

Forecourt Focus: Shop Profile

A True Gala Performance

Dolan's Gala store in Tullamore, Co. Offaly, has been meeting the needs of its community for more than half a century.



Store owner, Brian Dolan, pictured outside his thriving Gala store in Tullamore, Co. Offaly.

DOLAN'S store has been serving the local community of Tullamore, Co. Offaly, for over 50 years. Brian Dolan's parents first established the business when they returned from the US in the 1960s. Brian and his brother have been involved in the family forecourt since childhood and have experienced many of the highs and lows of retail. It is a matter of fact that this is a business that has risen from the ashes, and one that is looking to new heights.

"In 2003, we experienced a huge fire on the site," Brian tells *RETAIL NEWS*. "We did not lose the underground tanks, but the forecourt and shop were completely gutted by the flames. The premises was destroyed."

The scale of the fire might have been enough to end the Dolans proud history of serving the community, but Brian was determined and tenacious in the face of adversity. He immediately began to seek out and meet with symbol groups, as well as seeking planning permission for a new larger forecourt and shop.

Looking back now, Brian admits that "the fire was a disaster for the business, but it was also an opportunity. At that time, symbol groups were driving up standards in the sector. They had a lot to offer independent retailers such as ourselves. Joining with a group would give us a competitive advantage over where we were before the fire, but I also considered areas such as IT expertise, deliveries, training. Joining with a group made sense for the business."



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Refined Grocery Selection

Trade was very strong right from the start, and Brian quickly saw the benefits of partnering with Gala. The Baker's Corner element allowed Dolan's to offer fresh baked goods to customers for the very first time. This, of course, meant that the deli staff had no experience with it, but Ben McGinn and the Gala Fresh Food team worked closely with deli manager Michelle Barrett and her staff, for training and support. The deli, the full off licence, the large grocery selection, the Bewley's coffee offering, are all "ammunition" as Brian calls it, to give people cause to choose Dolan's as their shop of choice.

Anthony Robinson, Retail Operations Executive with the Gala Group, tells *RETAIL NEWS*, "There is a lot of competition in town. With 4,000 square feet, Brian is able to offer a food-to-go package as

well as a full grocery selection, with pricing to match. Brian works very closely with Liam and the 4 Aces team and he is always looking to refine his offering for his customers so he can give them value for money, whilst maintaining margin. Gala is the 'local market' and Brian is the perfect example of that. He is very engaged with his community, supporting all sorts of local activities and events."

It is not just Brian Dolan who is heavily involved in sponsorships. The Gala Group has an on-going association with the Jack & Jill Foundation, which has seen the brand raising more than €100,000 for the charity, while Gala is also an official team sponsor of Team Ireland at the Special Olympics 2015 World Summer Games.

Connecting with the Community

During the recent introduction of the latest Gala branding to the shop, Brian used Facebook to keep his customers bang up-to-date with progress. While things were much less dramatic than the days of the fire, posts showing the latest developments kept Dolan's connected to the community in a very modern way.

"I am always looking to make the shop better," Brian explains, "and Gala is always working to make my business better too. As well as the addition of this latest branding, which my customers and I love, it is the areas customers don't see that develop too." He cites the examples of the latest CashGuard system for retail security, the iPad based ordering system for Gala's Chilled Centralised operation, which means that all Brian's deliveries arrive in one drop three days a week.

"It's always about making things easier and better for my business and my customers," the store owner concludes. "I'm a big fan of making good things even better and so is the Gala Group, which is one of the reasons we make such a great partnership."

Incredible Support

The store owner considered a host of prospective retail partners but Gala won out, with two factors "tipping the scales in their favour".

"First of all, I absolutely loved Gala's one-to-one approach," Brian reveals. "From the very first moment I met the group, and still today, I am known as 'Brian', or 'Mr Dolan' if they want to be formal. I'm never a number. If I pick up the phone and call Anthony [Robinson, Retail Operations Executive, Gala Group], I get his support and attention immediately. It's like that across the Group and it always has been."

The second plus point was the "incredible support" Brian received from Liam Linden and the 4 Aces wholesale team. For three years following the fire, Dolan's traded from a portakabin on the site, while their planning application for the new store went through the legal process.

"Obviously, that was an extremely difficult situation," Brian recalls. "Stock control was almost impossible as we had almost no room. Liam and the 4 Aces team were flexible and reliable, and their support was extremely valuable."

Once planning permission was obtained in 2006, the project moved quickly. By August of that year, Dolan's had moved from a cramped portakabin to a spacious forecourt. Brian pays tribute to the local community, who stood by them in the tough times, and eventually benefited from a bigger and better shop when the new forecourt store opened its doors.



Fact File

	Owner:	Brian Dolan
	Location:	Clara Road, Tullamore, Co. Offaly
	Size:	4,000 square feet retail space
	No. of Staff:	19 full time & part time
	Opening Hours:	07:00-23:00; Monday-Friday; 07:30-23:00, Saturday.