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EMERGING NEW BUSINESSES

Ones to watch

The future is looking bright for some of Ireland's newest emerging start-ups

AGILE NETWORKS

In 2011, six members of staff at ICT company Telindus were faced with redundancy and unemployment when the firm decided to close its Irish arm. Darragh Richardson, manager with Telindus, was convinced there was a future in the firm with real opportunity in the market if it concentrated on what it was good at. So he led a management buyout.

With an investment grant from **Fingal County Enterprise Board**, Richardson and his colleagues started up **Agile Networks**, a specialist provider of IT networking solutions, in 2011. He is now managing director of the firm, which customises networks to each of its customer's environments and offers a full lifecycle of integration services.

Agile Networks had just seven customers when it started but has grown that base significantly. It now supports over 53 customers across almost 1,000 sites.

The firm is challenging the status quo in the marketplace, focusing on what it's good at and providing dedicated resources.

"Technical excellence is at the core of everything we do. We have been setting new standards in IT networks," says Richardson.

In the company's first year of business turnover was €2.3m, by year two it had grown to €4.7m. Already, it is on track to beat its target of €6m in year three.

All engineers at the firm have a minimum of eight years' experience. Since its establishment, it has hired another nine people, bringing its headcount to 15.

Agile Networks was named one of the top 100 businesses in Europe at the 2014 European Business Awards, and has won eight awards in total over the past two years.

"We want to build a reputation for being the best network integrator in Ireland and try to win a nice spread of high-value customers. We don't want to be the biggest company out there but we do want to be the best," says Richardson.

Visit www.agilenetworks.ie for more information.

"It has really grown far beyond our expectations. We have been doubling our sales year on year"

COYNE RESEARCH

Bernie Coyne has an established record in the research area, having worked in it for 25 years and set up and sold Research Solutions to Amarach a number of years ago.

Coyne stayed with the amalgamated firms for four years after the sale and did a further two years as managing director of the joint business. However, two years ago she decided to go it alone, setting up Coyne Research.

Growth at the Dublin-based firm has been organic. It now hires seven people, and in just two years has brought its turnover to €1.5m.

Quality is critical to the success of the firm, says Coyne.

"The key thing is clients. I have a core group of clients that I've worked with on and off for 25 years. You must maintain loyal clients but they're only loyal as a result of delivering added value, good-quality reports."

Those clients include Ulster Bank, Bayer and Johnson & Johnson. Last year, the firm carried out a massive product test for Lidl, which forms the basis of its brand challenge campaign.

Operating out of a 2,600 ft office space in Dublin 22, Coyne expects to take on three or four more staff in 2014.

She has won some international business with Digicel in the Caribbean but for now will concentrate on growing the Irish customer base.

"It's a €70m research industry here in Ireland, and we want to take a chunk of that."

Go to www.coyneresearch.com.

GO EXPLORE HOSTEL AND SAILOR'S BAR & RESTAURANT

In 2006, a small fire at the Bay View Hotel on Clare Island, County Mayo forced it to close. The business had been run since 1963 by Chris O'Grady but had needed significant investment before the fire. Chris's son Carl O'Grady had been studying to be a quantity surveyor and was working for a firm in Dublin when he carried out a feasibility study for a new business.

After submitting a business plan to AIB bank and being

approved for LEADER funding, he moved back from Dublin and started construction on what was to become Go Explore Hostel and Sailor's Bar & Restaurant in January 2012. The company opened for business in June that year.

It comprises a traditional Irish bar, seafood restaurant and new 42-bed modern hostel. O'Grady is also developing an education centre, a 45-seat classroom facility with a potential market of national and international universities looking to carry out field studies.

"We've brought the hostel up to a very significant standard. Through the Sailor's Bar & Restaurant, we go out and catch our own mackerel and pollock and serve it that day. We also put on entertainment during the week and at weekends," says Carl O'Grady.

Turnover in the first year of operation was €150,000; by the second year this had risen to €250,000. Some 80-90pc of business is during the peak season of May until end of September but O'Grady is working hard to bring in the off-season trade through the education, corporate team building and hen and stag parties market.

He also hopes to increase traditional tourism in the summer months. The firm has joined up with activity operator Adventure West to provide a series of activities and to develop a brand and website, Clareislandadventures.ie.

"Marketing is everything," says O'Grady. "During the off-season is where you really have to work hard on the PR side of things."

Check out www.goexplorehostel.ie for further information.

METALMAN BREWING

Metalman Brewing founders Grainne Walsh and Tim Barber were always interested in local beers, and when they returned to Ireland from travelling in the mid-2000s were taken aback by how little choice was available on the beer scene.

They started off making craft beer as a hobby, but by 2011, had turned it into a business. After much research, the pair launched the Metalman Brewing brand's first beer on 3 March, 2011.

The company was mostly self-funded to begin with but Waterford City Enterprise Board has since provided it with grant funding and a loan.

In the past three years, Walsh and Barber have built a strong customer base in Ireland, selling their Metalman Pale Ale brand in 60 locations nationwide. The company has also produced a number of seasonal beers and continues to experiment with different flavours and tastes.

"It has really grown far beyond our expectations. We have been doubling our sales year on year. Our first sales targets were really aggressive and we met them without much trouble at all," says Walsh.

Branding and marketing have been hugely important. "From the very outset we engaged a local graphic designer to brand the brewery. We felt that having something that made the product stand out was very important. We don't have much of an advertising budget so are very active on social media."

Exporting is on the agenda for 2014.

"One of the interesting and attractive aspects of exporting beer is that you don't have any duty liability on it. We would like to have more of a presence in international markets, so in 2014 will start moving forward with this plan."

See www.metalmanbrewing.com for more.

TITAN LOGISTICS

Shannon-based company Titan Logistics has made great waves in the transport and logistics market since it was set up in 2012. Working with SMEs, the firm designs logistics solutions, and has a global reach through international exports, imports and domestic services. What it ultimately offers is flexibility and agility, according to Paul Collins, managing director.

"Buying in small volume is complex, costly and time consuming. We have simplified the process through our global partnership programme, portfolio of services, knowledgeable employees and easy-to-use tools capable of adding value to business," he says.

Titan Logistics delivers innovative group purchasing solutions for customers who cannot reach the scaled discounts of large multinationals through its consolidated buying power. This results in savings of 17pc in freight and 22pc in indirect resources.

"We have lots of experience in dealing with large companies, and we've tried to bring that experience to small companies, with turnovers from €1 million to €25 million. We know about logistics, we know about supply chain. We can design the perfect logistics solution for firms so they can concentrate on their core business," says Collins.

In just two years, the firm has built up a regular customer-base of over 50 companies. Turn-over was €5 million in 2013. By 2015 Collins hopes to double that.

"We've exceeded what we thought we could do in terms of the client base. Our strategy is to create two divisions within the group; one for repeat clients for multinational business and the other for infrequent users."

The firm has launched an online e-logistics shop www.snapparcel.com for infrequent customers looking to deliver products worldwide. Snapparcel.com means it can move products out of Ireland to any location in the world.

"Traditionally, there has been a lack of service for SMEs or the infrequent user. We can deliver 20 kilos to the US for €45," says Collins.

Titan has a staff of seven at present, increasing to 10 by the end of the year. In the medium term, the company has plans move into the UK market.

See www.titanlogistics.ie for more details.

"The key thing is clients... You must maintain loyal clients but they're only loyal as a result of delivering added value, good quality reports"



Staff at **Agile Networks**, some of whom were involved in a management buyout of their old firm in 2011



Staff from start up Coyne Research, from left, Lesley Kelleher, Stephen Kelly and Roisin Ni Fhearghail





Carl O'Grady, owner of Go Explore Hostel and Sailor's Bar & Restaurant



Grainne Walsh, co-owner of Metalman Brewing



Kevin Vaughan, supply chain director and Paul Collins, managing director, Titan Logistics