping the brand and championing Northern Ireland produce across the agri-food sector.

"We've always believed in the quality of Northern Ireland produce," Tracy says. "Mash Direct has allowed us to showcase that - first locally and now across the UK and beyond."

Leadership of the business now sits firmly with the next generation. CEO Jack Hamilton focuses on long-term strategy, market expansion and continued investment in people and manufacturing capability, while Chief Commercial Officer Lance Hamilton leads the commercial agenda across retail and foodservice. Together, they combine the experience of the founding generation with the ambition and pace required in a modern food business.

Mash Direct now employs 217 people and continues to scale sustainably, supported by a strengthened senior leadership team and a clear focus on innovation. Growth has been driven by new product development, strong brand-building campaigns and collaborative partnerships with retailers and suppliers built on trust and long-term value.

The journey has not been without challenge. Rising input costs, energy volatility, labour pressures and supply-chain disruption have tested the business in recent years, alongside rapidly shifting consumer expectations around value, sustainability and provenance. Those pressures have sharpened discipline, prompting investment in automation, waste reduction and improved yields in the field.

The vertically integrated model - growing a significant proportion of vegetables on the family farm - has proved a critical advantage, providing greater control from seed to shelf and strengthening traceability and sustainability commitments.

That long-term perspective is

deeply rooted in family ownership.

"Being a family-owned business brings a long-term mindset," Tracy notes. "We're not building for the next quarter; we're building something sustainable that can be passed on to the next generation."

Innovation at Mash Direct is approached through the lens of core values rather than trends. Investment in bespoke steam-cooking technology has improved efficiency and consistency without compromising quality, while new flavours and formats ensure potatoes and vegetables remain central to the brand.

Digital engagement has also become a powerful extension of the company's field-to-fork story. From early video strategies to a shift towards authentic, organic content, Mash Direct has used social platforms to connect directly with consumers. In 2025 alone, the brand reached more than 49 million people across social channels, demonstrating how a heritage-led business can thrive in a digital environment.

Continuity and sustainability are being addressed with equal intent. Operations are independently assessed through a four-pillar SMETA audit, while participation in environmental schemes and ongoing efficiency investment continue to strengthen biodiversity, reduce waste and improve resource use.

Social responsibility is also central to that approach. In 2025, Mash Direct donated more than 265,000 portions of vegetables to food banks, charities and community groups across Northern Ireland. Education forms another pillar, with the Field to Fork programme, delivered in partnership with W5 Science and Discovery Centre, bringing food education into local primary schools.

Looking ahead, the focus is on scalable, sustainable growth. Over the next five years, Mash Direct aims to strengthen its position as a household name across the UK, Ireland and beyond, supported by continued investment in infrastructure, digital capability and innovation.

More than two decades on from that first batch of Champ cooked at home in Comber, Mash Direct stands as an example of how a family business can scale with confidence while staying true to its roots - built on land, legacy and long-term thinking, and firmly focused on the next generation.

Eye on Family Business

A Century of Growth, Guided by Family Values



Geoffrey and Martin Agnew, with their father John.

Henderson Group is one of Northern Ireland's longest-established family businesses, with a history that stretches back around 130 years.

While the company formally cites 1897 as its year of establishment, evidence of trading can be traced to as early as 1892 - a longevity that places it among the region's most enduring commercial enterprises.

Founded by John Henderson, the business began as a retail grocery operation selling butter, cheese and eggs from premises on the Old Lodge Road in Belfast, before moving to St George's Market. As demand grew, so too did the scale of the operation, with the business relocating to a depot on Ravenhill Avenue and, over time, evolving into the multi-faceted organisation now headquartered at state-of-the-art facilities in Mallusk, Newtownabbey.

Now under the fourth generation of family leadership, Henderson Group has grown far beyond its original retail roots. Today it is one of the island's largest food solutions businesses, encompassing wholesale, retail, hospitality, property and technology services, with revenues in excess of £1.3bn

and a workforce of just under 6,000 colleagues across the Group.

Reflecting on that journey, Martin Agnew points to growth built steadily rather than opportunistically. "The success of our business is very much built on volume growth, and this has been, and always will be the main factor driving our performance," he says. "Over many years, we have focused on building trading and customer partnerships to organically grow our business, with acquisitions also providing fuel to our expansion."

As the organisation has expanded, so too have the challenges associated with scale. One of the most significant has been building and sustaining the right team. "As we have grown our business, the challenges of building our team have been at the forefront of our strategy," Agnew explains. "We have moved from being a 'hunter' of external talent to focusing on developing our own colleagues to ensure that we both retain and optimise their potential."

That emphasis on internal development reflects a broader family-business mindset - one that balances continuity with the need to adapt. Anticipating change, rather than reacting to it, has become embedded in the culture. "We believe that being able to anticipate, understand and plan for change is both a strength and also a key component of our culture," Agnew says. "We invest heavily in encouraging our leaders to explore future trends and solutions through study tours, networking and engaging with industry thought leaders."

Innovation and transformation are overseen through structured governance, including a senior Business Transformation Steering Group tasked with defining and guiding critical initiatives. Its role is to ensure the business continues to evolve in response to what Agnew describes as "the considerable changes which swirl around us".

Continuity, both familial and operational, is also central to long-term thinking. Members of the fifth generation of the Henderson family are already developing their careers within the business, supported by the leadership

team and given opportunities to broaden their experience across the Group's operations. Alongside that generational progression sits a wider commitment to sustainability through the company's Responsible Business programme, Tomorrow Matters, which brings together priorities across People, Place and Planet.

Looking ahead, the organisation's ambitions remain anchored to a clear sense of purpose. "Our Core Purpose is 'To Delight our Customers with Great Food', and this will remain a mainstay of all that we do," Agnew says. While continuing to grow within its established markets, Henderson Group also sees opportunities to extend its expertise into new customer sectors, including technology solutions, logistics, payroll services and its training academy.

At the heart of the business is a strong emphasis on culture and shared values. Core principles of Ambition, Customer First, Teamwork and Integrity are used not only to recognise colleagues, but also to guide recruitment and ensure a strong cultural fit across the organisation. "We have always viewed our business as a family of suppliers, customers and colleagues," Agnew notes, "working and investing together with shared long-term aspirations."

More than a century on from its beginnings on the Old Lodge Road, Henderson Group remains a family business in the truest sense - defined not just by ownership, but by partnership, patience and a long-term view. In an era of rapid change, its ability to evolve while staying true to its origins continues to be one of its greatest strengths.

Eye on Family Business



Richard Kane, Jacob Kane, son, Emily Kane daughter and Leona Kane.

Broighter Gold: From Field to Bottle, a Family Business Rooted in Place

Family businesses rarely emerge overnight. They are shaped by time, patience and a willingness to think long-term – qualities that define The Broighter Co Ltd, trading as Broighter Gold Rapeseed Oil.

This year marks 15 years of selling product, but the story of the business stretches back more than 130 years to its origins at Broglasco Farm, reflecting a farming heritage that long predates the brand itself.

As Richard Kane explains, the early years were about groundwork rather than quick returns. The business began 17 years ago, but family life and the realities of farming meant progress was measured. Developing the brand image, selecting the right varieties and understanding what it means to produce something “from field to bottle” all took time – a reminder that agricultural businesses operate on a different rhythm to many modern start-ups.

Broighter Gold was founded as a family business firmly anchored in farming heritage and a passion for producing high-quality, traceable food. Oilseed had been grown on the family

farm for years, traditionally sent off to the mill. The turning point came with a desire to grow a variety suited to the land at Broglasco – and to create something distinctive in taste as well as provenance. From that thinking came a single-estate rapeseed oil, cold-pressed and produced entirely in Northern Ireland, with every stage of the process managed in-house.

What began as a small family idea has evolved into a respected regional and national brand. Richard leads on the farming, growing oilseed alongside potatoes and carrots, and oversees the pressing of the seeds into what the business calls its “Liquid Golden oils”. Production standards are central to the operation, while Leona has shaped brand identity, product development and customer experience, helping Broighter Gold connect with consumers through storytelling and innovation.

At its heart, however, the business remains family-driven and future-focused. As Richard Kane puts it, “At the heart of Broighter Gold is our family. We have built the business with a long-term vision, not only to grow commercially but to create something meaningful that can be passed on to future generations.”

Today, Broighter Gold is a well-established supplier across retail, wholesale, foodservice and export markets. Alongside its own branded products, the company produces a wide range of own-brand lines for supermarkets and is preparing to launch with another well-known brand in the coming weeks. A dedicated team spans production, administration and sales, supporting a brand recognised for premium, single-estate cold-pressed oils where provenance and consistency of taste are key.

Growth has brought its own pressures. Scaling production while maintaining quality, managing rising costs across energy, packaging and staffing, and navigating regulatory requirements are constant challenges. Pricing discipline is equally critical in a competitive market, particularly when competing

against olive oil brands with marketing budgets far beyond the reach of a family business. Supply chain pressures and operational complexity are part of daily life – but resilience is second nature in farming. As Richard Broighter notes, “Farmers know how to deal with the weather, and this is something that we just have to get on with.”

Modernisation has been approached carefully, with tradition and innovation seen as complementary rather than conflicting. Broighter Gold is now entering phase one of automation, investing heavily in systems that improve digital records and operational efficiency for both the business and its staff. The goal is not change for its own sake, but progress that reinforces quality, demonstrates commitment to customers and supports the future of the next generation. “We see tradition and innovation as complementary rather than conflicting,” says Richard Kane.

Ensuring continuity is about agility as much as planning. As owners, Richard and Leona are able to make decisions quickly, responding to issues without layers of governance. Investment in people, skills development, technology and sustainable practices underpins the long-term strategy, alongside strong relationships with customers, suppliers and the wider community.

Looking ahead, the objectives are clear: expanding market reach, growing online and export sales, strengthening brand awareness, improving operational efficiency and launching innovative new products. Sustainable growth, enhanced profitability and continued investment in staff and sustainability initiatives all feed into a single ambition – to secure Broighter Gold as a thriving, future-proof family enterprise.

Employee engagement is central to that ambition. The business actively promotes a culture of respect, pride and shared purpose, encouraging staff to understand the history and values of the company and to feel connected to its success. Open communication, recognition and opportunities for progression help ensure that employees are not just part of the operation, but part of the journey.

In an increasingly competitive food sector, Broighter Gold stands as an example of how a family business, grounded in place and values, can grow steadily – proving that when you control the process from field to bottle, patience and authenticity can be powerful commercial assets.

Eye on Family Business

More Than a Business: How Family Values Shaped McNicholl Caravans



Legacy in motion – two generations, one vision: Shauneen, Michael, Colette, Aisling & Leanne McNicholl.

McNicholl Caravans is one of those family businesses whose story captures both the romance and the reality of entrepreneurship in Northern Ireland.

Built through bold decisions, personal sacrifice and an unwavering commitment to family values, it has grown steadily over more than four decades into one of Ireland’s leading caravan and holiday park operators – without losing the principles that shaped its beginnings.

Founded in 1980 by Michael McNicholl, the business began with a leap of faith that remains a proud part of its history.

Michael sold all his cattle to purchase his first caravan, a decision driven more by belief than certainty. “I didn’t have a grand plan at the time,” Michael recalls. “I just believed there was an opportunity and that if I worked hard enough, I could make it work.”

That willingness to take calculated risks became a defining feature of the business. In 1997, Michael and his wife Colette took another significant step, mortgaging their family home to purchase their first holiday park. It was

a bold move, taken at a time when the business was still finding its feet.

“We knew it was a risk,” Colette says. “But we believed in what we were building and we were prepared to back ourselves.”

Soon after that investment, the family faced a far more personal challenge when Michael was diagnosed with cancer. For a period, the business was being built amid uncertainty on every front. “There were times when you simply had to keep going, because stopping wasn’t an option,” Michael reflects. “The business was built around family, and family was at the heart of the business.”

That period helped cement the values that continue to define McNicholl Caravans today – hard work, loyalty, resilience and family. What began as a modest venture evolved steadily, guided by those principles, into a business now recognised across the sector for its integrity, customer care and values-led leadership.

Today, McNicholl Caravans operates seven holiday parks across Ireland and the UK. Over the past five years, the business has recorded growth of more than 110%, all while remaining entirely family-owned and completely debt-free.

“We’ve always believed in growing at a pace we can sustain,” Colette

explains. “Being debt-free gives us confidence, but it also gives us control.”

Behind those figures is a strong people-focused culture. With a staff retention rate of 94%, the business has built a loyal, long-serving team, many of whom have developed their careers within the company. “Our people are everything,” Michael says. “You can have the best facilities in the world, but it’s the team that makes the difference.”

Growth has brought its own challenges. As the business expanded across multiple sites, maintaining consistency of service, culture and values became increasingly important. External pressures, from Brexit to the impact of Covid-19, added further complexity, including rising costs and changing customer expectations.

“Every Chapter brings its own challenges,” Colette notes. “The key is making sure progress never comes at the expense of who you are.”

That philosophy also shapes how the business approaches innovation. Change is not about following trends, but about improving the customer experience and strengthening the long-term future of the company. While the foundations remain rooted in trust and personal service, the next generation has brought

new energy and expertise, particularly in digital marketing, brand development, customer experience and sustainability.

Recent initiatives include a complete brand refresh, enhanced digital platforms and a collaboration with The Digg Podcast, which helped reframe perceptions of static caravan living for a modern audience.

“We’re not trying to reinvent ourselves,” Michael says. “We’re making sure the business stays relevant while protecting what matters.”

Continuity has been equally deliberate. Succession planning has been carefully structured, with Michael and Colette remaining actively involved while their daughters – Shauneen, Aisling and Leanne – along with their partners, now co-lead the business. Clear governance and a defined succession plan through to 2030 underpin that transition.

“It’s about passing on more than a business,” Colette says. “It’s about instilling values, embracing responsibility and building a meaningful legacy that lasts.”

Now with fresh vision and cross generation leadership, the company is boldly shaping its future through a set of clear ambitious goals: expansion to ten holiday parks, with a 25% growth in turnover, the creation of ten new roles and a 50% –60% reduction in operational carbon emissions by 2030. Each target is guided by a commitment to sustainable, values-led growth.

At its heart, McNicholl Caravans remains a people-first business. Employees are treated as an extension of the family, with open communication, development and recognition embedded in daily operations. That ethos extends naturally to the customer experience, ensuring that the warmth and care on which the business was founded remain evident across every park.

More than 45 years on, McNicholl Caravans stands as an example of how a family business can grow at scale without losing its heart – built on courage, continuity and a clear sense of purpose, and focused on passing that legacy on stronger than ever.

Eye on Family Business



Connollys of Moy: A Family Business Built on Trust, Service and Staying Power

In the world of retail, longevity is rarely accidental. For family-owned businesses in particular, survival depends on a careful balance of instinct, resilience and the ability to evolve without losing sight of core values.

Connollys of Moy, now marking its 32nd year in business, offers a clear example of how that balance can be achieved. The story begins in November 1994, when Vivion Connolly took his first major step as an entrepreneur, opening a small furniture shop on Irish Street in Dungannon. It was a modest start, but one built on ambition and close customer relationships. As the business flourished, so too did the team behind it, prompting a move to the village of Moy, just outside Dungannon – a location

that would become synonymous with the Connollys name. Today, Connollys of Moy is one of the largest furniture superstores in Northern Ireland, firmly established as a household name. Much of that recognition comes from a strong and consistent brand presence, underpinned by a recognisable jingle and a long-standing partnership with brand ambassador Pamela Ballantine. But behind the marketing lies a people-focused operation, with a dedicated sales team at its core. Many employees have been with the business for more than a decade,

and one recently surpassed an exceptional thirty years of service – a testament to loyalty on both sides of the employer-employee relationship. Growth, however, has not come without challenge. As Vivion Connolly reflects, “As the business has grown, adapting to change has been one of the greatest challenges.” Over the years, Connollys of Moy has navigated two major recessions, periods that tested both resilience and customer loyalty. More recently, changing consumer behaviours, intensifying competition and the rapid pace of digital transformation have required the business to continually reassess how it operates and engages with its audience. For Connolly, innovation does not mean abandoning tradition. “Innovation begins with respect for tradition,” he says. While the business remains rooted in values of trust and

personal service, it has embraced modern marketing through digital platforms, engaging social media content and a strong, recognisable brand, supported by consistent TV and radio advertising. This approach has allowed Connollys of Moy to connect with new generations of customers while maintaining the loyalty of those who have shopped with the business for decades. Planning for the future is equally deliberate. Sustainability, Connolly believes, comes from aligning long-term thinking with enduring principles. “Sustainability comes from planning for the future while staying true to the company’s core values,” he notes. Investment in people, the adoption of modern business practices and a willingness to evolve with change are all central to positioning the business for continued progression. Team development and innovation in marketing remain priorities as Connollys of Moy looks ahead. The objectives for the next phase are measured rather than transformational. The focus is on steady growth, maintaining high standards, strengthening the brand and introducing carefully selected new ranges – all without compromising the service that has defined the business for more than three decades. At the heart of it all is culture. “A strong family-business ethos begins with people,” Connolly says. By fostering respect, loyalty and shared purpose, Connollys of Moy ensures employees feel valued and included in the company’s journey. Long-serving team members and open communication reinforce the importance of trust and customer care, creating a workplace where the values of a family business are not just stated, but lived every day. In an era when many retailers struggle for relevance, Connollys of Moy stands as a reminder that family businesses, when anchored by clear values and a willingness to adapt, can not only endure but continue to thrive.

Eye on Family Business

Furniture With a Passport: How a Co Antrim Family Firm Went Global

Environmental Street Furniture Ltd is one of those Northern Ireland companies whose scale belies its size.

From a base in Co Antrim, the family-owned business now supplies to more than 30 countries worldwide, working with global clients in the fast-growing experience attraction sector. Yet at its core, ESF remains a compact local enterprise built on traditional family business values. The company has operated in Northern Ireland since 1998, but its defining chapter began in 2012 when Alan and Caroline Lowry took ownership following the collapse of previous parent company WT Burdens. For Managing Director Alan Lowry, it was a pivotal moment. “I’d spent many years working for WT Burdens and had managed offices all over the world – Dubai, Qatar, New York, Brisbane and Perth,” he explains. “When the business went into administration, we had to decide whether to move on or start again ourselves. “We chose to invest here, to protect local jobs and to build something sustainable in Northern Ireland.” That international background has

proved central to the company’s success. From day one, ESF was designed as an outward-looking business. “Understanding export markets, cultures and logistics gave us a head start,” says Alan. “It meant we could think globally while still operating as a small, agile Northern Ireland company.” Today ESF employs nine people locally and generates annual turnover in the region of £2 million. While modest in scale, its reach is genuinely international. “We compete with much larger organisations,” Alan notes. “Being family-owned allows us to be quick, flexible and highly customer focused. That’s a real advantage.” Alongside its commercial activity, the business has deliberately embedded a strong social and developmental ethos. ESF supports student and graduate placements, Erasmus programmes, Young Enterprise initiatives and regular work experience opportunities. “Developing young talent is hugely important to us,” Alan says. “It’s part of our responsibility as a local employer and it helps create the next generation of skills our economy needs.” The past few years, however, have tested every exporter in Northern Ireland, and ESF has been no exception. “Brexit, Covid and the ongoing complexities around the Windsor Framework have created very

challenging trading conditions,” he admits. “Currency fluctuations, shipping delays and new administrative hurdles have all added cost and uncertainty.” Rather than retreat, the company chose to adapt. “We’ve turned those challenges into an opportunity to support our customers,” Alan explains. “By helping them navigate logistics and regulatory issues, we’ve strengthened relationships and positioned ourselves as a trusted partner.” Innovation has been another critical strand of ESF’s strategy. The company is currently working with Belfast-based blockchain specialist Ubloquity on the development of a Digital Product Passport platform, supported by a Digital Transformation Flexible Fund grant. “It’s about giving clients digital traceability and asset registration on a global scale,” says Alan. “Technology like this keeps us relevant and competitive, but it doesn’t change our core identity.” That balance between modernisation and tradition is one of the defining characteristics of the business. “Family companies have to evolve, but they also have to stay true to their values,” he says. “For us, innovation and integrity go hand in hand.” Succession planning is a topic every family firm must eventually address. While Alan and Caroline’s daughters have pursued careers in education, ESF’s



Environmental Street Furniture Managing Director Alan Lowry

future is being shaped in a different way. “Our focus is on developing a new generation within the business – young people who embrace sustainability and innovation,” Alan explains. “Continuity doesn’t always mean direct family succession; it means building a strong, values-led team.” Looking ahead, the objectives are clear. “We want to keep driving innovation, keep growing responsibly and keep supporting the local economy,” he says. “Social value matters – apprenticeships, mentoring, placements, all of that is part of who we are.” Above all, the company remains grounded in a distinctly family business philosophy. “Our culture is built on long-term thinking rather than short-term gains,” Alan concludes. “That creates loyalty among staff and trust with customers. It’s the foundation of everything we’ve achieved.” From a small Northern Ireland base to a worldwide marketplace, Environmental Street Furniture Ltd demonstrates what is possible when family values are matched with global ambition – a local company with an international outlook and a long-term vision.



Eye on Family Business

Hutchinson: Building a Global Engineering Business from Family Foundations

Family businesses often begin with little more than determination, practical skill and a willingness to solve problems. For Hutchinson, those qualities were present from the very beginning.

The company was founded in 1971 by Creighton Hutchinson in a shed on the family farm in Kilrea. Starting by serving the local agricultural sector, he fabricated parts and tackled practical engineering challenges for farmers and machinery operators. In those early days, the business was entirely hands-on – with Creighton quoting for work, manufacturing components, delivering orders and installing them himself.

What began as a one-man operation has evolved steadily over more than five decades into a significant engineering and fabrication business serving global markets.

Today, Hutchinson operates from a 160,000 sq. ft. manufacturing facility and employs over 185 people. The company partners with global machinery brands and specialises in complex fabrication solutions across sectors including materials handling, crushing and screening, and wider industrial markets. Significant investment in advanced manufacturing technology and design capability has helped position the business as a strategic engineering partner rather than simply a supplier.

For Mark Hutchinson, the journey from a founder-led operation to a structured organisation has been one of the defining challenges of the company's growth.

"One of the biggest challenges has been scaling sustainably – moving from a founder-led business where



Mark Hutchinson

one person made every decision, to a structured organisation with strong leadership, systems and accountability," he explains. Like many manufacturers, the business has also had to navigate economic downturns, skills shortages, supply chain disruption and growing international competition. Each stage of development has required the organisation to professionalise further, while maintaining the culture and values that underpinned its early success.

Modernisation is a necessary part of operating in advanced manufacturing, but at Hutchinson it is approached with a clear philosophy. "For us, innovation isn't about change for the sake of it – it's about solving problems better," says Mark Hutchinson.

Investment in automation, advanced design tools, energy-efficient systems and continuous

improvement ensures the company can meet the demands of customers who expect precision, speed and quality. At the same time, the business remains grounded in the principles established by its founder – integrity, hard work and a commitment to supporting people.

Looking ahead, ensuring the continuity of the family business is closely tied to investing in skills and leadership. One of the company's key initiatives is the Creighton Hutchinson Academy, its apprenticeship programme designed to create structured pathways into engineering and fabrication. By developing talent internally, the business is building a pipeline of skills that will sustain it well into the future.

Growth remains firmly on the agenda, but it is growth that is carefully managed. The company's focus is on strengthening

relationships with global OEM partners, expanding technical capabilities and continuing investment in automation and operational excellence. At the same time, Hutchinson is placing strong emphasis on leadership development and maintaining its reputation as a workplace where people can build long-term careers. Culture, Mark Hutchinson believes, is fundamental to that ambition. "Our goal is for every employee to feel they are part of something bigger than a job – that they are contributing to a legacy."

More than 50 years on from its beginnings in a farm shed in Kilrea, Hutchinson stands as a powerful example of how family businesses can evolve into global enterprises while remaining grounded in the values that shaped their origins.



DOWN ROYAL RACECOURSE
FRIDAY 24TH APRIL 2026
10AM - 3PM

REAL CONVERSATIONS. REAL FAMILIES. REAL BUSINESS.

Family businesses are built on relationships – and that's both their greatest strength and their greatest challenge.

Behind every successful family enterprise are conversations that shape decisions, direction and dynamics. Some are constructive. Others are complicated, emotional, or quietly avoided for years.

Family Business Unfiltered is an immersive experience designed to help family businesses talk more openly, listen more clearly, and move forward together.

Using live actors to portray familiar family business scenarios, the session invites honest discussion, shared learning and practical insight creating a safe space for conversations that rarely happen, but deeply matter.



LINDA STINSON
Bellamianta

Linda Stinson is the Founder and CEO of Bellamianta, Ireland's leading luxury tanning, skincare, and cosmetics brand. Inspired by her own skin struggles, Linda created Bellamianta in 2015 to develop clean, high-performing products that care for the skin while delivering flawless results.

Under her leadership, Bellamianta has grown into a multi-award-winning brand, stocked by major retailers across Ireland and the UK and now exporting to seven countries. A proud Tyrone native and mother of three, Linda is known for her authenticity, innovation, and passion for empowering confidence through beauty.



Colin Conway
Newell Stores

Colin Conway is the Managing Director and 2nd Generation owner of Newell Stores, an independent retail company based in Mid Ulster.

Under his leadership, Newell Stores has successfully opened a second location, expanded into alcohol and in 2024 opened their first bistro in partnership with award winning chef James Devine.

Colin is a Tyrone local and father of two. He is currently working as part of Dungannon Chamber of Commerce to help pilot new initiatives to help the next generation of SMEs.