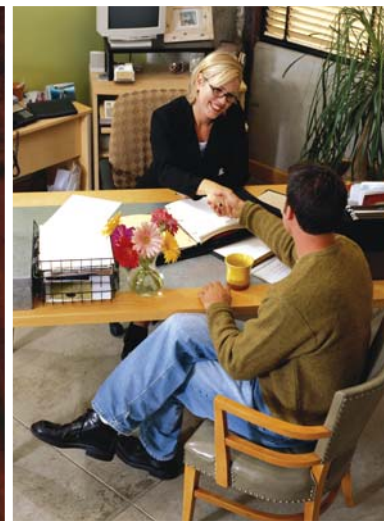


Profiling Ireland's entrepreneurs



Key Learning Outcomes

- ▶ Entrepreneurship in Ireland
- ▶ Remit of Enterprise Ireland
- ▶ Importance of entrepreneurship to the Irish economy
- ▶ Changing attitudes to entrepreneurs in Ireland today
- ▶ Profiles of six entrepreneurs and their businesses supported by Enterprise Ireland

Curriculum Links

Business
(Unit 2)

Transition Year

LCVP

Introduction

Ireland is a dynamic economy with the highest rate of start-up companies in Europe (Global Entrepreneurship Monitor). The tax system and Government incentives, together with a positive attitude towards business, contribute to a highly positive entrepreneurial culture. In 2005, the Economist Intelligence Unit listed Ireland as no. 1 in a quality of life index for 111 countries (ahead of the USA). The Irish economy is a model for developing economies all over the world. In March 2006, the Wall Street Journal referred to Ireland as a 'real star' and the French newspaper, Le Figaro, recommended Ireland as a 'shining example'. Ireland's economic outlook is good – it is forecast that Ireland will maintain its present rate of superior economic expansion for the forthcoming 15 years.



Ireland has a young, well-educated, English-speaking population, exposed to global influences, with a 'can do' attitude and the ambition to create their own businesses. As economies become wealthier entrepreneurship becomes a key driver of economic growth.

It would seem that there has never been a better time to start a new business in Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland

Enterprise Ireland works on behalf of the Irish Government to help high potential start-up businesses to establish themselves and develop profitably. Its mission is to transform Irish companies into market-focused, innovation-driven businesses, capable of maximising exports through the utilisation of applied research and technologies.

To be eligible for start-up assistance from Enterprise Ireland, a proposed new business must:

- ▶ Be based on a product or service that is innovative with the potential for growth and export.
- ▶ Plan to operate in either the manufacturing sector or in an internationally traded service sector.
- ▶ Be likely to achieve significant growth in 3 years (sales of €1m and employment of 10 people).
- ▶ Demonstrate a clear and identifiable need for financial assistance.
- ▶ Be Irish owned and located in Ireland.

Enterprise Ireland can help in a number of ways: through funding, identifying new markets, team building and training, consultancy and mentoring.

Characteristics of successful start-up businesses:

- ▶ Strong and industry-experienced management team (frequently led by or supported by a serial entrepreneur).
- ▶ A product offering based on a clear technological advantage.
- ▶ Experienced sales and marketing professional in the team.
- ▶ Have built a close strategic alliance with key target customers.
- ▶ Well funded or with access to substantial equity funding from the outset.

Who is an entrepreneur?

An entrepreneur is a person who spots an opportunity and undertakes to create a business out of that opportunity in the hope of making profit. Examples of Irish entrepreneurs are Michael Smurfit who built an international packaging empire from one box-making factory in Dublin, Pádraig O'Céidigh, a teacher who ventured into the airline business with Aer Aran and Louise Kennedy, one of Ireland's most successful fashion designers. There is no such thing as the typical entrepreneur. They can come from all variety of backgrounds and educational levels. They do, however, often have some common characteristics.

Qualities & skills

Many entrepreneurs share common personal characteristics. They are highly motivated, resourceful and creative people who proactively seek out opportunities.

Research in Ireland shows that many Irish entrepreneurs are typically:

- ▶ 25–34 years old (early stage entrepreneurs)
- ▶ Well educated
- ▶ Have worked for a number of years in formal employment
- ▶ Motivated by choice to exploit a commercial opportunity
- ▶ Believe in their own skills
- ▶ Role models for others



Have you got what it takes to be an entrepreneur?

The following are entrepreneurs who turned their vision into reality. They may inspire you to consider starting your own business.

Quality Additives

Problem solvers would best describe Quality Additives. Quality Additives is the brainchild of Kevin Sheridan, offering solutions to customers to process end products. It may be for a toothbrush company, a food packaging company, a medical company or even a construction company. These companies may be looking for a particular colour or different features for their products. Quality Additives has a variety of applications for their products and services.

An entrepreneur requires a mixture of skills and qualities. Kevin, a business graduate, has the classic traits of an entrepreneur. He is a fantastic communicator, with the ability to win over customers. He is also passionate about working for himself and is highly motivated. He has excellent people skills.

Kevin believes in common sense and understanding all aspects of communication from sending a business letter to presenting a relevant presentation. Having good communication skills will create a good impression and is a desirable quality to have as an entrepreneur.

For more information visit: www.qualityadditives.com

Instinct Technology

Instinct Technology is an exciting new business that produces the technology platform used by developers in the PC and console games sector to develop game titles.

Dermot Gallagher turned his hobby (game development) into a business idea. Dermot is exceptionally persistent, good at managing and is focused. He believes these are the most important qualities for an entrepreneur. Dermot is a self-taught programmer and project manager - very much the exception in this sector.

Dermot believes that training and education are vital to success. Many of Instinct Technology employees are exceptionally talented, either as programmers or artists. They are highly educated with the majority having third level qualifications. Being located in Dublin has meant they have been able to access Irish support packages and agencies.

The company went through quite a long and extensive research and development stage to develop their product. In order to finance this, support from Enterprise Ireland was vital.

There are lots of barriers to entry into the marketplace. You have to be aware of the challenges and drive the business over those hurdles both technical and financial. Finally, as an entrepreneur, Dermot has the following advice to someone starting their own enterprise *“Plan, focus, and keep focused. Expect it to be difficult, but don’t allow that to cause you to lose sight of what makes it worthwhile.”*

For more information, visit: www.Instinct-tech.com

Qualflow Systems

Qualflow Systems manufactures novel sterilisation technologies which have cross industry potential with applications in the brewing, food and pharmaceutical/medical sectors.

Ciaran O’Morain noticed an important gap in the market when he worked in the Japanese semiconductor industry. He saw an opportunity to provide a better product and service and tried to get his employer to run with the idea. They didn’t, so he took the entrepreneurial solution and co-founded Scientific Systems in 1995.

Initially Ciaran, a graduate in Applied Physics, started his career as a researcher in DCU Physics Department in 1988. In 1991, he got the opportunity through a FÁS scheme to work in the Japanese semiconductor industry. Ciaran realises the importance of education and training and has participated in a number of marketing and finance courses at Berkley University, California. Today, he is CEO and co-founder of Qualflow, his second start-up entrepreneurial adventure.

Entrepreneurs need a mix of core skills to create a successful business. You need the ability to sell your ideas and to motivate people both internal and external to your company.

In a start-up situation, having quick and easy access to customers will help get your product to market. In his last venture, Ciaran set up an office in California to get close to and understand his customers’ needs.

The most significant challenge, according to Ciaran is getting over the credibility hump, particularly with large corporate customers. However, he believes if you have a product or service with a competitive edge that meets customer’s needs and a good team, you can overcome this and other challenges.

For more information, visit: www.qualflow.com

Netfort Technologies

NetFort Technologies is an exciting Network/User Behaviour Analysis business formed in 2002. The company develops IT solutions that provide the continuous intelligence that companies need to validate IT security and network usage policies and reassure customers, partners, management and staff.

The company is the brainchild of businessman, John Brosnan who gained experience working mostly in software engineering multinationals. He has a B.Eng. (Electronic Engineering), M.Eng. (Computer Systems) and a Diploma from the Technology Enterprise Programme. John believes that training and education are vital and that experience, leadership, motivation and management are important qualities for entrepreneurship. He attributes success to hard work, listening, help from friends, contacts and Enterprise Ireland.

John planned and sought funding to meet his needs. He received finance from Enterprise Ireland, NUIG, various friends and mentors. He is aware that generating sales is important and the engine of any business. He markets through different channels including telemarketing and the NetFort website.

Ireland is a satisfactory location for NetFort as they deal mostly with the UK, with which it is easy to establish close trading links and English is the common language.

As an entrepreneur John has the following advice to someone starting their own enterprise:

- ▶ Do lots of market research.
- ▶ Test at a very early stage if possible.
- ▶ Keep talking and meeting customers and prospects. Do not over use email for example. Face-to-face meetings are critical.
- ▶ Keep it simple and focus. Develop expertise and functionality that gives you an advantage in a specific sector and use it.

For more information, visit: www.netforttechnologies.com





Shenick

Established in 2000 and based in Dublin, Shenick has deployed its diversifEye™ integrated network, application and security test systems throughout North America, Europe and Asia.

Alan Robinson, a restless telecom executive, wanted to start his own business and was looking for emerging Internet opportunities. He established his own business mainly for the freedom to make his own mistakes and take credit for the successes.

A graduate in Maths and Engineering from Trinity College in 1989, Alan has the classic traits of an entrepreneur; attention to detail, hard-working, enthusiastic, intelligent, with a high level of accuracy and diligence. In addition, Alan realises the importance of training and education which gives a person the ability to solve problems.

Enterprise Ireland has supported Shenick very well with several grants to aid research and development, trade shows and hiring experts. In addition, Shenick has raised over €8m in venture finance.

Alan believes that if you are to set up a successful business, you must think about it very carefully. Get someone you trust to critique your plans. If it doesn't pass this, then modify the plan and critique again. Then once that's achieved, jump on in. You can't start any other way.

Today, Shenick is a thriving business. Innovation has been the key to its success. For more information, visit: www.shenick.com

Zandar Technologies

Zandar Technologies is a dynamic and fast growing Irish company devoted to the design and development of leading edge video display products. Founded in 1999, Zandar is now well established internationally.

Marketing objectives are central for success. It's important to know the market prior to developing any product. The majority of Zandar's products are for specialised dealers, therefore Zandar devotes enormous time in training, to ensure expertise and understanding of its products. Training and education are extremely important particularly in a high technology firm.

In terms of finance, Zandar has found Enterprise Ireland very supportive. Five years is a relatively short period to allow a satisfactory return from a technology company. Like all companies, the most significant challenge is raising sufficient capital and in the post dot.com boom raising finance has become more complicated.

The Single European Market with the associated benefits of single pricing across the euro zone was very important for Zandar.

If you're a wannabe Entrepreneur, then Zandar recommends that you ask yourself the following three simple questions:

1. **How** are you going to sell?
2. To **whom** will you sell?
3. Can you sell at a **profit**?

If you can answer these questions then you are off to a great start. It is then extremely important to discuss your idea with support agencies such as Enterprise Ireland and other professional advisors.

For more information, visit: www.zandar.com

Conclusion

Entrepreneurship in Ireland is set to grow in the future. Demographic factors such as the increase in population, increased migration and the relative youth of the Irish population have all played a part in providing a framework in which entrepreneurial activity has thrived.

Ensuring entrepreneurial success requires a mix of qualities, skills and resources together with demanding effort, motivation and vision.

Activity

- ▶ Profile a local, national and international entrepreneur. Draft a SWOT/SCOT analysis for the entrepreneurs profiled.
- ▶ Debate the following statement 'Entrepreneurs are born not made'.
- ▶ Draft a list of appropriate questions to ask an entrepreneur.
- ▶ List the qualities and skills of entrepreneurs. Can you explain each one?
- ▶ Discuss the work of Enterprise Ireland.
- ▶ Design a poster for the classroom, which will demonstrate enterprise. Prepare a short (one minute) oral presentation for your class stating what you have learned about enterprise.
- ▶ Write an essay on *Entrepreneurship in Ireland*.
- ▶ Discuss the benefits of entrepreneurship to a local community.
- ▶ List ways to ensure a successful company.

Find out more

Visit www.enterprise-ireland.com

While every effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of information contained in this case study, no liability shall attach to either The Irish Times Ltd. or Woodgrange Technologies Ltd. for any errors or omissions in this case study.