



Nspace

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LOUISE NORTON

Husband and wife to be team, designer Louise Norton and builder Gareth Nihill, set up NSpace in 2004, offering a complete design and building package to both the residential and commercial sectors.

Where are we now: A large portion of our business is in private homes, rental property renovations and show houses. We would have also completed some commercial contracts for offices, shop fit outs, restaurants and pubs.

We have a growing network of reliable contractors and a good client list, with lots of repeat custom, but we need to work at broadening this further. We've never advertised or marketed the company, so this is something that needs focus.

Where we want to be: We like to get premises – we currently operate from a home office. We also need a clear financial plan so we can look four to six months ahead financially and manage our cash flow. I think this will also help with scheduling work – it will let us run seamlessly between projects or even run projects concurrently.

How we'll get there: We need to

start building Nspace as a brand, branding our vehicles and using signs on site. We're putting our website together, and a portfolio to present to potential clients. We also need to network more, and develop relationships with architects, engineers and developers, keeping an eye on the papers for planning applications and contacting potential customers. We need help with admin so that we can focus on other areas like sales, customer service and getting supplies. We're hoping to become more efficient with costings and, in turn, the quotations we give to help on our cash-flow and scheduling.

The challenges ahead: Putting together a clear financial strategy; conducting photoshoots of all our work for our website and also generating more revenue to fund an assistant and new premises.

BRODY SAYS:

“I love the sound of this as well. Like the Diet of Worms group, being creative is only 50 per cent of what you need to make the business successful. If it was me, I would consider doing a FÁS 'Start Your Own Business Course', which give a basic grounding in all the business disciplines. There may be grants available for this from Skillnets or other groups. Also, join a networking group like PLATO, where you can swap war stories with other small business owners and share your difficulties. I wouldn't put too much emphasis on your website. Yes, you need one (which you should design as low-maintenance), but it may turn out to be a relatively small part of your marketing mix. Low cost ideas, like looking at County Council lists for people who have gotten planning permission, then contacting them, may prove more fruitful – and cheaper.”