



## Donna Daly Blyth

### Angelina Ballerina Dance Academy

#### GOING FOR GROWTH PROFILE

##### NAME:

Donna Daly Blyth

##### BUSINESS

Angelina Ballerina Dance Academy

##### POSITION

Chief Executive and Founder

##### WHAT WE DO

Dance Studio

##### CONTACT US

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Donna Daly Blyth started teaching dance 25 years ago with an ambition to share her love and passion for dance. From humble beginnings in the local parish hall, Donna has kept her focus on growth and in September 2008, the doors were opened on the new 'Donna's Dance Studio', a 5,000 sq. ft. facility comprising three separate dance studios, as well as changing rooms, reception and retail facility. Each week, over 80 classes are conducted, covering 14 different styles and catering to both children and adults. Thousands of dancers have passed through the company's Cork base over the years, and former students now teach and perform in all corners of the world.

In 2007, Donna began exploring a new growth opportunity when she obtained a licence from HIT International to begin running classes for the under-6 market under the name 'Angelina Ballerina Dance Academy'. The product was based on the internationally promoted TV and book cartoon character Angelina Ballerina, and, recognising its potential, Donna began to research and develop both the product and a management system that would make the product suitable for potential distribution to the international market. A hugely positive response to the January 2008 trial in the Cork studio pushed Donna to create an online management system for the classes and launch in Dublin and Kildare in 2008.

Capitalising on the success of the classes, in 2010 Donna began negotiations with HIT international to licence the product to a wider market and preparations for the period of intense growth to follow brought Donna to apply to take part in the Going for Growth programme. "The changes to the company were already in progress when I began my involvement in Going for Growth, and the sessions offered me a chance to really clarify my objectives in relation to a number of these changes. The programme helped me to identify the need for a clear set of management and reporting mechanisms to help in focussing on our long term goals and developing a strategy for obtaining maximum growth."

Although the Angelina Ballerina Dance Academy built on the strong reputation and lengthy experience in teaching dance and managing a dance studio that Donna had gained through her many years heading up 'Donnas Dance Studio', she found that the move represented a major shift as regards the business model of the new venture. "Although it was a very familiar area, the Angelina Ballerina Dance Academy is in many ways a totally different kind of business, and requires a very different operational approach," Donna notes, "The Going for Growth sessions really helped to challenge my ideas and thinking in a safe, supportive environment as I planned the best way to take things forward."

Donna holds the master licence for the product and began to franchise to other dance schools in March 2011. "The sheer pace of growth since the contracts with HIT international were signed in December 2010 has been staggering and over 40 territories across the UK and Ireland are now operational, making it one of the fastest growing franchises on the market at the moment." This rapid growth has come with certain challenges and Donna notes that part of the key to her success has been making sure she is surrounded by a great team. "The first thing we did after signing the contracts in December was hire. Having the right people around you is invaluable as each member of staff brings with them a massive amount of enthusiasm and positivity which is essential when you are going to be as busy as we have been."

The future looks bright for Donna Daly Blyth and the Angelina Ballerina Dance Academy as the company prepares for maintaining the fast pace of growth that has been the norm over the last few months. "We're already exceeding our targets for the licencing of new territories in the UK and Ireland, which is a really positive sign! Over the next 18 months we'll maintain focus on these markets. After that we're looking at launching the product in the US- considering the size of the market, that would be really exciting and a massive opportunity for further growth."



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