

From Bricks to Bytes

By Morgan Flanagan Creagh

While investigating recent Irish documentaries I noticed that many had been focused upon the hardships and repercussions of the recession, others looked at people coping with the hard times and doing the best they could with limited resources. They all seemed to take a negative or solemn view and that perspective was not something I wanted this documentary to portray, so a different route was taken.

I went in search of Ireland's new entrepreneurs; a decade ago the nation was brimming with them and I assumed the new breed was something that needed investigation. Were people starting property businesses, shops and bars in the recession or had that kind of development died completely in Ireland? How difficult was it to set up these businesses and what is the future for entrepreneurs in Ireland?

The idea for the Documentary originally began as an exploration into the different styles and forms of new business being created in Ireland post Celtic Tiger, however, the focus was narrowed upon realising that the technology sector was developing at a far greater pace than any other area. The use of Ireland as a base for multinationals such as *Google*, *LinkedIn*, *Facebook* and *Intel* has given the Irish IT sector a huge boost and led to a jump in the 2011 CAO points for science, computer science and engineering. It also gave Ireland's talented businesspeople an area outside property to focus their attention on.

This led to the development of the final question and focus of *From Bricks to Bytes* which is mentioned in the opening sequence of the documentary: "Is technology the future for business in Ireland and how difficult is it to grow a start-up company following the property crash?"

Having decided on the research topic I then examined what categories and areas of start-up companies in the technology sector needed investigation. My first task was to find an interviewee who had experience in business during Ireland's economic growth and during the recession in order to form a comparison for the listener. Then I wanted to find young, up and coming entrepreneurs who were starting online and tech businesses, in order to explore their perceptions regarding the future of this sector in Ireland. I also wanted to know how successful they had been so far, how much interest was in the IT sector and whether or not Ireland was a good place to launch these businesses. My final task was to interview an entrepreneur who had succeeded in creating a successful business during the economic downturn in the tech and online sectors, and examine the challenges faced in creating a viable and profitable business in Ireland, and what obstacles needed to be overcome.

My First interview was conducted with Mr Matt Forkin, the Director of *Forkin Estates*. This interview was not used in the Documentary as it was focused on the original area of research into the broad spectrum of young entrepreneurs in Ireland. The next interviewee was Mr Stephen Byrne, CEO of *Venueone*, an online entertainment hub which was started in 2010. Stephen had been involved in property during the Celtic Tiger and as such was a perfect candidate for a comparative view on business in the two decades. I discovered *Dublin Beta* Start-up Company Expose while researching Irish online start-ups and attended the event in order to interview a plethora of developing businesses. Some of the interviews did not make the final cut for the Documentary. These interviewees consisted of Owen O'Connor founder and CEO of *Cernam* an online security company, Liam Ryan co-founder of *Get Health* and Mary Forde of *User Story Ltd*.

Of the interviews from Dublin Beta the CEO of *Newswhip* Paul Quigley, was used in the final product of *From Bricks to Bytes* as I felt he gave a good unbiased insight on the future of business in Ireland and the developments in technology that will secure this future. Richard Whelan of *Studybuddy* was only 18 years old and I felt he gave a good and positive outlook for business in Ireland while also giving the perspective from the original starting point of online entrepreneurship. CEO of *Von Bismark* Eoghan O'Sullivan's interview displayed the interest large companies have in the online and tech sector and just how cutting edge the work being done in Ireland is. Finally Adrian Avendano of *Crowdscanner* give the perspective from a non Irish person who honestly discussed the size limitations Ireland suffers from on the world stage, in relation to company development.

John O'Rourke is one of the team who created Dublin Beta. A self described non tech person, John's business background and pragmatic view that the IT sector needs to work with business in Ireland I found compelling. John created *Dublin Beta* to allow Irish business to browse what is on offer from Irish online start-up companies which provided a valuable message.

Shane Breslin editor of *Joe.ie* was interviewed while I was at the joe.ie offices but was not included in the documentary. The founder and CEO of *Joe.ie* Niall McGarry was a perfect example of successful and optimistic recession era entrepreneur who could provide the listener with personal data on the difficulties with forming, running and making an online business successful. Niall also gave a valuable insight into the future of online entrepreneurship in Ireland.

This documentary could be broadcast to a broad spectrum of listeners. This is because careful attention was paid to avoid technical jargon or buzzwords. It is presented in a simple manner in order to reach an audience of

varied education and experience. *From Bricks to Bytes* could also be used on the websites of start-up companies to reaffirm the importance for the Irish economy of visitors to their sites. Personally I believe this documentary could be broadcast anywhere, from an evening segment on *RTE Radio 1* to Primetime on *Phantom* as it both informs older people of the opportunities of investment or involvement in the nations IT sector, and also shows young people that starting up their own business is far from an unattainable throwback to the Celtic Tiger. Furthermore, it helps to create a spirit of optimism and a sense of possibility for the future, which is much needed a time when we are surrounded by negativity and uncertainty.

Difficulties in creating this documentary included accessing Dublin Beta in order to conduct interviews. Having to scrap so many interviews in the editing room was also a problem. Removal of background noise from the interviews in *joe.ie* and *Dublin Beta* was highly problematic. Finding candidates for interviews that fitted my criteria took months to arrange and plan. There were also problems with the equipment, mainly related to the college's radio studio which is used by classes who have a tendency to rearrange controls and programmes.

In conclusion *From Bricks to Bytes* has discovered that the IT sector in Ireland is developing very successfully. It is a perfect platform for young entrepreneurs to create business and for already established businesses to broaden their horizons and investigate a new medium. The documentary also shows that Ireland is not the IT hub we are led to believe and that there is much work to be done in investment, taxation and national broadband coverage if we truly wish to be Europe's centre of IT and a contender on the world stage

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