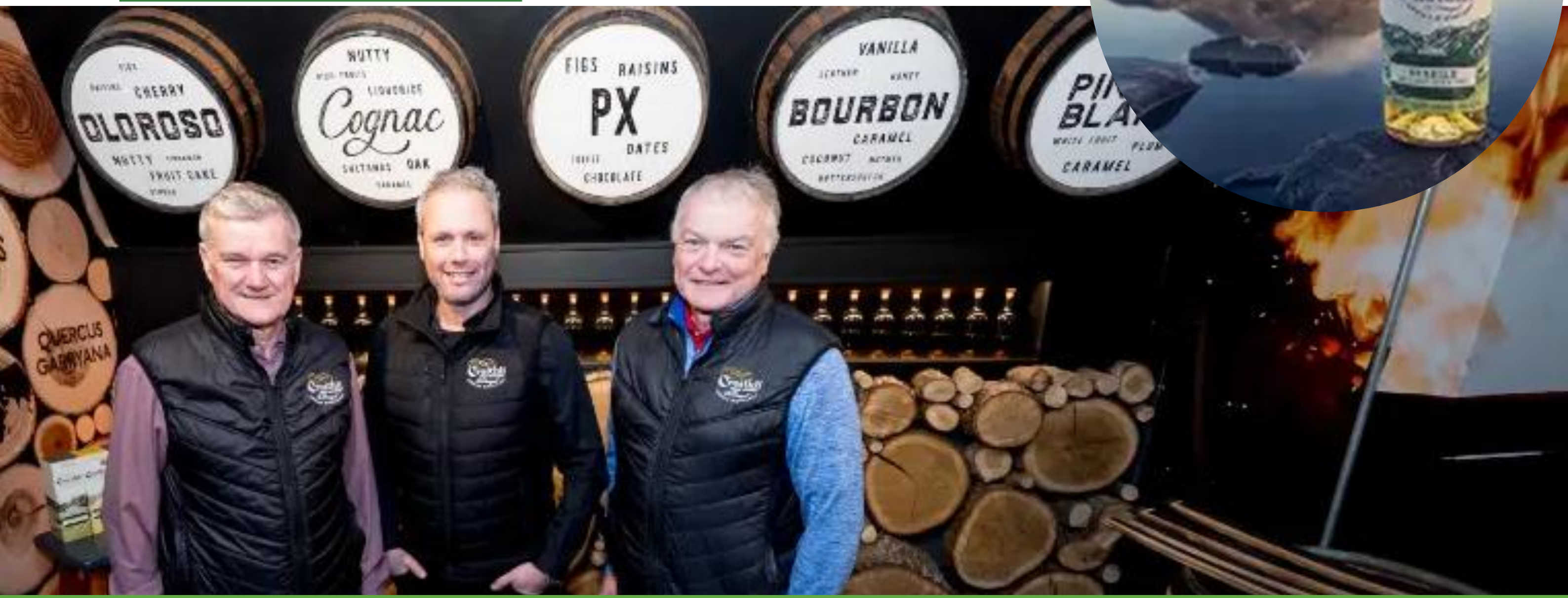
eco smart hospitality
Green and Digital Skills for Sustainable Hospitality



Crolly Distillery – Case Study
Ireland

Business in Numbers

Year established: 2018

Making whiskey since: 2020

Visitors centre opened: 2022

Visitors: 10,000 per year

Employees: 15

Energy as a % of costs: 7/8%

Digital Channel Presence: Web, Tik Tok, Facebook and Instagram.

Business Overview

Crolly Distillery Visitors Experience is a working distillery and visitor centre in Crolly, Co. Donegal. The company offers guided tours, whiskey tastings, and the opportunity to see traditional distilling in action. It welcomes tourists exploring Donegal, whiskey enthusiasts, local groups, families, and international tour groups looking for an authentic Irish whiskey experience.

Since opening, Crolly Distillery Visitors Experience has grown steadily. It started with guided tours and tastings for small local groups and passing visitors. Over time, it expanded its visitor numbers through stronger promotion and word of mouth, developed its facilities for larger tour groups, and added tasting events and private group bookings. The team has also grown to support tours, tastings, and customer service.

How is food waste monitored or reduced?

Crolly Distillery plans to use the Green Audit / Energy Efficiency Grant available from Údarás. Through this process, the company will undertake a Green Audit to identify areas for improvement in the business.

The company links waste and environmental impact to several operational areas. Water is essential in whiskey production, but local water abundance in Donegal means water scarcity is not currently a main issue for Crolly. Energy use remains a major concern, and the distillery is adopting energy-efficient technologies such as heat recovery systems, biomass boilers, and solar panels to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and lower carbon emissions.

Crolly Distillery also uses waste management practices to reduce waste and recover resources. Spent grains are repurposed as animal feed or compost, while wastewater treatment systems reduce the environmental impact of distillery effluent. The company expects the upcoming Green Audit to strengthen this work further.

Community engagement

Crolly Distillery connects sustainability with social responsibility and community engagement. Based in rural Donegal, the company supports local initiatives in education, conservation, and cultural preservation. The visitor centre has also had a positive knock-on effect for local hotels and B&Bs in an area that was not previously known as a tourism destination.

How is digital used to grow and promote the business?

Crolly Distillery has a strong online presence and places high value on its website and content creation. Because much of its customer base is international, online reach is central to its marketing. The company captures visitor data where possible and uses follow-up emails to increase sales and strengthen client engagement. It also uses an age-confirmation filter on the website and keeps online marketing activity age appropriate.

What data is informing key decisions?

The company uses a bespoke CRM system designed for the hospitality sector. This system generates live financial data that the team reviews constantly. Key indicators include turnover, margins, and costs. Crolly Distillery also tracks the location and home countries of visitors to support future marketing decisions.

What is the role of local sourcing?

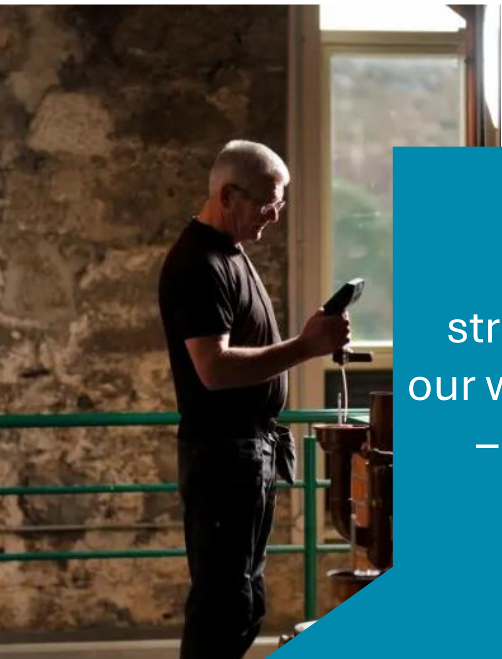
Crolly Distillery increasingly prioritises sustainable sourcing. The company sources barley from local farmers using organic or regenerative agricultural methods, manages water resources responsibly, and uses sustainably sourced oak for barrel maturation. Through these choices, it aims to reduce environmental impact and support biodiversity conservation.

What tools support energy or waste tracking?

Crolly Distillery is in negotiations with Údarás to undertake a Green Audit of its current practices. This is a fully funded €1,800 grant that will bring in an external expert to review the premises and recommend ways to reduce the company's carbon footprint and improve environmental practices.

An example of how you have led through adversity

Crolly Distillery avoided the worst of the COVID crisis because the visitor centre only opened in 2022. As a result, the company has not yet had to manage a major crisis of that scale. Day to day, however, it still faces operational pressure, especially in recruiting qualified staff in rural Donegal.



> Our online presence is very strong and we are very proud of our website and content creation – as the bulk of our clients are international, online reach is critical to our marketing.

Do you see your business implementing other initiatives that acknowledge ESG in the future?

The owner is familiar with ESG and places the business within a tightly regulated Irish whiskey environment. Crolly Distillery refers to the Irish whiskey technical file / product specification, the Irish Whiskey Verification Scheme, and the 2019 Food Safety Authority of Ireland guidelines on the labelling and marketing of Irish whiskey. Alongside this regulatory context, the company is exploring bioenergy production from organic waste as a possible future sustainability initiative.

What are the barriers or challenges to your business progressing in the ESG space?

Crolly Distillery's primary statutory funder is Údarás na Gaeltachta, so the company also promotes the Irish language in its business, for example through online AV content in Irish with English subtitles. At the same time, the company sells internationally and has to manage different tax rates, tariffs, and legal drinking ages across markets.

The business reports whiskey turnover of €1.5 million last year, with 10% of sales going to the USA and 55% to the UK. It ships directly from the distillery to retain employment in the area, but managing sales across several jurisdictions creates complexity. As a smaller SME, the company also has to invest time and money in GDPR compliance and proper employment practices.

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