

Brain-storming boost for Irish innovators as entrepreneurial weekend kicks off



Philip Connolly

What does it take to become a successful entrepreneur? It is a question frequently asked by aspiring business people, but one without a simple answer. And in post-Celtic tiger Ireland, it is a question asked more regularly than most. It's five years since Face-

book opened its Irish office, joining a cluster of Silicon Valley firms that timed their arrival perfectly, giving at least one small part of Dublin a different feel to the rest of a city about to be

ravaged by financial meltdown. As Ireland lurched from one financial crisis to the next, here was a shining example of what can be achieved by innovation. Irish entrepreneurs had

a blueprint for what can be done on their doorstep, and since then, Ireland's own start-up scene has changed completely. But what are the characteristics that constitute

the right stuff – that intangible cocktail of attributes that sets apart those who succeed? For 24 hours this weekend, a group of emerging entrepreneurs have tried to find out.

This weekend in Cork, 24 experienced entrepreneurs teamed up with 24 up-and-coming business people for this year's instalment of the Entrepreneur Experience, an annual event featuring

seminars and talks from leading business people that aims to help entrepreneurs succeed. Ireland boasts plenty of its own examples of entrepreneurial success, and some of those successful business

leaders were on hand to give emerging entrepreneurs advice and mentoring. Unlike many business networking events, there are no ulterior motives at the Entrepreneur Experience. The

purpose is clear – to help the next generation of Irish entrepreneurs. According to Pete Smyth, chief executive of Broadlake Capital and one of the experienced entrepreneurs on

hand to give advice, the 24 seasoned entrepreneurs are carefully selected to ensure that they can critically analyse the emerging entrepreneurs' businesses and provide advice, guidance and knowledge

transfer to the next generation of innovators. The advice and mentoring received over the weekend has proved vital in the past, with business people such as Arun Kapil, who runs Cork-

based spice company Green Saffron, and Gerald Leen, one of the founders of biomedical technology firm Polypico, citing the event as a major eye-opener. The Entrepreneur Experi-

ence took place this weekend in Cork, in conjunction with Cork BIC. The Sunday Business Post is the official media partner, with other sponsors including Ernst & Young and AIB.

The purpose is clear: to help Irish entrepreneurs

The leaders of the pack

Following on from last week's feature, here are the remaining 12 high-flying entrepreneurs hoping to achieve success in the coming years, writes Lily Killeen

Mike Webster
founder and chief executive of Mobacar

Mobacar is a venture capital-backed travel technology company that aims to create easier ways to rent cars around the world.

After founding Mobacar, Mike Webster acquired the Nova car rental consumer brand and went on to raise \$1 million in venture capital finance. Since then, he has signed two more major clients in Australia, something he names as his "single biggest achievement" of his career.

Mobacar operates novacarrhire.com, which has rented cars to more than 1.5 million people worldwide and was one of the world's first car rental brokerage consumer businesses.

Swiftfleet, the B2B solution that is in place, enables travel brands around the world to customise their own car rental solutions on a fully managed basis. Clients include global travel brands, such as lastminute.com and travel.com.

The company is run by an experienced team of car rental product experts who combine creative software development with customer service. According to Webster, its many challenges now include scaling business development and matching product development.

Veronica Kenneally
MD of Veronica's Snacks

Veronica Kenneally could not understand why adults and children with dietary requirements did not have the option to enjoy their favourite snacks without having to compromise on flavour. So she launched Veronica's Snacks to fill the gap in the market.

Having landed its first sale in 2012, the company now manufactures and sells low-fat, gluten-free snacks in the Irish and British retail markets. It has achieved rapid market growth – its products are for sale in various retail outlets including Tesco, SuperValu and Dunnes Stores.

The revenue model for Veronica's Snacks is based on securing listings with retailers across market channels, ranging from major supermarkets through to speciality food companies and food-service organisations. It has also engaged with an experienced sales agency in Britain to secure further listings.

A limited budget means building brand awareness has proven to be one of the company's major challenges. Solidifying her listings in major supermarkets and maintaining good rates of sale is essential for establishing Veronica's Snacks in an extremely competitive area.

Kenneally graduated with a BSc in Food Business from UCC and has extensive experience in the retail environment, having previously worked as a sales manager with Clona Dairy Products in Cork. With an excellent network across Ireland and Britain, Kenneally exploits any opportunities that present themselves in an effort to continue to grow her healthy snack company.

Sean Ahern
chief executive of ThankFrank

Finding reliable reviews online is becoming more and more difficult, due to the amount of commercial content available. But ThankFrank.com has come up with a solution. The website aims to provide a 'sharing economy' service that offers incentives to consumers to help each other search and research.

Chief executive Sean Ahern says the objective is to encourage consumers to alert ThankFrank when their social media interactions are about to directly result in spending. This allows the site to identify the 'valuable' interactions within social media chatter. ThankFrank will then charge the selling merchant a commission fee for the social referrals service, and finally it will award helpful users with free shopping vouchers each time they are 'thanked' by a purchasing consumer for offering their advice or recommendation.

This concept is a win-win-win for three key beneficiaries, each fulfilling the other's needs, while at the same time gaining value in return. Shoppers cut down their search time and get genuine feedback from real consumers; enthusiasts get discounts for their next purchase if shoppers 'thank' them for their help, and brands can utilise their best customers to endorse them at extremely low cost.

Ahern holds a law degree, but has focused much of his career on designing win-win solutions and user-friendly tools to support them. He left Microsoft in early 2012 where he was in control of all processes and tools for Global Contracting, in order to set up ThankFrank.

Over the next 24 months, he hopes to secure investment to build up a global brand and capture a large portion of the social shopping market.

RosterChief is an employee scheduling programme designed to replace the outdated use of Excel and paper rosters

The revenue model for RosterChief is based on securing listings with retailers across market channels, ranging from major supermarkets through to speciality food companies and food-service organisations. It has also engaged with an experienced sales agency in Britain to secure further listings.

Rose Lenihan
business manager of Advanced Enviro Technology

Advanced Enviro Technology is a smart, clean, tech-product development company. Its signature product is EnviroLung, a micro-bubble aerator for waste liquids. The company aims to develop products to address key water-management issues by using energy efficiency, sustainability, interoperability, automation and remote control as core elements in the product design.

The company was established in July 2012 by Patrick Curtin and Michael Harnett, with Rose Lenihan joining as a full member of the team in March 2013.

Prior to this, Lenihan acted as an external advisor to the company. She has an operational and programme management background, gained by working in an international environment for 15 years.

The functional testing, design and prototype for the product has been completed and EnviroLung is currently installed in two client sites: Tralee waste water treatment plant and a private 64-bed nursing home. The challenges facing the business include trying to focus the company direction rather than product specifics, as well as a lack of industry knowledge and skills resulting in a dependence on external technical knowledge when testing the products in live sites.

Advanced Enviro Technology is getting investor ready at present, as well as preparing for production, collaborating with the engineering firm and going through the CE certification process.

Plans are in place for its formal launch in July 2014.

Shane McCarthy
chief executive of BlueChief Solutions

After achieving a degree in economics and management from University of Limerick, Shane McCarthy became solely focused on his role as chief executive of BlueChief, a company that specialises in business-to-business software solutions.

The company identifies issues across a range of industries based on market research and co-creates web-based solutions to these issues with key businesses, or 'pilots', who receive heavily discounted prices and specialised licence subscriptions agreements, while BlueChief retains the intellectual property rights.

The goal is to change how businesses of all sizes approach and interact with technology by applying its software as a service business model.

Chief executive Ken Keating is a database consultant who, for almost nine years, has worked closely with fertility labs and medical facilities both locally and internationally. It is during this work that he was able to identify problem areas and conduct research to determine how he could provide a solution.



Michael O'Neill of Irish Atlantic Salt
Picture: Clare Keogh



Veronica Kenneally of Veronica's Snacks

Ken Keating
chief executive of DB Matters Ltd

DB Matters develops innovative software products for fertility clinics, and has developed a software solution called the 'Consumable Tracker' for the secure tracking and traceability of consumable products and media used in fertility laboratories or clinical environments.

The application uses the latest integration of scanning and barcode technology and allows users to track whether consumables have been received, opened, are in use, dosed or expired. This allows for full traceability and recall on all patients and procedures to be carried out accurately and efficiently.

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His solution, the Consumable Tracker, is GAMP 5 and FDA compliant for the storage of electronic records and electronic signatures. It has been integrated with the Fertility Clinic Management System, 'IDEAS', which was developed by Mellowood Medical. Mellowood Medical is the European market leader of EMR software for fertility clinics and has a large client base in the US, Canada and Australia.

Consumable Tracker is set to be rolled out to Mellowood Medical clients internationally, which requires support and future development, both to maintain the standard of the current application and to introduce other applications and products to the industry.

Denis Coleman
founder and chief executive of Cognito HRM (Work Compass)

Work Compass was developed out of a frustration on the part of founder Denis Coleman with the lack of support available to managers in small and medium businesses. He believes that most managers are promoted due to success in their previous role, and most receive little or no assistance in learning the competency of management.

Work Compass was established to bridge the gap. It was designed to help managers execute the important management practices well, regardless of prior experience.

Based in Cork, the company has been in operation for a year and half and currently has three staff. Its software as a service staff performance management system provides managers in SMEs with a systematic way to align staff objectives with those of the organisation, track progress, give timely and structured feedback and measure the behaviours of staff engagement.

Some of its Irish customers to date include the Irish Management Institute and the Irish Business Employers' Confederation. The company has also secured customers in Britain and



Sean Ahern of ThankFrank

With just a finger-prick of blood, Radisens' device is able to report test results within minutes

America. At present, the critical issue for Coleman is help with scaling the business in Ireland and Britain, and in particular selling to enterprises online.

Alan O'Herlihy
founder and chief executive of Everseen

When setting up Everseen, Alan O'Herlihy combined his retail experience in both the fast moving consumer goods and the food sectors with his systems and process consulting experience.

Everseen develops point-of-sale video analytics. The system covers point-of-sale configurations and is able to detect and report on non-scanning activity across many sectors of the retail industry. The Everseen automated video analytics system identifies irregular transactions at the point of sale and puts retailers in a position to identify the causes and take remedial action. By monitoring these aspects, retailers can't improve their gross margins through a reduction in shrinkage and profit loss and better employee management systems.

Eoin Leonard
chief executive of i3PT Certification

Eoin Leonard is a construction industry expert, and has led large public and private construction projects in Ireland and Britain. He is now chief executive of i3PT Certification, an international third-party certification body, and is responsible for driving the company's strategy and innovation.

i3PT Certification is an international, independent certification and inspection body that operates in the construction sector. It specialises in the auditing and certification of critical building elements, including the passive, active and fixed fire protection systems, ICT, and electronic security. i3PT Certification audits the design and installation of these systems to international standards.

The company also helps the assigned certifier, design certifier and building owner to meet with its due diligence and mitigate physical risks under the new regulations. i3PT Certification believes that this is a critical element of the building process and states that one of the company's major challenges is to change the culture in the construction sector and make people understand that these standards



Mike Webster of Mobacar



Jerry O'Brien of Radisens Diagnostics Ltd



Rose Lenihan of Advanced Enviro Technology

are not merely "nice to have", they are a "need to have" element. It is thought that the new building regulations have helped in this regard, but i3PT needs to find partners in global engineering firms to include its service in their scope-and-deliver ability to reduce risk.

Michael O'Neill
MD of Irish Atlantic Salt

Having graduated from University of Limerick with a degree in computer engineering, Michael O'Neill has purchased his first fishing vessel in 1992, followed by a second in 1995, and managed and ran this business until 2004. It was not until 2007 that he began to focus on the development of Irish Atlantic Salt.

Based in the Bazar Peninsula in west Cork, the company produces Irish sea salt flakes and a range of infused sea salt products using a bespoke and energy efficient production process in an organically certified facility. Production began in 2010, and the factory capacity is now 60,000kg per week.

The company is a family-run business that is dedicated to quality. It has won a number of awards, including Great Taste, Blas na hÉireann and a Bord Bia food and drink award.



Eoin Leonard of i3PT Certification

With just a finger-prick of blood, Radisens' device is able to report test results within minutes with lab grade sensitivity and precision. The company aims to place diagnostic devices into every physician's office and outpatient clinic in a hope to improve patient outcomes, drive down healthcare costs and enable performance-based incentives sought by healthcare insurers.

Jerry O'Brien, chief executive, has spent more than 20 years working in the consumer electronics and medical diagnostics industries in various positions.

Jerry O'Brien
chief executive of Radisens Diagnostics Ltd

He believes strongly in combining early direct market intelligence and trans-disciplinary fields to drive disruptive innovation.

He founded Radisens Diagnostics Ltd in 2009, with leading in-vitro diagnostics and consumer electronics experts. Since then, he has travelled across Asia, the US and European markets, building and

growing a number of innovative product lines. With chronic disease epidemics – such as diabetes and heart disease – on the rise, the healthcare industry is struggling to provide the necessary clinical best practice and cost savings that are required. This is where Radisens believes it can close the gap between diagnostics and therapeutics, with its multi-mode diagnostics at the point of care.



Frank Casey founder of ResourceKraft

Established in 2007, ResourceKraft is developing technology driven products and web-based solutions to assist energy users with multi-site estates to measure and reduce their energy consumption and carbon emissions, and to help manage and report on their energy costs.

The Advisor, a real-time energy management solution, acquires enterprise-wide energy usage data and transforms it into readable information for executives and managers at the corporate, regional and store level.

It presents low- and no-cost energy saving measures, and conveys the information in an understandable way. The company has successfully developed low-cost devices to gather meter information and control devices, using wireless technology. Resources are then targeted to achieve savings, with an average of 10 per cent to 20 per cent savings in the first 12 months.

With a background in ICT hardware, Frank Casey set up ResourceKraft with Liam Reilly after leaving Intel in 2007.

The company says its biggest challenge is to scale into the US market and learn how to best position the company against US competitors.

Other speakers at the event will include Gillian Moore, whose make-up and cosmetics company Fuchsia has expanded countrywide and book a seat at one of the seminars in Drogheda late last year and which offers mentoring services, hot-desking and training to those who want to be their own boss.

"People start businesses for many different reasons – be-



Patrick Joy of Suretank

Drogheda Business Expo – winning business abroad

Patrick Joy, whose manufacturing company Suretank employs 600 people offices around the world, will be in Drogheda on Tuesday to give advice to business owners on how to achieve success in global markets.

Joy, who set up Suretank in 1995, will address delegates at the Drogheda Business Expo, which is being organised by Drogheda & District Chamber in association with The Sunday Business Post.

Suretank is the world's largest manufacturer of car-carrying units for the offshore oil and gas sectors, and has a 62 per cent share of the global market. Joy, whose company has revenues of over €70 million per year, is the current EY Entrepreneur of the Year.

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Being positive and looking for opportunities in a difficult market will be covered by Simon Elliott of Volkswagen. Drogheda United manager Robbie Horgan will discuss how to get fit for business, while Louisa Maher of MOR Solutions will advise on developing a digital strategy for your business.

Of particular interest to start-ups and aspiring entrepreneurs will be a seminar given by Sean MacEntee of The Mill, an enterprise hub which opened in Drogheda late last year and which offers mentoring services, hot-desking and training to those who want to be their own boss.

"People start businesses for many different reasons – be-

cause of their desire to be their own boss, unemployment, by accident or for no particular reason at all," he said. "For many, the choice of business type is obvious because of their training, experience and market knowledge. However, for others, the choice is not so clear, and that's where we can help."

According to MacEntee, whose talk at the expo will focus on how to evaluate and rank new business ideas, The Mill is actively seeking entrepreneurs and early stage SMEs for its Drogheda facility. Attendees at the expo will have the chance to win three months hot-desking plus mentoring to the value of €1,000.

In total, more than 40 exhibitors will be showcasing their businesses at the expo, which takes place at the Westcourt Hotel on West Street from 9.30am to 6pm. The event is open to all businesses across the north east and further afield. To register and book a seat at one of the seminars, see droghedachamber.com.

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