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THE MARKET

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THE NEW AGE OF THE TRAIN
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**Noticeboard**

**Creganna grows its global position with new acquisition**

Creganna, the Galway medical device and lifescience specialist, has acquired California-headquartered Avalon Medical Services, which trades as Tactx Medical.

The move positions Creganna-Tactx Medical within the top ten global providers of technologies and services to minimally invasive medical device companies, according to Creganna’s CEO Helen Ryan.

With locations in California, Minnesota, Massachusetts, Singapore and Ireland, the new entity will have a presence in many of the key medical device clusters globally, enabling stronger partnerships with customers.

Combined, the two companies will offer a complete range of technologies and services for minimally invasive delivery and access devices, with a specialist competency in the design and manufacturing of high-end therapeutic catheters.

Bank of Ireland Corporate Banking acted as agent and funding bank on the deal, while Barclays Bank Ireland and HSBC Corporate Banking Ireland provided the finance for the transaction.

**Terminalfour attracts €1.6m in new funding**

Terminalfour, a web content management company, has secured €1.6m of equity funding. The Dublin company currently has over 200 customers throughout Ireland, the UK and Europe and is now positioned to expand beyond its European base and capitalise on growing sales opportunities in North America.

It has already developed a partner network and won a number of reference university clients in the US and Canada. The equity funding will now accelerate its growth strategy and be used to finance the development of its partner network, sales force and research and development. The company also plans to increase its employee numbers from thirty-five to fifty, including sales, pre-sales and customer service jobs in its Irish headquarters.

The investment was led by the Ulster Bank Diageo Venture Fund, managed by NCB Ventures, with investment also provided by the AIB Seed Capital Fund, managed by the Dublin Business Innovation Centre, and with grant aid from Enterprise Ireland.

**Killarney-based Monex to provide treasury management software to Hertz Europe**

Hertz, the world’s largest general use car rental brand, has entered an agreement with Monex, the Killarney-based global leader in multi-currency and card processing, to roll out its multi-currency treasury management software systems to Hertz corporate countries in Europe.

Monex will now add 1.5 billion to its annual throughput on behalf of global clients. Over 46 million individual credit card transactions are facilitated through the Killarney office for clients that include Ryanair, Ritz Carlton Hotels and the Dublin Airport Authority.

Monex has established itself as one indigenous Irish company that has bucked the current economic trends. Last year, it announced a licensing agreement with ICICI Bank, India’s second largest bank, to provide its currency conversion software. ICICI processes over €700 million in credit card transactions per annum.

That deal culminated a very successful 24-month expansion programme across the Asian market, which resulted in a number of significant client wins, including AirAsia, Bank of Asia, Bangkok Airways, Bank of China, Shangri-La Hotels and the Thai Military Bank. It now has 40 percent of the multi-currency credit card processing business across the continent.

**Luxcel secures investment and enters strategic alliance with US partner**

Cork-based company Luxcel Biosciences, a specialist producer of luminescence based gas and pH sensors and related tests, has announced a major strategic partnership with MOCON Inc., a global leader in gas-sensing technologies and package testing/shelf life instrumentation for the food, beverage, pharmaceutical and other industries.

Under the agreement, MOCON will invest €2.5m in Luxcel and support the company’s business development plans and expansion into new global markets. This includes a new R&D investment programme, which is also being supported by Enterprise Ireland.

Luxcel is currently selling its sensors and tests to research and development teams within the major pharmaceutical companies and is about to launch new products for the food safety and packaging industries in 2010.
Daft launches in Poland

Daft Media Group, the company behind the Irish property website Daft.ie, is expanding into the Polish online property market with the launch of Daft.pl. The website launches with approximately 60,000 properties, covering every major city and town in Poland. The company hopes that Daft.pl will benefit from the positive brand recognition of Daft.ie amongst the hundreds of thousands of Polish people who came to work and live in Ireland during the last 10 years.

The Daft.pl website has been fully localised into Polish. The Polish market is approximately ten times larger than the Irish market, with a population of 38 million, and while internet penetration in Poland is slightly behind Ireland at just 52 per cent, the market for online advertising is growing at a faster rate.

Limerick company secures major international deal with Monsanto

Stokes Bio has signed a major licensing and R&D collaboration with Monsanto, one of the world’s leading agriculture companies. The Limerick company specialises in the development and application of microfluidic technology to enhance life science research and molecular diagnostics.

The deal with Monsanto is expected to help accelerate the pace of new advancement in plant breeding, as the new system will allow companies and scientists to massively increase the quantity and speed of data processed in the course of genetic analysis of biological samples.

West Cork stoves to feature in latest Harry Potter Film

Three antique stoves from Ovne Stoves are to feature in the next and very last Harry Potter film ‘Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows’. Based between Rosscarbery and Leap in West Cork, Ovne specialises in fully restored antique and retro stoves. The film is due out in November.

Aspera to invest €1.4m targeting the UK

Aspera Solutions, an Irish enterprise software implementation company, is to invest €1.4 million over a three-year period as it seeks to become the UK’s market leading enterprise resource planning (ERP) service provider in the mid-tier manufacturing and distribution segment.

The investment is being financed by AIB loan finance and retained earnings. Aspera aims to grow its annual UK turnover to €1 million in 2010.

The first phase of the investment has just concluded with the acquisition of AlphaGen’s manufacturing sector customer base of 35 ERP customers, which generate a €500,000 annual revenue stream.

Production by Dublin media company launches on kids’ BBC

This January, ‘Garth & Bev’ an animated series from Kavaleer Productions, based in the Dublin Digital Hub, launched on the BBC’s CBeebies.

The series is a co-production between Kavaleer Productions and Copernicus Studios, a Canadian animation company.

Gath and Bev is aimed at four to seven year olds and follows the adventures of Garth and his sister Bev, who lived a long time ago. With a little magical help from their druid grandfather Lir, they can travel anywhere in time to satisfy their curiosity about the world and everything in it. The series already enjoyed huge success when it debuted on RTE in November 2009 and secured a 33 per cent share of the viewing audience.

Kentz enters into global agreement with ExxonMobil

Engineering and construction company Kentz has entered into a five-year Global Framework Continuing Engineering Service Agreement with ExxonMobil Global Services Company. The agreement provides a framework for the provision of engineering, design and technical support services to ExxonMobil projects around the world.
Perfect your pitch with messaging and value proposition workshop

Enterprise Ireland is hosting one-day interactive workshops in Dublin this spring to help participants develop a clear and credible value proposition relevant to their customers. The day will be followed up by a one-to-one session with the workshop facilitators, Futurecurve, to stress-test the resulting customer value proposition (see www.futurecurve.com).

Two separate workshops take place on March 3 and April 12. For further information contact, Angela Byrne, Tel:+353 21 4800248, email angela.byrne@enterprise-ireland.com

SMEs more confident about prospects in 2010

Senior executives in Irish SMEs are more confident about their prospects in 2010 than they were about facing into last year, according to the annual O2 business survey.

The number who are more confident about the year ahead has more than doubled from 12 per cent in 2009 to 26 per cent this year.

“The study finds that while companies continue to face serious challenges in terms of sales, cash flow and competition, there appears to be the start of a recovery in confidence levels,” commented Alan Brown, Business Sales Director - Telefónica O2 Ireland.

He said that this uptake in confidence may be, in part, due to the fact that the majority (57 per cent) believe that the global recession has bottomed out. However, just 23 per cent say the Irish recession has bottomed out, while 62 per cent believe worse is yet to come.

On the jobs front, the outlook appears neutral, with 17 per cent expecting to increase recruitment, similar to the number (15 per cent) that predict a decline in headcount. The majority (67 per cent) expect to maintain employment at the same level.

A third (34 per cent) of Irish SMEs expect revenues to rise in 2010, up from a quarter (24 per cent) last year. Some 42 per cent expect revenues to remain the same, while a quarter (24 per cent) predict a decline in sales. Last year, over a third (36 per cent) expected revenues to fall.

Looking for more PR?

Dublin company Bvisible Communications has launched a free, downloadable e-book that should help Irish companies get a steer on PR. The e-book features interviews with some leading Irish journalists and provides insight into how best to get a story picked up, major faux pas to avoid and examples of how to make your media pitch stand out. See http://bvisible.ie/ebook/
Irish firm to offer faster market intelligence data to global organisations

Polecat, a market intelligence provider based in Dublin and in the UK, has signed an exclusive, worldwide licence for advanced software algorithms developed by UCD researchers to enhance its strategic market intelligence platform.

Polecat’s MeaningMine platform analyses statistical and linguistic trends in publically available digital and broadcast media by mining 300,000 articles and 4 million blog posts daily. Using its current platform, Polecat can provide clients with insight into emerging trends, influencer networks, competitive analysis and dominant discussions, empowering senior organisational strategists to keep up-to-date with relevant market intelligence data.

Polecat’s MeaningMine platform is part of a new market category of advanced software analytics which, according to Forrester, will fuel year-on-year growth in the business intelligence software market to an estimated $14 billion worldwide by 2014. According to IDC, the advanced software analytics market represents approximately 20 per cent of the overall business intelligence tools market and grew by 12 per cent in 2008.

The technology licensed by Polecat arises from a research programme funded by Science Foundation Ireland at UCD’s School of Computer Science and Informatics.

Get ready to target North America

This February, Enterprise Ireland is hosting workshop events, introducing clients to the First Flight programme and other relevant supports. The events will have specific relevance to companies focused on exporting to the United States and Canada.

Essentially, the First Flight programme is aimed at helping participants to understand what could hold their business back from achieving profitable export sales; formulate and action a plan to target key risk areas; benefit from the expertise of experienced exporters, and avail of other relevant Enterprise Ireland supports.

The February workshops aim to provide participants with a brief overview of some key factors to consider when exporting to North America as well as informing them of the benefits of First Flight and how to get involved.

A workshop for life science and clean tech companies will take place on February 17, followed by a workshop for software and service companies on February 18. The Plaza at East Point will be the venue for both. Contact: Claire Minogue, Tel: +353 1 7272958, Email: claire.minogue@enterprise-ireland.com

New arbitration law set to improve international dispute resolutions

It is expected that the Arbitration Bill, published by the Department of Justice in 2008, will be passed by the Oireachtas this February.

The bill is intended to repeal the three previous Acts covering this subject and replace them with a single consolidating Act governing not only domestic but also international arbitrations. It will be the most significant change to the legislation governing arbitration since the introduction of the 1954 Act.

Crucially, it will apply the UNCITRAL (United Nations Commission on International Trade Law) Model Law on International Commercial Arbitration to all arbitrations that take place within the State. The most significant impact for Irish businesses trading internationally is that an arbitration order made by the Irish courts can now be enforced internationally, as UNCITRAL has already been adopted by over 50 countries.

UK to invest £1 billion in super-fast broadband

The UK is to invest £1 billion in upgrading digital infrastructure to bring super-fast broadband to 90 per cent of Britain and Northern Ireland. The objective of the Next Generation Fund is to provide the UK with a “world class” communications network to bolster innovation and services in digital content.

“Already the market is delivering superfast internet speeds of 50Mbps to half the country, but we cannot be certain that it will reach the communities that are not currently served, which is why we are putting in an extra £1 billion to support the market,” commented Minister Peter Mandelson, launching a consultation on how funds should be spent. Areas with little or no broadband provision are likely to benefit most from the investment, he said.
Companies share information at first Vietnam Ireland Business Forum

At the request of the Vietnamese Government, Irish Aid is funding a programme in Vietnam, entitled the Irish Development Experience Sharing (IDEAS) programme, which will involve various Irish institutions sharing their economic development expertise with Vietnamese counterparts.

The programme comprises three parts; capacity building at central government level (the Central Bank and ESRI etc, coaching counterparts in Vietnam), education (Irish Aid is sponsoring a number of MBA students at Smurfit School) and private sector capacity building.

Enterprise Ireland has been invited to manage the third part of the programme, and the activities involved are designed to bring Irish companies into the Vietnam market through partnerships with Vietnamese companies.

Partnering with the Vietnam Chamber of Commerce and Industry and the Vietnam Software Association, EI Malaysia has set up the Vietnam Ireland Business Forum (VIBF).

The first session of the VIBF was held in Hanoi towards the end of last year. An interesting result from the event was the large amount of sharing of information and networking among the Irish companies. For example, Sentry Wireless effected an introduction for SIMChronise to VMS/Mobiphone, and Seestream provided contacts in FPT in Ho Chi Minh City, facilitating an important meeting for Digisoft.tv. In return, Digisoft.tv introduced Seestream to the Digisoft.tv partner in Singapore, to see if they can work together in that market. Digisoft.tv is also looking at the possibility of adding the Seestream Video product to their offering and discussions on this will continue in Ireland.

The VIBF is to be continued on an annual basis. While in the first year, it is concentrating on the ICT sectors, in the future other industry sectors will be included. See www.vibf.net.vn/en

Irish video technologies pitch to the Japanese market

While you are sleeping, you can download your favourite QVGA high quality videos and music from more than 50,000 sources for later enjoyment,” explained Yoshiaki Maeda of NTT DoCoMo, the keynote speaker at Enterprise Ireland’s ‘Fusion of Digital Media and Telecommunications’ held late last year.

In light of the coming transformation to full digital broadcasting systems throughout Japan in 2011, new services and businesses are expected to be generated arising from the convergence of telecommunications, broadcasting and content beyond existing barriers. With a fully equipped broadband infrastructure, user demand for high quality Internet Protocol TV (IPTV) is also on the rise.

Happily, the challenges faced by Japanese content and service providers present opportunities for Irish IT solution companies. NTT DoCoMo is the largest wireless telecommunications service provider in Japan with an estimated market share of 52 per cent in 2008. As NTT DoCoMo moves towards Long Term Evolution (LTE) mobile technology, it is producing a number of key services to integrate the mobile phone further into their users’ lives.

A mobile television service, Bee TV allows NTT subscribers to watch content specifically designed for the small screen. Channels include music, animation, entertainment, comedy, drama and movies among others. At the moment, more than 13 million people are downloading video content per month, while downloaded content by subscribers per file has doubled when compared with last year.

Mr. Maeda’s introduction to the current state of play in Japan set the stage for five Irish IT companies; Firecomms, Digisoft.tv, Movidius, Redmere and Shenick. These companies have developed cutting edge technologies and unique services ranging from network connectivity to user terminals and TVs. Already actively doing business with European and US providers, operators and manufacturers, it is envisaged that these companies could also help local companies to provide a variety of services in the Japanese market.

[Michael Garvey]
Galway company eMedia has developed the Pocket Heart – an iPhone application, enabling users to drill down and see the visuals and workings of the human heart. The device has been piloted with 16 to 18 years olds – in transition, fifth and sixth year. It is also aimed at pre-med students entering medicine in the US, some of whom are coming from a humanities rather than a science background.

eMedia’s third receptive audience are cardiology diagnosis patients whose consultants want to explain what’s happening to them. Currently, this is done using wall-charts, but there is keen interest in using a digital tool to explain procedures to patients in the under-sixties age category.

Finally, eMedia’s Mark Campbell says the Pocket Heart has found fans as a gadget among the general public. So far, it has featured on about eight review sites and sold in 18 countries. (See www.pocketanatomy.com)

“The pocket heart is a massive shift in what we do,” he says, adding that it is part of a move to transition the business from a small to a mid-sized company.

“We now have sales in 18 countries, which has made us aware of markets outside Ireland. A year ago, we wouldn’t have believed we would be here.”

While the application hasn’t made the company a mint, sales have covered development costs, and the application has generated enormous PR. As an example, when we spoke, Campbell was heading to a meeting with cardiologist members of Croi, a charity to which it is donating a percentage of profits from the Pocket Heart. “It is creating nice synergies and profile,” he says.

The company is now looking to expand with a suite of iPhone applications, as well as online versions for people who don’t have an iPhone. Ultimately, the aim is to create a ‘Google Earth maps’-type searchable and navigable map of the human body, allowing users to select a location and drill down past skin, bones and muscle, layer by layer. The project is vast and complex, Campbell concedes. But as a company already providing 3-D medical animation to healthcare, medical technology companies and universities, eMedia is well positioned.

A second arm of development would include building quizzes into the application and creating an e-learning tool. In the meantime, the company is planning to develop a 2-D version of the human body. This will have a reasonable amount of content and be applicable to secondary schools and first year university students.
Spring Diary

What's on

FEBRUARY

First Flight China
8 February
Workshop event introducing the First Flight Programme, which is aimed at determining a company’s export-readiness and addressing gaps, and providing details of other relevant supports from Enterprise Ireland. This event will have specific relevance to companies focused on exporting to China.
L: East Point, Dublin 3
C: Claire Minogue
T: +353 1 7272958
E: claire.minogue@enterprise-ireland.com

Kidscreen Summit - USA
10 to 12 February
Trade fair for those involved in the kids’ entertainment industry TV programming, acquisitions and development executives, marketers and digital media content creators and distributors.
L: New York
C: Simone Boswell
T: +1 650 32914108
E: simone.boswell@enterprise-ireland.com
W: www.summit.kidscreen.com

Mobile World Congress 2010
15 to 18 February
The meeting place for leaders in mobile technology
L: Barcelona
C: Robert Bushnell
T: +353 1 7272151
E: robert.bushnell@enterprise-ireland.com
W: www.mobicelworldcongress.com

Irish Financial Services Promotion in Gulf States
21 to 25 February
C: Michael Browne
T: +353 1 7272795
E: michael.browne@enterprise-ireland.com

The Digital Festival: Hothousing Digital Ideas
24 February
Event organised by The Brainfood Store, with support from Enterprise Ireland, focusing on digital and social networking communications and marketing, featuring an international panel of speakers.
L: The Berkley Court Hotel, Dublin 4
C: digitalfestival@thebrainfoodstore.com
T: +353 1 284 6096
W: www.thebrainfoodstore.com

First Flight North America
17 and 18 February
Workshop event introducing the First Flight programme, which is aimed at determining a company’s export-readiness and addressing gaps, and providing details of other relevant supports from Enterprise Ireland. This event will have specific relevance to companies focused on exporting to North America, including Canada.
L: East Point, Dublin 3
C: Claire Minogue
T: +353 1 7272958
E: claire.minogue@enterprise-ireland.com

What's on
MARCH

Batibouw  
1 to 3 March  
Study visit to trade fair focused on construction and renovation  
L: Brussels  
c: David Jordan  
t: +353 1 7272702  
e: david.jordan@enterprise-ireland.com  
w: www.batibouw.com  

‘The Business of Ageing – Turning Silver into Gold’  
3 March  
The Business of Ageing Conference, in association with lead sponsor, Intel Health, aims to alert Irish businesses to the new opportunities and challenges associated with targeting the over 50’s - the largest, fastest growing and most rapidly changing consumer market in the world  
L: Royal Hospital Kilmainham, Dublin 8.  
w: www.businessofageing.com  

Educare Exhibition – Kuwait  
8 to 11 March  
Exhibition of Irish education providers, geared towards the Kuwait student population  
c: Ikram Ur Rehman  
t: +966 1 4881383  
e: ikram.urrehman@enterprise-ireland.com  

O10 – Oceanology International  
9 to 11 March  
Trade fair and meeting place for the marine science and ocean technology community  
L: London  
c: Marina Donohoe  
t: +353 1 7272860  
e: marina.donohoe@enterprise-ireland.com  
w: www.oceanologyinternational.com  

Water Energy Technology Environment Exhibition (WETEX), Dubai  
9 to 11 March  
Market study visit to WETEX 2010, providing an excellent opportunity to meet with UAE and regional decision makers in water, electrical and energy sectors. The visit will include one to one meetings at the exhibition and access to seminars, market briefings and a networking reception for participating client companies  
L: Dubai  
c: Anthony Cahill  
t: +9 714 3298384  
e: anthony.cahill@enterprise-ireland.com  

Education Mission to China - CIEET 2010  
13 to 28 March  
Series of education trade fairs, organised by the Chinese Service Centre for Scholarly Exchange, Ministry of Education  
L: Beijing, Chongqing, Shanghai, Qindao and Guangzhou  
c: Li Bo  
t: +86 10 8448080  
e: li.bo@enterprise-ireland.com  
w: www.cieet.com  

US Trade Mission  
15 to 19 March  
Irish trade mission, to be led by An Taoiseach  
L: West and East Coast  
c: John McIntyre  
t: +1 650 329-1414  
e: john.mcintyre@enterprise-ireland.com  

Medtec Europe 2010  
23 to 25 March  
Exhibition and conference addressing the technical sourcing needs of medical device manufacturing companies  
L: Stuttgart, Germany  
c: Eddie Goodwin  
t: +49 211 4795935  
e: eddie.goodwin@enterprise-ireland.com  
w: www.devicelink.com/expo/medtece10/index_en.html  

CTIA Wireless 2010  
23 to 25 March  
Show representing a $1 trillion global marketplace that brings together wireless and converged communications, wireless broadband, applications, mobile web and data  
L: Las Vegas, Nevada  
c: David Smith  
t: +1 650 2876369  
e: david.smith@enterprise-ireland.com  
w: www.ctiawireless.com  

Protecting your intellectual property in China  
26 March  
Workshop  
L: Dublin  
c: Cathy Holahan  
t: +353 1 7272907  
e: cathy.holahan@enterprise-ireland.com  
w: enterprise-ireland.com  

The European Insurance Forum 2010  
March 29 to 30  
Solvency II and other industry relevant regulatory issues, along with reviews on current insurance market opportunities will be addressed. The conference will also explore the Obama Impact - the US Attitude to Europe, and it will review the emerging markets of Brazil and Russia  
L: RDS, Dublin 4  
w: www.ctiawireless.com  

APRIL

‘Regionalism and Globalisation’ Conference  
8 to 10 April  
‘Regionalism and Globalisation’ is the theme of the 37th annual conference from the Academy of International Business (UK & Ireland Chapter). Keynote speakers include Professor Peter Buckley and Professor Alan Rugman  
L: TCD, Dublin 2  
w: www.tcd.ie/business/news-and-events/events/  

MIPTV 2010  
12 to 16 April  
Trade fair, described as the world’s entertainment content market  
L: Cannes, France  
c: Damien McCarney  
t: +353 1 7272181  
e: damien.mccarney@enterprise-ireland.com  
w: www.miptv.com  

Trade Stand at GETEX Dubai  
14 to 17 April  
Information communications technology show  
L: Dubai  
c: Nasser Zahran  
t: +971 4 3298384  
e: nasser.zahran@enterprise-ireland.com  
w: www.gitex.com  

Irish Construction companies in China  
20 April  
Workshop  
L: Dublin  
c: Cathy Holahan  
t: +353 1 7272907  
e: cathy.holahan@enterprise-ireland.com  
w: enterprise-ireland.com  

Using the Internet to compete in International Markets  
22 April  
Workshop  
c: Eoin O’Siochru  
t: +353 (1) 7272969  
e: eoin.osiochru@enterprise-ireland.com
“In Turkey, which is our most consolidated market, almost 50 per cent of our volume goes through traditional moms and pops [stores], so the challenge is how to profitably serve a small mom and pop in eastern Turkey with a three or a five case drop at a time.”
Irish man Michael O’Neill is CEO of Coca-Cola İçecek, the fifth largest bottler in the Coca-Cola System. He talks to Mary Sweetman about growth opportunities and pain points for the industry.

In 2009, Irish-born Michael O’Neill was voted ‘Best CEO in Turkey’ in an annual survey of fund managers and executives, brokers and listed companies by Thomson Reuters.

Thomson Reuters doesn’t do a ranking for ‘CEO with the most interesting brief’, but if they did, then O’Neill, who is head of Coca-Cola İçecek (CCI), would, again, surely have been a contender.

As the fifth largest bottler in the Coca-Cola System internationally, Istanbul-headquartered CCI operates 20 plants and employs over 11,000 people, producing, selling and distributing in ten incredibly diverse countries across the often politically volatile Pakistan, Central Asia and the Middle East region.

CHALLENGES Day-to-day, O’Neill reckons that the region’s underdeveloped retail sector is his biggest challenge. In Ireland, it’s probably fair to say that a handful of supermarket chains dominate branded soft beverages’ distribution; but not so in Central Asia or the Middle East.

O’Neill has a photo of Coke being supplied on the back of a camel in Petra, Jordan. “In Turkey, which is our most consolidated market, almost 50 per cent of our volume goes through traditional moms and pops [stores],” he explains, “so the challenge is how to profitably serve a small mom and pop in eastern Turkey with a three or a five case drop at a time.”

That’s not all. In central Kazakhstan, temperatures can fall to below -45°C degrees, and as Coca-Cola freezes at -3 to -4°C, it must be shipped across the country, which is the size of Europe, in heated, insulated, railway carriages.

Challenge number two is affordability, and, in turn, tailoring flavours and packaging to reflect the ability of the consumer to pay.

Pre-recession, that ability had been increasing all the time. Growing from a low per-capita consumption base, in the last five years, up to 2008, CCI had been experiencing mid-20s compound annual growth rates.

Spurring this on were some stellar GDP growth rates in Central Asia, where CCI is active in five countries, including oil-rich Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, which has lots of gas, and Tajikistan, which neighbours Afghanistan. “Even, in Kyrgyzstan, a relatively small country, about the size of Ireland, when there was affluence in Kazakhstan and Russia, many people went to work there, so there was strong repatriation of cash,” O’Neill says.

Then came the global downturn. In 2009, CCI’s growth remained positive but now in single digits. But O’Neill is confident that an abundance of natural resources will set these countries back on a strong growth path once the global economy re-boots.
Across the CCI territory, which also includes Pakistan, Jordan, Iraq and Syria, he says that a rough rule of thumb applies: consumption of sparkling beverages increases in tandem with GDP growth.

“We see Coca-Cola, Fanta or Sprite often becoming a replacement for tea, so as people get a bit more money in their pocket, they are very much open to go out and have a Coke with friends. In many of these countries, we have little or no competition from alcohol, so instead of bringing home a bottle of wine, you see many fathers of families bringing home a litre and a half of Coke and putting it on the table for an evening meal or to share with friends on a social celebration.”

Current projections are that the CCI will require an additional three to four plants over the next four years.

WORLD VIEW O’Neill who graduated as an industrial engineer from Rathmines College, back in 1969, joined The Coca Cola Company in 1989, where he was Eurasia Regional Director until 1996 and subsequently president of TCCC’s Nordic and Northern Eurasia Division.

Prior to that, he spent 15 years working for what was Córas Tráchtála, the then Irish Trade Board, with many assignments overseas, including a stint with the Manchester office; heading up the Swiss, Austrian and German markets from Düsseldorf and a period managing the Moscow office during the late seventies, which saw the start of Aer Rianta’s presence there and the beginning of the 1980s’ love affair between Ireland and the Soviet Union.

For the past five years, he has been with CCI in Turkey and says he finds the people there much more hospitable and warmer than in many other countries.

“Istanbul really has what I would call the spice. It’s got this European-Asian energy and a different flavour; there is a positive outlook, a multicultural collage, which is so exciting and so interesting. I travel a lot down to the eastern coast of Turkey and Syria, where you enter an extraordinary treasure trove of biblical and historical attractions.” Add to that the fact that the Turks are beginning to get into golf, and although O’Neill says he rarely has the time to get a round in, he sees it as another symbol of Turkey’s increasing sophistication.

The CEO is more circumspect about the prospects for Irish food and drinks companies in the region. While the Middle East has traditionally been a strong market for meat and meat products, he reckons Irish consumer food companies could find the decentralised retail sector a tough nut to crack. Likewise, alcohol is largely a non-runner.

But he is more optimistic about the prospects for those supplying the dairy sector. “There are dairy industries in Russia, Saudi Arabia, Ukraine and Turkey, and these industries almost mirror and evolve in line with each other, so if you have a proposition for the industry in Ireland, it’s highly likely you’ll have one for the industry there. The question is: can you do it effectively and properly in that culture?”

He also envisages prospects for laboratory systems companies, with one large caveat – they will have to compete with larger scale Asian suppliers. And he says that people in his industry would be open to hearing from companies with innovative environmental solutions.

“In Jordan, Syria and Pakistan, we are operating in a territory that, from a water perspective, is one of the most distressed parts of the world, so water is clearly very high on our radar screen.”
In Jordan, Syria and Pakistan, we are operating in a territory that, from a water perspective, is one of the most distressed parts of the world, so water is clearly very high on our radar screen.

Into the future, he doesn’t rule out desalination, but currently he says the focus is on managing existing water resources very carefully: CCI’s water usage per litre of finished beverage is currently slightly below half the average of the Coca-Cola System.

Surprisingly, given that CCI is active in one of the world’s densest hydrocarbon hotspots, energy is another concern, with reliable power supply being an issue in several territories.

Efficient packaging and recycling is a third hot topic. Since O’Neill took over as CEO five years ago, he says CCI has made significant gains in reducing packaging weight. Separately, TCCC has developed the ‘PlantBottle’, launched in Denmark last November, with further rollout expected in parts of Canada, the US, Japan, Mexico, Brazil and China in 2010. Up to 30 per cent of PET in the PlantBottle comes from plant sources rather than petroleum. It is 100 per cent recyclable and just the kind of innovation the company is keen to embrace.

“My job is not just to produce product and sell it, but to understand what consumers want and really get ahead of them rather than being reactive,” O’Neill says. In 2008, CCI launched more than 200 different product and packaging innovations. But the classic sparkling beverages remain most popular, particularly in poorer regions. “The higher income consumer has a bit more flexibility and a bit more latitude; whereas in the slightly more stressed communities, people aspire to having a Coca-Cola,” he says.

Even in Turkey – the most advanced market in the region – the CCI consumer will typically reach for a Coke, Fanta or Sprite 70 to 80 per cent of the time; while newer products like sports drinks, juices, nectars, water and iced teas represent just 20 to 30 per cent of the market.

That said, O’Neill does see a role for vitamin-enriched beverages in enhancing the health status of the region, and it is something, he says, the company will continue to explore.

What he’s unlikely to have to worry about are the obesity concerns being put at the door of the fast food and soft drinks industry in the US. “In our countries, where we don’t have the same level of automation, or the type of cocooned life that you in Ireland lead, most people have to walk long distances, consequently you don’t see any fat people, so from the perspective of the nation’s health, obesity is not an issue and is unlikely to be.”

That is not to say, he is not exercised by it. “In the United States, they are talking about raising taxes on soft drinks and limiting consumption, and I think it’s certain authorities taking the easy way out. I was shocked when I saw a statistic that almost 60 per cent of Americans don’t take enough exercise and 25 per cent are not active at all, so society has to look at itself. There is a question of calories in, but there is also a question of calories out,” he says, suggesting that policy-makers have seized upon a topical, headline issue and apportioned blame to easy targets rather than look deeper at the fundamental problems.

His last word is on possible non-food opportunities in the Central Asia and Middle East region. “Security equipment,” he wryly suggests.

Dairy and soft drinks industries set to converge?

Last October, Coca-Cola Company launched its first dairy drink in China, according to the Shanghai Daily. The Minute Maid Pulpy Super Milky drink is a mixture of fruit juice, milk powder and coconut bits, set to be available in 300 Chinese cities by the end of 2009.

Meanwhile, at the end of June 2009, Coca-Cola started testing a new milk-based carbonated refreshing drink called Vio in New York in four flavours: very berry, peach mango, tropical colada and citrus burst.

According to FoodBev.com, the move is part of a wider Coke initiative called ‘Project Life’, which may lead to milk-based products for North America, Europe and some developing markets.

Michael O’Neill accepts that there could be some convergence in the dairy and soft drinks industry in the years ahead. “I think if you look at where consumers are headed, and what they demand, there are many different facets, and I think that dairy and nutrition will be part and parcel of it.”

Enterprise Ireland’s manager for Turkey and Italy, Kevin Buckley, believes that this trend could offer a new line of opportunities for Irish companies that have developed around the dairy industry in this country, as dairy beverages will require different plant, processes and hygiene protocols than traditional sparkling beverages bottling.
The airline sector is an industry in trouble. However, the relentless pressure to cut costs and generate new revenue offers opportunities for Irish technology companies with the right value proposition, writes Gerard O’Dwyer.

Japan Airlines’ (JAL) decision to file for bankruptcy administration, on January 19, served-up the latest casualty in an industry which is continuing to labour under the menacing weight of stressed financial conditions. JAL’s collapse, with debts in excess of $25 billion (£17.6bn), has reinforced fears that airlines are in for another rough ride in 2010.

The signs are ominous. In order to maintain acceptable sales volumes, many airlines are choosing to heavily discount fares and, by so doing, sacrifice their optimum profit yield. “Airlines have seen some tough times in the past, but this current period has been going on for a very long, long time. There are high fuel prices. Airlines are also seeing their load-factors and yields squeezed by competition from low cost carriers,” says John Alderman, the Senior Manager for Business Development at SITA, the leading air transport communication and information technology (IT) solutions specialist.

The rising cost of fuel, with prices in mid-January hovering at just under US$90 per barrel, is expected to accelerate the pace at which airlines pursue cost-reduction programmes more intensively. Compounding this is falling demand for air travel. IATA has forecast net losses for the aviation industry as a whole in 2009 of US$11 billion (£7.7bn), noting that yields have been slow to rise from the “sharp falls in the first half of the year and fuel prices continue their upward trend”.

The mood within the industry has been to look for value gains in outsourcing, a move that is certain to provide abundant and gainful opportunities for vendors, including Irish specialised niche product providers.

**THE CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES** Reducing enterprise costs and generating new revenue opportunities will remain a main focus for IT investments in the airline industry in 2010, says Toby Tucker, Director Flight Operations at SITA.

“There is a move towards virtualisation and service-orientated architecture where airlines can run systems in a more virtual environment, whether it is outsourced or within the airline’s own data centre,” he explained.

The latest SITA/Airline Business industry survey found that 34 per cent of airlines rated aircraft operations as a major investment area going forward, while investments in passenger processing and services topped the list.

On the sales and revenue generating front, online distribution is set to become the most significant sales channel, with airlines expecting to increase the proportion of tickets sold through online channels from 26.7 to 41.4 per cent by 2012.

Airline investment in IT&T reached a new low this year as the aircraft operators focused on managing record financial losses. According to Mike Moore, a Director at Travel Technology Research (TTR), the total size of the IT-airline market stood at US$12 billion (£8.5bn) in 2009, a value that includes in-house services. Passenger service systems (PSS) were 14 per cent of that spend.

“We see the total marketplace growing only marginally over the next three years. We see infrastructure investments going down,” Moore said. He expects the primary areas for IT&T investments in 2010 to again include PSS, covering reservation and inventory systems, ticketing, fares, departure control and in-house websites.

**INNOVATION AND OUTSOURCING** The pivotal influence of the low-cost sector has moved some carriers to broaden their business models and add features such as customer loyalty programmes, global distribution systems and baggage transfer services into the mix. This development has impacted on even the traditional full-service carriers, some of whom have moved to unbundle products, introduce point-to-point routing and directly distributed, ticketless travel.

“We are seeing trends and there are some moves by traditional low-cost carriers to adopt more of a hybrid model where they have more of the characteristics of a traditional network carrier, with interline-ticketing and additional functionality. But I would stop short of calling this a revolution,” said Moore.

The IT segment of the airline industry is a very mature marketplace, and demands a strong value contribution from vendors, says Tony McDermott, the founder and joint Managing Director of Dublin-based Liberator, which is seeing healthy growth in China and Asia, as well as the Middle East. However, Ireland’s niche aviation-sector companies should be optimistic about the prospects for 2010, he believes.

Privately owned and incorporated in 2003, Liberator provides web-based products and services that reduce base-costs by simplifying and improving airline operations. Its product solution offers savings of up to 2 per cent on an airline’s annual fuel bill by focusing on better loading efficiency, heightened awareness of the cost of weight carried and more accurate payload planning. The company’s international expansion received a major lift in December 2009 as a result of a strategic partnership deal, whereby SITA will market Liberator’s Fuel Index (LFI) system.

“ This is a seismic opportunity for us, because it gives us visibility and reach beyond anything we could possibly do alone,” says McDermott. The company’s LFI-system is currently...
SILVER LINING IN THE CLOUDS
monitoring operational performance for flights departing from 70 airports in Europe and South East Asia for its customer airlines.

Sectoral expertise and innovation are key to selling to cost-conscious airlines, McDermott says. “A lot of airlines have been through the first-generation of fuel savings, and they are now looking at more targeted fine-tuning. That brings us back into the picture again. Higher fuel costs have the potential to make our cost savings solutions, tools and services even more attractive.” The increased focus on emissions will also present opportunities, he adds.

Skypaq, which provides cockpit IT solutions and communications between flight operations and flight maintenance segments, is another Irish company optimistic about prospects. “There is room for others. This niche area is expanding, and what we are looking at right now is how we consolidate that growth,” says CEO Richard McKenna.

The Westmeath-based business signed a significant contract in September 2009 to deliver a completely integrated maintenance and operational solution for the entire Finnair fleet of Airbus, Boeing and Embraer aircraft.

“Securing that contract was extremely important for us. Finnair is a One World airline, which means they are in alliance with Qantas, Iberia and British Airways, among others, offering potentially more opportunities. The airline is also State-controlled, which makes it secure financially.”

“Outsourcing as such within the airline industry doesn’t always work. So what you really need to do is have your technology people work very closely with the airline themselves. Our business model is to have our people work very closely with the airline’s people,” he advises. “Airlines tend to be extremely cost conscious. You would really want to be bringing back four times the value of your application for an airline to take it.”

At a strategic level, Irish companies will need to be “flexible” with their software, he adds. “Each airline will have its own basic needs. The software will need to be customised, within reason, to the airline’s requirement. It is very important that any Irish company actually writes the software itself, and keeps control inhouse.”

MOBILITY DRIVES MARKET CHANGES

Mobility looks set to become another big trend going forward. “Certainly the use of barcodes to do one’s boarding pass will increase. Airlines expect a rise in this activity from 7 per cent to 31 per cent by the end of the ear,” says Tucker. “We will see a big increase in the use of iPhones, PDA (personal digital assistant) and Blackberry type devices to actually get to reinforce this paperless ticket concept.”

But just how big a share mobiles will have in original bookings is still open to debate. Moore cautions. “As airline offerings become more complex in terms of bundlings and how many different options you can apply to your booking, then the sheer physical size of a mobile presents challenges for long, extensive inter-actions.”

Dublin-based Mobile Travel Technologies (MTT) is focused exclusively in the mobile space. “For Irish companies looking to sell to the travel and airline sectors, it is important that they are experts in their particular area and have leadership in that area. They need to work with top class reference customers in the key regions of the world to boost their credibility,” says Executive Director Gerry Samuels. “We are the only mobile travel specialist, and we don’t do anything outside mobile travel. We have a blue chip customer base that operate worldwide, and this puts us in a leading position. Whether or not we are the market leader is difficult to say, but we are certainly a leader in the sector, and we plan to consolidate this position in 2010.”

The mobile web can reduce costs in three key ways, he says: extending the efficiencies of the online model to on-mobile; reducing the volume of call-centre and front desk traffic, and reducing the need to install costly self-service terminals.

The range, functionality and user-friendliness of mobile devices will enable people to conduct more travel functions while on the move, Samuels believes. “We are in a wave of mobile development right now where the capability of devices and the range of content available, and the ease of finding the content, are streets ahead of where we were even two years ago. The satisfaction and the volume of usage will increase significantly over time.”

“Irish software companies must have a value proposition to offer, and have sector expertise. Everyone’s looking long and hard at numbers. It is also wise to have service propositions that can be implemented in a reasonably short space of time,” Moore says.

“What we have seen talking to Liberator, and there are a lot of other aviation sector companies like them in Ireland, is that they have a huge amount of enthusiasm and expertise backed up with very innovative ideas and applications,” adds Tucker.

Overall, the message is that while the airline sector is undoubtedly under pressure, solutions that can help cut costs or generate new revenues are increasingly welcome.

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(Source: IATA, airline and industry websites)
A speciality pork-meat processor based in Clonmel turned to Scandinavia to boost its export income, and now the Swedish market alone looks set to account for a quarter of its annual turnover in 2010. Cian Molloy reports.

**TASTY RETURNS FOR RIBWORLD IN SWEDEN**

Sales of Ribworld’s pre-cooked baby-pork loin-ribs are on the increase in Ireland, the UK and Scandinavia, but the biggest growth of all is in Sweden, where sales have increased from €400,000 in 2008 to €1.4m in 2009, and Ribworld managing director and company founder Bo Nielsen is predicting sales of €2.5-3m in Sweden in 2010, with total company sales for the year in the region of €11-12 million.

If Ribworld hits those targets, the company founded in 2004 will be the second biggest producer of pre-cooked baby-pork ribs in Europe by the end of the year, and, if growth continues at current levels, it will be the largest food producer in its sector very shortly afterwards.

Nielsen, who has experience of working in the pork meats industry in Denmark and South Africa, set up Ribworld with the intention of being primarily an export manufacturer, although he admits to being delighted with sales in the Irish market, where he is listed with all the major multiples. Initially, he targeted the UK catering industry, particularly Britain’s large restaurant chains, but the company also sold the same high-quality product into the retail sector, and retail sales now account for the bulk of the company’s revenue. In order of size, the company is now selling in: the UK, Ireland, Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Greece, Cyprus, Iceland, Bulgaria and Finland.

As a fluent speaker of Swedish, with a good understanding of the Swedish retail food market, it was always Nielsen’s intention to export to Sweden, but his plans were given additional impetus by the 50 per cent fall in the value of Sterling against the euro since 2007. “Our sales in the UK have grown, and we have plans to grow further in the UK, but what has happened to sterling has been devastating for Irish exports,” says Nielsen. “We really had to look at opportunities in other markets.”
Because I am Scandinavian, it made sense to look at Scandinavia.

“There are a few reasons why we have concentrated on Sweden rather than Denmark. First of all, because I started in the Danish meat industry, I know a lot of people in the industry and have friends there, and I would not want to make trouble for them, but also the way the two markets operate is different.

“Denmark is much more competitive than Sweden for food businesses like ours; Denmark has more meat producers but fewer supermarket chains, so it can be harder to get a listing. Also, in Denmark, the market is more fickle – they are always looking for innovations and new ideas; in Sweden, the customer is very loyal – if a product finds a foothold in the market, customers will come back to that same product again and again. Generally, the Swedes are easy to work with, and they have a good payments record.”

Another advantage of selling into Sweden is that for decades the country has been a major net importer of food, so customers there are used to the consequences of currency fluctuations. “It’s not like the UK where if our prices go up, there are alternative domestic food producers available,” said Nielsen. “Swedish supermarkets pay us in euro, and if the value of the Krona falls in value against the euro, the supermarkets pass on that extra cost to their customers.”

When starting in Sweden, Nielsen looked for retailers operating in the area near the Norwegian border and secured his first listing with the MAXIMat chain, which has four supermarkets in the southwest of the country. He explains: “As well as serving the local Swedish customers, these stores also have a large number of Norwegian customers who pop over the border on an almost weekly basis to do their shopping. Food is much cheaper in Sweden than it is in Norway, so you have a situation like we have here in Ireland where people from...
Dundalk do their shopping in Newry. Once they have made that trip, the Norwegian customers are much more likely to try a new premium product, so this was a good area for us to dip our toes into the Swedish market because we were also getting Norwegian customers."

Once he had a foothold in the Swedish market, Nielsen worked to build awareness of the Ribworld brand through a number of co-sponsorships of sporting events, such as the finals of the national Olympic handball competitions – in Sweden, handball is the second most popular spectator sport after soccer. Nielsen choose co-sponsorships partly because he had a limited marketing budget, but also because it allowed him to meet the fellow corporate co-sponsors. Ribworld’s co-sponsorship of the Djurgaarten Women’s Soccer team was a particularly shrewd move, as its main sponsorship is ICA, the country’s largest supermarket chain. By sponsoring Djurgaarten, Nielsen was able to meet ICA senior management in a relaxed informal environment, and the relationships that he developed help him secure a listing in some of their stores.

“Since we secured a listing with a couple of ICA stores and did very well with those stores, we are now being given centralised listing in ICA stores across Sweden,” said Nielsen. “This is an important aspect of the Swedish retail market, individual store managers have much greater control over the stock they put on their shelves than store managers would have in Ireland or the UK or Denmark. There are more opportunities in Sweden for a new supplier like us to get a listing. You also have to remember that some of the supermarkets in Sweden are very big, there are individual ICA stores that will have an annual turnover of €50 to €60 million.”

There are opportunities for other Irish food producers in Sweden, and Nielsen has noticed that Irish beef is on sale in the supermarkets. He says that to do well, Irish producers need to be quality-focused. Ribworld’s production facility in Clonmel is designed to achieve the highest food safety and standards accreditation available, including EU, USDA and BRC/EFSIS Grade A approval, which the plant notably achieved on its first application. Nielsen said: “When we set up as a specialist pork rib producer in 2004, our intent was to be the best in our field. You need that kind of strategy to succeed in Sweden.”

To do business in Sweden, you also need to either speak Swedish or have someone who speaks the language working with you or for you, Nielsen says. “Although the Swedes are perceived as being good at English, they are nowhere near as good as the Danes. A lot of Swedes are not that confident speaking English, and you want people to be comfortable when you are doing business with them. If you do not speak Swedish, you will need an agent or a distributor who will work with you on the ground and speak to people on your behalf.

“Because I knew the market, I did everything myself, I didn’t use agencies like Bord Bia, but if you don’t know the market I would recommend that you talk to Bord Bia and Enterprise Ireland who will help get you the introductions to the people you need to meet.”

Nielsen speaks Swedish because he grew up on the eastern side of Denmark. “Television when I was growing up was a bit like television used to be on the east coast of Ireland,” he says. “Danish television didn’t start until 5pm, so we would watch Swedish television when we came in from school, just like people here watch BBC as an alternative to RTE. Similarly, in the south of Denmark people learn German from watching German TV.”

At first, Nielsen was travelling to Sweden on a weekly basis to meet supermarket store managers and to work with them on how his pre-cooked ribs were being sold, but now he uses Nordic Trader House, a Swedish wholesale company that was recommended to him by a Danish friend. “They are in daily contact with the stores and are visiting them regularly to meet the store managers,” he says. “You need that. There is no point in only talking to the supermarket buyers, you have to talk to the store managers and get them to build up an affiliation with you and your product. If your product is positioned poorly in a store, your sales are poor; if your positioning is good, your sales will be excellent. You have to go to the stores and help the store managers sell more of your product, so that both of you are doing well out of the relationship. Daily contact with the stores is very important, in Ireland and in Sweden.”
Irish firms looking to North America for investment need to be aware the game has changed, but opportunities still exist for those who want it most, writes Niall Byrne.

A ficionadoes of ‘Dragon’s Den’ might have formed an impression about venture capitalists (VCs) that they are constantly weighing up pitches from the public, avidly seeking to add to their portfolio of companies. The truth would make rather less interesting television: the majority of venture partners over the course of their lifetime will nurture only a handful of companies to growth.

At the moment, many Irish companies are looking abroad for funding as the recession at home has dug its heels in. News that American investors don’t view their job as throwing darts at a board and hoping some stick explodes some of the myths about venture capital: that there is a lot of it to go around; that a good idea is itself enough to succeed; capital is global and therefore boundary-less; and the less investment sought the more chance of getting it.

“A partner in a venture capital firm will typically shepherd three to four companies over their lifetime, maybe five or six companies in exceptional cases,” says Antoin Russell, CEO, Powervation. “It’s a huge personal commitment for a partner in a venture capital firm to take up a company.”

Powervation, which provides chip solutions for power control, has raised more than US$20m in funding since its inception in 2006, the most recent investment secured from New York-based Braemer Energy Ventures in November.

With such careful scrutiny of prospective companies for their portfolios, venture capital firms take an interest in their investees that goes beyond merely writing the cheques.

“You can assume that American VCs have a number of partners that take a seat on the board and help build the company. What companies are really competing for is not so much investor money as mindshare.”

“A good investor is an investor who can contribute to helping the company to grow,” says Peter Smyth, CEO of RedMere. RedMere, which supplies smart active cable solutions, raised US$5.6m in funding in December from Celtic House Venture Partners, Toronto.

Smyth iterates that VCs are far more likely to want to get involved in a company in which they can bring their experience to bear, be it offering advice to management or opening doors to helpful contacts and customers.

This raises an obvious question for Irish companies looking to tap funds in an increasingly tight credit landscape: how do you satisfy an investor that they will be able to have a hands-on role in a company that is headquartered on the far side of the Atlantic Ocean?

US PRESENCE: TO BE OR NOT TO BE
Before embarking on a fundraising round, it is critical to research who to approach. Some US VCs are quite happy to invest in overseas companies; others aren’t. A good indicator of a VC’s amenability to invest in Irish firms is if they have done it before.

“Many VC funds would look at the value proposition of the company, such as the technology and the market, but it might be too much stress for them to bring in one company located in Ireland into their portfolio,” notes Smyth. “If they have made investments before with that geographical location issue overcome, they’re more likely to do it again.”

Short of the VC having made a previous
investment in Ireland, Irish firms can make themselves more attractive if they have an existing Irish-based VC backing them.

“Those VCs that can and will go outside the US would always prefer to have a participatory entity in the country in which they are investing,” says Paul Grillo, President of New York-based financial consulting firm P.A. Grillo Associates. “If an Irish company can bring an existing Irish VC to the table, even if they have a much smaller percentage, it bodes enormously well for the company.”

Promoting increased syndication between US and Irish VCs is one of the objectives of an initiative being rolled out by Enterprise Ireland to help Irish companies overcome hurdles when seeking funding in the States, according to John McIntyre, Enterprise Ireland’s US West Coast Manager.

Some VC firms are prevented by their charter from investing outside North America. However, McIntyre says that this need not be an insurmountable obstacle. Companies can, without too much difficulty, structure themselves to create a US entity as well, and Enterprise Ireland can point them in the direction of good legal advice in this respect, he says.

That said, geographic distance can be an issue for some VCs, McIntyre acknowledges. Paul Grillo agrees: “When you’re pitching your company you are trying to get all the negatives off the piece of paper in the valuation for a VC. It adds confidence to the VC if you have at least a sales office or some type of presence here.”

Powervation bases its marketing and sales vice-president positions in California. Surface Power, a provider of specialist renewable energy technology, is another Irish company that has seen the advantages of having a base in the US. The company is actively negotiating with American VCs at the moment.

“We used people on the ground in California and Florida who got doors opened for us that we couldn’t have gotten opened from Ireland,” remarks John Quinn, CEO, Surface Power. “In California, we used Enterprise Ireland; in Florida, we put our own consultants on the ground. I’m not a believer you can make everything in Ireland and sell it around the world. Big global companies don’t do that. You’ve got to factor in a location in the US.”

Wicklow-man Conrad Burke is President and CEO of Innovalight, a California-based solar energy start-up that raised US$18m in January. Burke is also part of the management team of the Irish Technology Leadership Group, a group of Irish or Irish-American senior executives from Silicon Valley technology companies committed to helping Irish entrepreneurs.

For Burke, having a presence in the US is about access to customers as much as funding. “A lot of the Irish entrepreneurs tend to be in the IT sector, and there’s enough enormous client opportunities here in Silicon Valley and the US generally that warrants having a presence here of some description.”

Any export-led Irish firm should be considering having a presence in the US anyway just from a sales perspective, he suggests. “To grow into a big company, you can’t neglect the US as a market. I don’t think it requires you to have the whole operation there but some sort of presence is a help.”
American venture capital may not be the goose that lays the golden egg anymore, but with proper preparation, it needn't be a wild goose chase either. After a tough 2009, things are starting to loosen up again.

Redmere’s Peter Smyth, likewise, believes proximity to investors is not as important as proximity to customers. “At any stage in a company’s development, it will open new offices, usually close to customers or sources of additional funding, but I’d put the customers ahead of funding any day.”

Smyth asserts an investor will swallow the logistical pain that has to be taken when investing in a foreign company if it’s a really interesting product and market to get into. “RedMere is an Irish start-up. If we were a Valley start-up, we’d be in the Valley. The most important consideration when soliciting VC funding is that the investor matches your market.”

**GIVE THEM WHAT THEY WANT** American venture capital may not be the goose that lays the golden egg anymore, but with proper preparation, it needn't be a wild goose chase either. After a tough 2009, things are starting to loosen up again, but the criteria for a good investment have changed. The pitches that will make American investors sit up and listen in 2010 are those for game-changing products, which demonstrate management expertise, which have proven customer sales potential and, of utmost importance, ones that help VCs solve existing problems within their portfolios.

“A lot of the companies VCs have funded over the past few years are run by technologists, not by people who can steer the ship, so the VCs themselves have had to get strongly involved,” notes Quinn. “They are looking for revenue-generating synergies with their current portfolio because they’ve funded far too many enabling technologies.”

His advice is simple: “If you want to get in front of people who are busy managing projects they’ve already invested in, you have to give them something that solves their current problems.”

**HOW MUCH IS TOO LITTLE?** A common mistake Irish entrepreneurs make when looking for American VC is asking for too little and aiming too low. “Irish entrepreneurs tend to be on the conservative side, asking for very little capital and exiting at a very early stage,” says Burke.

He points to a dearth of IPOs by Irish companies. “The number that has gone public over the past 10 years is very small. Irish entrepreneurs are looking for an acquisition of the company for US$20-30m. VCs like to see bigger plans and bigger growth opportunities.”

Quinn also warns against asking for too little based on what is considered normal in Ireland. “In Ireland, a company might think half a million is quite a sizeable VC investment; in the Valley, that’s pocket money.”

Smaller companies tend to forget about the cash flow issues they’re going to hit on the way to growth, comments Grillo. “The probability of getting VC funds will not fluctuate if it’s a question of a few million dollars or 20 per cent plus or minus. They are not impeding themselves if they ask for what they really need instead of low-balling themselves.”

The message seems to be to err on the side of optimism. What could be more American?

**Enterprise Ireland is currently developing pilot programmes to help increasing numbers of Irish companies to raise venture capital in the United States. For further information, contact John McIntyre, West Coast Manager, Palo Alto. Email john.mcintyre@enterprise-ireland.com**
As virtual presentation tools and document sharing become more sophisticated, video conferencing software offers a real alternative to face-to-face meetings, saving companies time and money. Ian Campbell reports.

The worst winter in years and impassable roads was one more reason for businesses to look at video conferencing solutions, but the argument for web-based meetings is already compelling for a lot of companies, especially those running international teams. Add to that an eye on corporate social responsibility and the objective of cutting back on carbon emissions, or simply another way to cut costs in hard times, by encouraging people to work at their desks rather than leave the office and incur travel and accommodation expenses.

Whatever the driver, the good news is that the cost of web meetings is coming down. They can be bought on a per-user per-month basis for around €15, and the leading applications require nothing more from participants than a browser, a plug-in headset and a webcam attached to a desktop computer.

Video conferences no longer depend on booking a dedicated room in the office, and a new generation of IP networks and unified communication platforms ensure a quality and consistency of service that was not possible a decade ago.

In some cases, the people invited to the meeting don’t even have to have the application; the best known products are compatible with every operating system, from Windows and Mac, to Linux and Solaris. They can even be accessed from a mobile phone.

The blocker for most companies, however, is that nothing replaces face-to-face meetings; spending time with customers and colleagues is the key to success because every business is ultimately a people business. While it would be wrong to suggest that there is a change in this fundamental dynamic, an argument could be made that web conferencing solutions are becoming so sophisticated they not only emulate face-to-face meetings, they improve on them.

Collaboration tools

They facilitate voice and video interaction between people, but they also provide a platform for sharing documents. Collaboration becomes a real-time virtual experience in a way that is changing the way people go about their business.

A web conference can be instant, an on-the-fly discussion between two colleagues who have to resolve a problem, cleaning up a tricky paragraph in a client contract, for example. Or it can be planned for large groups with documents handed out in advance that are then worked through online and in real-time.

Excel spreadsheets, word documents and PowerPoint are all accessible with most systems. The host leads the meeting and can make any application on their hard disk available, sharing their desktop view with other participants.

Remote collaboration made easy
Floating panes can be moved around the main viewing area, and there’s a control panel to the side that keeps tabs on who is attending and provides various presentation tools. Control of the meeting can be passed over to other attendees, and sessions can be recorded for absent staff. Most systems accommodate mixed-audio modes and take voice calls direct from an outside line or mobile as well as over IP networks.

Once an organisation has overcome the culture change that comes with a transition to video conferencing, it can start to embrace other possibilities. The leading conference applications sell the products as being beneficial to all sorts of meetings, from sales and marketing to training and team collaboration.

Rich feature sets include tools for break-out sessions that help aggregate training programmes, and there are ways of measuring performance almost instantly. Many of the packages can also be scaled and adapted to host live virtual events, web seminars or e-learning sessions. Potentially thousands of users can be accommodated in virtual environments that offer a cheap alternative to engaging with customers at exhibitions and roadshows.

The best known names are GoToMeeting, WebEx, Microsoft Office Live Meeting - explored more closely in the following pages – along with Adobe Acrobat Connect and IBM Lotus Sametime. They are all available to try-before-you-buy, with one month trials. If you like what you see, you can buy them online. Alternatively, telecommunication companies like BT and eircom offer a variety of packages and services around video conferencing, sometimes as part of a unified communication suite.

Microsoft Office Live Meeting

For Microsoft, video conferencing is a natural add-on to its suite of Office applications. Word, Excel and PowerPoint are precisely the type of documents that can be shared. Meetings can be scheduled and managed with up to 1,250 participant connections per meeting. Each one has to download the software before they can join. The viewing area and control panel are basic but functional. While it lacks the rich feature set of the other two products reviewed, there are some nice touches. An always-on shared notes panel enables every attendee to view and edit shared action items. Notes can be stored and whole sessions recorded and saved for 360 days.

You can also customise your Live Meeting experience, anchoring panes and selecting windows you always want to see, saving the configuration in the system. A sign of the times perhaps, Microsoft has a version available that will run on Linux or Mac.

Cost per user per month starts at just €13.63, reflecting a more basic approach to video conferencing, but there are more than enough tools to make it worth considering.

Web meeting packages are available on a per-user per-month fee of around €15, and the leading applications require nothing more than a browser, a plug-in headset and a webcam attached to a desktop computer.
WebEx

The market leader and the system that got the ball rolling, WebEx was so popular that Cisco bought it out in 2007. It is loaded with useful features, including a comprehensive meeting scheduler that lets the host set the agenda and determine who comes, as well as the privileges of attendees. The right-side control panel is a grid design, reminiscent of spreadsheets, and is functional rather than stylish.

As the host, you decide which documents are issued in advance of a meeting and set parameters in terms of the type of content that will be shared and the presentation tools used. Alternatively, you can click into near-instant meetings and develop ideas on-the-fly, recording anything that happens to share with absent colleagues.

Cisco makes much of targeting real-time applications to different business needs, from webinars and sales pitches to training. Naturally, it trades on its prowess as a network specialist to reassure prospective buyers of the security of its system.

Participants can be invited via Outlook and participate on any platform, including 3G smartphones. The basic application costs €34 per user per month for meetings with up to 25 people.

GoToMeeting

This Citrix offering has the best interface, with a right-side ‘grab tab’ that slides out for the host to determine the parameters of the meeting and details of attendees. It also provides a great set of presentation tools for marking up copy and interacting with content.

The licensed user can integrate GoToMeeting with Outlook or Lotus Notes on their computer, making it easy to schedule a meeting in the calendar. Then they simply click into it via a desktop icon that launches the software in their browser.

The stylish control panel is intuitive to use, with big friendly buttons. There are some nice touches, such as enabling a participant to take control over the mouse, and a screen-clean feature for hiding all desktop content except the document that is being shared. Meetings can be recorded in different audio formats, including Windows Media Player.

GoToMeeting starts at $49 (€34) per user per month for unlimited meetings with up to 15 attendees. Bigger corporate users have the option of licensing GoToWebinar for a much larger audience.
The medium-term future looks bright for the rail sector. Although the downturn has undoubtedly had an impact — for example, there has been a significant decline in rail freight across Europe, and passenger growth has slowed in certain markets — observers are still forecasting strong growth across the industry. The most recent Worldwide Rail Market Study by UNIFE (Association of the European Rail Industry) predicts robust growth across the entire rail supply industry to 2016.

Despite economic difficulties, governments are continuing to invest in rail infrastructure, and some are even increasing spending to counter the downturn. Investment in rail, particularly in high-speed passenger rail lines, is featuring in many governments’ stimulus packages, as outlined on pages 030 to 032.

Some of the arguments being put forward include the potential for improved railway infrastructure to provide long-term economic benefits. Rail development can also soak up labour from a depressed construction industry, and rail can offer significant environmental benefits in terms of tackling climate change.

There are additional global ‘megatrends’ that further favour the long-term growth of the industry. Increasing urbanisation, road congestion, rising fuel prices, and increasing identification of rail as a form of sustainable transport are all encouraging a shift to rail transport and, thereby, encouraging investment in infrastructure, rolling stock, rail control and services.

**INVESTMENT IN RAIL: SPAIN** In Europe, Spain is taking a lead-role in rail development. Provisions to improve rail infrastructure are a central feature of the Spanish government’s €8bn “Plan E” scheme for economic growth and job creation. Indeed, investment in rail has been a priority for the Spanish government for the last number of years.

Spain’s Strategic Infrastructure and Transport Plan – PEIT (2005-2020) places rail, particularly high-speed passenger rail, centre stage in the development of the country’s transport system. PEIT envisages that, by 2020, Spain will have 10,000km of high-speed lines, all provincial capitals will be connected to the high-speed network and 90 per cent of the population will be less than 50km from a station served by high-speed lines.
This means that by 2012, Spain is set to surpass Japan as the country with the world’s largest network of high-speed routes.

PEIT also contains provisions for infrastructure improvements to make rail freight more competitive; for example, rail access to logistics and ports is to be improved. Furthermore, PEIT contains provisions to improve transport safety, which means that significant funds will be directed towards infrastructure maintenance. Significantly, the Spanish government expects PEIT to result in a 20 per cent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2020.

For 2010 alone, the Ministry of Public Works has allocated €19bn for the development of the transport industry, over €10bn of which is to be spent on the railway sector. Some €8.9bn is to be invested in infrastructure, 71 per cent of which is earmarked for the high-speed network, while €1.34bn will be invested in new rolling stock.

Furthermore, it is expected that the Ministry will invest an additional €15bn in the construction and maintenance of railways and motorways over the next two years, although details of exactly how this money will be spent have yet to be released.
Oportunities for Irish Companies These investments open up considerable opportunities for Irish companies at every level from civil engineering and construction services; rail interior design; locomotive and rail-car maintenance technologies and services, right through to passenger-ticketing and communications technologies.

In infrastructure management and construction, opportunities exist in the areas of, among others, civil engineering, project management, construction services and consulting.

Tenders for major infrastructure construction and maintenance projects are, of course, open to Irish companies. However, contracts to carry out big projects are generally won by the leading Spanish construction and civil engineering companies, which include Acciona, Dragados, Ferrovial, ACS, OHL, FCC, Sacyr, etc.

Irish companies may have products that fit into a niche within projects. Thus, they need to align with the right partners, and they need to be meeting people, building relationships and positioning themselves from the earliest time possible, before tenders are announced. Many Spanish companies are involved in major rail projects internationally, so any such alliances could open up an even bigger market once a relationship is established.

There are two world-class Spanish rolling stock manufacturers: CAF (Construcciones y Auxiliar de Ferrocarriles) and Talgo. Both CAF and Talgo have substantial overseas contracts, which may make them more open to working with international suppliers.

Other leading international rolling stock manufacturers present in the Spanish market include Alstom, Bombardier and Siemens. According to a recent Railway Interiors Special Report, significant opportunities in this segment exist for companies offering products and services that enhance the safety, security and/or environmental friendliness of the rail vehicle. Thus, opportunities should exist for Irish companies offering innovative products and services in the areas of

- on-board safety and surveillance;
- passenger comfort and convenience features; e.g. WIFI, on-board entertainment, advanced passenger information and communication systems, etc
- rail interior design; e.g. more robust, non-hazardous, low-smoke interior materials, door technologies to enable more efficient use of space, etc
- technologies to improve energy efficiency and to make railcars ‘greener’
- systems intelligence to assist in train diagnostics, etc.

An Irish Company’s Experience of the Spanish Market Irish company Cubis is a leading manufacturer of pre-formed trackside manholes, trackside troughing and heavy duty ducting systems, active in more than 22 countries throughout Europe and the Middle East. Cubis’s Director of International Sales Cian Cantwell is upbeat about prospects in Spain.

“The Spanish Rail authorities are implementing expansive plans for their high speed network, and, over the next decade, they intend to have the largest high-speed rail network in Europe. To achieve this, significant rail line expansion and line upgrade will be required, which offers substantial potential for our product ranges and the other relevant organisations.

“As Cubis supplies construction and infrastructure products, the worldwide economic downtown has impacted on us,” he continues. “However, our strategy of geographical and market sector diversity has cushioned the blow, as a number of markets in various countries are expanding. The rail segment plays an important role in this respect, as many governments are increasing infrastructural spending to stimulate economic growth while also implementing public transport initiatives to reduce road congestion, greenhouse gas emissions, etc.”

As to entering the rail market, Cantwell says that Cubis’s strategy in other European markets has been to obtain product approval from the rail authority while simultaneously educating the consulting engineering organisations and the building contractors about installation savings and cost advantages associated with using the Cubis system. “This has been successful for us to date in Ireland, UK, France, Norway, Sweden, Denmark etc.,” he says. “We will replicate this approach in Spain and modify it if necessary.”

Cantwell also advocates participating in or attending one of the local trade shows, such as BCN RAIL in Barcelona, or International Rail Forum in Valencia. “The BCN RAIL exhibition was a very beneficial experience for Cubis. It enabled us to access a concentrated knowledge base of market players in one location, which helped in expanding our market knowledge and confirming the market potential, along with the most appropriate strategies to implement. It also enabled us to demonstrate first-hand the advantages of our product ranges to the rail authority, consulting engineers and construction companies,” he said.
The message, it seems, is that the rail sector is open for business and it’s time for Irish companies to get on board.

His advice to Irish companies is to look for a local partner in the market. “In my opinion, all international companies who want to work in Spain should work with a Spanish partner, in the manner they see fit – whether through a joint venture, a new company, a European Economic Interest Grouping, or a one-off agreement.” The only exception, he says, might be if they have an innovative, patented technology or could offer a product with superior added value. In this case, there may be a simpler route to market, but he adds that he would still working with a Spanish partner.

Bonilla believes the outlook for the sector is extremely positive. “This is not just the case in Spain,” he says. “There is a general trend towards developing and consolidating rail as a means of transport, both nationally and internationally. Some projects currently underway, such as the well-known FERRMED Project, go beyond national borders.”

FERRMED is a non-profit, multisectoral organisation that aims to enhance European competitiveness by promoting the so called ‘FERRMED Standards’, the improvement of ports and airports’ connections with their respective hinterlands, the conception of Great Rail Freight Scandinavia-Rhine-Rhone-Western Mediterranean Axis, and more sustainable development through the reduction of pollution and climate change emissions. (See www.ferrmed.com).

“High-speed rail has been an important catalyst in stimulating the sector, after years of its practical ostracism in terms of lack of projects and investment,” he continues. “It is interesting to note that practically all countries and regions are planning rail initiatives, for example the Medina-Mecca rail project in Saudi Arabia, the projected Dubai tram system and the plans for high-speed rail in the US.”

Another interesting trend, he adds, is the revival of the tram – a means of transport that has been very positively received by citizens, in spite of initial problems and inconvenience caused during construction. In Spain alone, there are 37 tram projects, many of which are already in operation. As to particular areas that offer most potential, he says that it is difficult to pinpoint a single subsector. “Given the quantity of projects underway, I believe that all sub-sectors offer considerable opportunities in terms of receiving orders.”

Bonsilla adds that R&D is wide-ranging. Key areas, he cites, include energy efficiency, automated driving systems, communication and information systems (ICT), new materials (composites), traction systems, tracks and overhead power lines for high-speed rail etc.

The message, it seems, is that the rail sector is open for business and it’s time for Irish companies to get on board.

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the market

| FEBRUARY/MARCH 2010 |

Sectoral Report: Rail

The Market looks at global spending plans and headline figures.

**FRANCE’S €15 BILLION+ INVESTMENTS**

France has announced plans to award major capital grants to help fund investment in new public transport systems, according to a June 2009 report in Tramways & Urban Transit (TAUT). This new spurt of urban electric rail investment “is the first stage of an announced 1,500km of new tramway covering just provincial cities across the country,” according to the magazine.

In the first stage of a massive investment in new tramway development, the French government has committed funding within a “financial envelope” of €1bn to support a list of 57 tramway projects. In addition, the government has also announced a commitment of €15bn to €20bn for capital funding to help finance “a state-of-the-art” 130km automated metro for Paris, which will have a total of 60 stations and be known as Arc Express. This project could be completed by 2020,” according to the TAUT report.

In addition to these plans, current urban rail developments already under way in France include electric trolleybus projects in five cities; metro expansions in two cities in addition to Paris, and electric tramway development in 30 cities.

**$8 BILLION+ US INVESTMENT PART OF OBAMA’S STIMULUS PLAN**

President Obama has earmarked investments totalling of $8 billion (£5.7bn) for improvements in the US rail system as part of the country’s $787bn stimulus plan. The Obama plan also proposes a separate, five-year, $5bn (£3.5bn) investment in high-speed rail as part of the administration’s suggested fiscal year 2010 budget to make a down payment on constructing enhanced rail network.

According to a February 2009 Reuters report, high-speed rail initiatives are in various stages of planning in California, Florida, Nevada, the Carolinas, the Northeast and the Midwest.

If moves by US investor Warren Buffett are anything to go by, rail could be a sector to watch. In March 2009, Buffett spent a record $44 billion buying an American rail freight company, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp, in the largest transaction in the history of his Berkshire Hathaway holding company. At the time, Buffett said that the rising costs of oil would make rail freight more profitable compared with rival truck-based freight.
In March 2009, Warren Buffett spent a record $44 billion buying an American rail freight company, the Burlington Northern Santa Fe Corp, in the largest transaction in the history of his Berkshire Hathaway holding company.
Making other countries’ investments look like peanuts, in March 2009, China committed US$259bn (€184bn) to high-speed rail network projects and unveiled plans to spend nearly a half trillion dollars more in the next three years, boosting the total investment to $730bn (€517bn) by 2012. Ultimately, China’s massive investment plan could see the country’s railway network expanded to 120,000 km by 2020.

According to China Daily, the first fruits of this initiative are likely to be the delivery of 100 new high-speed trains as part of a deal between the Beijing Railway Administration and China CNR Co Ltd.

The newspaper noted that celebrations over the package have been particularly heartfelt at the Railway Transportation Equipment Manufacturing Industrial Park in Changchun, China’s rail manufacturing hub. More colloquially known as “Rail Park”, this joint venture, between CNR and the Changchun municipal government, is now on course to be a global leader in rail technology. So far, more than 30 major companies have relocated to the Rail Park, bringing a total investment of over €100m.

UK PROPOSES £20BN FUNDING FOR HIGH-SPEED RAIL. UK investment could depend on the outcome of the next election. In December, Gordon Brown pledged £20bn (€22.9bn) funding for the sector at the launch of the UK’s first full domestic high-speed rail services between London and Kent. In addition, the British Prime Minister announced that the government would publish plans, by the end of March, for a north-south high-speed rail network.

GAME ON FOR RAIL IN BRAZIL. As host of the 2014 World Cup and 2016 Olympics, Brazil’s infrastructure could require an investment of £10–30bn (€11.5–34bn) to successfully prepare for the event, according to the UK Department of Trade & Investment (DTI). The country’s ‘Accelerated Growth Programme’ has allocated about £208bn (€239bn) for investments post-2010.

According to DTI, the Brazilian Government has pledged £2.5bn (€2.9bn) to the rail sector in the lead-up to the World Cup, excluding urban rail transport systems. The funds will be used to construct about 2,518km worth of new railways, which will form the basis of an integrated network of wide-gauge freight rail across the country. The government also plans to introduce Brazil’s first long-distance passenger railway, which will link São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro in just 94 minutes.

When individual projects are completed, the governments will work towards connecting the numerous rail systems to complete the network throughout the Gulf. Tenders for the proposed $25bn (€18bn) regional rail network are set to be floated in the first quarter of 2010, according to comments from a senior official of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
Some people wouldn’t leave home for love or money. Valerie Gürtler-Doyle went to Switzerland for both. On a summer visit, with her degree in biochemistry from UCD fresh in her back pocket, what struck her most was not only how much her contemporaries were earning as new graduates in the Swiss pharmaceutical industry, but also the kind of company resources being dedicated to research. Coming from a business-driven family, but with a love of science, Valerie confesses to having spent much of her life being drawn from one career path to the other. After that summer, working as a research assistant in Sandoz’s laboratories in Basel, science won out – for some time, at least – and she came back to Ireland to complete a PhD at the Royal College of Surgeons, before returning to Switzerland to pursue a post-doc at a competing lab in Basel. The Swiss city, a pharmaceutical heartland, was part of the draw. But she admits that a “young gentleman” she had met during her first visit there was also a return attraction. Today, that man – a Swedish born Swiss national – is her husband of 25 years.

Sandoz, and its subsequent incarnation, Novartis, formed through a merger with Ciba Giegy in 1996, has been an equally pervasive part of her life. In 1983, Valerie completed a second post-doc there and has since rapidly climbed the corporate ranks. Today, she is Head of Business Alignment for social media at Novartis – now a hot topic for multinationals across industry. Part of this role involves driving new approaches to communication within Novartis, a massive corporation with revenues of $53 billion in 2008, active in 140 countries and with a workforce of 100,000 across four divisions: pharmaceuticals, vaccines and diagnostics, generics and consumer health.

Valerie describes herself a born networker. “That’s why I love social media,” she says. “It connects people that wouldn’t necessarily otherwise be connected around a topic, a question or a piece of information.”

“Social media for internal collaboration is really, really important, particularly in a company our size,” she continues. “How do you know if someone in one division is working on the exact same issue as someone in another division? How do you connect them so they are not re-inventing the wheel? It’s a huge challenge, but there are a couple of companies that do it really well. Cisco is one – collaboration ware is their life blood – and they do some very interesting work.”

Novartis is also using social media to reach out to customers in the consumer healthcare and generics space, but this is more challenging in the heavily-regulated prescription medicines
area. “It’s a huge cultural change for us – the traditional way of doing pharmaceutical marketing involved a lot of pushing out of information, whereas this approach requires you to really listen very carefully to what is required prior to initiating a dialogue. From a regulatory perspective, dialoguing with patients is – in the FDA’s eyes – promotion – and that’s forbidden, so it’s a question of how you engage in a dialogue and what is discussed – the jury is still out on this. Having said that, there is so much going on, we have to engage at some point. The FDA, like other health authorities, is working on guidance, so hopefully we will have more clarity soon.”

In the meantime, Valerie says “we can still listen and see what customers are saying and what patient needs are, and it’s a huge step forward to be able to do that ourselves, rather than having market research companies come in and do it all.”

Healthcare costs are going to be one of the biggest issues for the industry going forward, she believes. “The demographics are changing. An elderly population is going to require a lot more care, and the pressure on healthcare costs will continue. The challenge here is for healthcare companies, healthcare providers and other key stakeholders to form a partnership and develop solutions that will be win-win for everybody.”

As well as understanding exactly what healthcare payers are willing to pay for and trying to address those discussions very early on, she says that the industry needs to continue looking for new methods of delivering drugs and new ways of measuring drug effectiveness. “Innovation is not just about the molecule, it’s the way you do business; it’s the people you talk to, and it’s understanding the needs and really thinking forward and securing those win-win situations.”

Valerie is actively involved in Novartis’s Diversity and Inclusion programme, which has been running for several years, and she believes this offers opportunities for differentiation. “When you talk about diversity, people immediately think about gender; it’s one of the big, hot issues, because there aren’t enough women in senior positions in the majority of companies around the world. This is an issue as it does generally not reflect the customer base. But I also think of diversity in terms of culture, style and ethnic origins. For example, do some of our products metabolise differently in ethnic populations? If yes, are we actually targeting that population in terms of the clinical trials and carrying out research to understand what’s driving this response? And are we looking at, for example, our marketing plans to make sure we are talking to these people in the language...
they understand and want to hear, instead of a one-size-fits-all marketing programme? Great opportunities here.

As to how Irish business people should position themselves in Switzerland, Valerie’s advice is ‘be yourself’. “Like any business relationship, you have to sit down and listen and watch the body language, but I do think the Irish have an advantage. By nature, they are pretty extroverted, very open, and although they understand and respect hierarchy, they don’t watch the pecking order as much as other cultures would do, and that together with warmth, spontaneity and inclusiveness, breaks down a lot of barriers. The Swiss culture is not that way, it’s more conservative, it very precise, but somehow they complement each other well.”

That said, the kinds of things that would really bug the Swiss, she adds, include a lack of punctuality or lack of detail on deliverables. “What is respected and expected here is people arriving on time, people being respectful and following up, not just leaving things hanging in the air.”

Drilling down another layer to target decision-makers in the inner echelons of the pharmaceutical industry depends, she says, very much on knowing what your customer needs are. “You find that out through networking, using someone who understands the issue and can really talk about the pain-points that will capture attention.”

Valerie says that through her membership of the Irish Business Network in Basel, she is happy to do this for Irish companies in response to a request from Enterprise Ireland’s Swiss biopharma market adviser. “I’ll have a look at what they are offering, and then connect them through to the right person, and I can tell them some of the issues on their radar now, so they can target the customer appropriately.”

“This model works,” she insists, “using Irish people who are living in Switzerland, and there are lots of them here, to make introductions. Then it’s up to the company to sell themselves, but at least we have opened a door for them.”

Valerie says the feedback on any company she has facilitated has always been positive. “I think what Irish companies bring, even if some of them are small, is that they are very innovative. We are a very big company with 100,000 people, and while innovation is our bloodline, a company that size requires a lot of structure and hierarchy and processes, so sometime you get a little bit less spontaneity. Smaller companies can be a little more agile, so bringing the two together can be very rewarding.”
TECHNOLOGY TO HELP TEACHERS TEACH
Ian Campbell got his copy book out to take note of trends at this year’s BETT expo, the world’s biggest education technology exhibition.

Last month in London at the BETT education technology exhibition, 700 stands competed for the attention of 30,000 visitors who came for their annual update on how hardware and software can improve pedagogical practices.

Formerly known as the British Educational Training and Technology Show, the event has become so big since it started out in the ‘Eighties that an acronym is all it needs to draw teachers and education professionals from around the world. The British government takes the event so seriously, it preceded it with a special conference and told the media that education was an export sector worth £28 billion a year to the UK economy.

For Irish firms, the industry opens up opportunities for very different types of technology, from specialist business systems and virtual learning environments to educational software and interactive classroom technologies. Walking around the aisles of exhibitors, the presence of blue-chip ICT giants like Microsoft, Intel and Samsung was to be expected, but it was the sheer diversity of the small firms specialising in niche solutions and services that was so striking.

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SERIOUS GAMING There was a strong presence of so-called ‘serious games’ companies, publishers of immersive video games that emulate the look and feel of Xbox and PlayStation titles but add an educational layer. Danish company Serious Games Interactive made a real impact at the show, scooping a prestigious BETT award for digital content for a learning game called Global Conflicts.

Focused on world trouble spots, students get to play the role of a freelance journalist, briefed by an editor to cover the story from a particular angle. Stylistically, it looks every bit as good as a console game, but its power to educate is what sets it apart, something that becomes immediately apparent when you take the idea and apply it to the Palestine-Israeli conflict.

Aimed at secondary school students, it is particularly useful for citizenship courses and media studies. The game has been a big hit in Scandinavia and Denmark in particular, where 15 per cent of schools have bought the software. For some schools and education authorities, however, there is a reluctance to bring any type of game into the classroom.

“Perception is changing,” said Mikkel Overby, commercial director with the company. “In the three-and-a-half years we have been going, it has become increasingly acceptable to the sector. The barrier is not about whether games have a value in the classroom; it’s about whether teachers feel comfortable using them.”

The founder of the young company was a postgraduate in games and learning who wanted to explore how games offered a different cognitive approach to tackling difficult subjects. “Something like human rights violation are difficult to teach, but if you put them in a game world, it provides a contextual bridge and it’s easier for students to grasp,” said Overby.
Another games company won the BETT exporter of the year award. Manic Monkey is a UK firm that makes interactive language games for primary school and has found a big market for their teaching English titles in Scandinavia and Asia.

International sales manager John Russell says that concerns in the UK around educational games simply do not apply in other countries. “In Asia, there is a totally different perception about gaming and an understanding that it can enhance learning. Maybe it’s to do with the way these markets embrace technology generally,” he said.

“If you look at Korea, 90 per cent of households have broadband, and it’s the biggest gaming market in the world. It’s not so surprising that they look at gaming in the classroom differently. It also happens to be one of our biggest export territories.”

With 23,000 British primary schools mandated this year to teach a foreign language, Russell is optimistic that home sales will increase too. He also points out that English is not the first language for one million immigrant children in the UK.

SPECIAL NEEDS While educators may have been slow to recognise the benefits that games bring to the classroom, there has been a long-standing recognition that technology in general can play an important role in special needs teaching and learning.

Inclusive Technology won the ICT company of the year award at BETT for hardware and software products that help people with special needs operate computers. Particularly successful has been its switch to accessible software that enables children with severe learning disabilities to interact with a screen at an appropriate cognitive level.

“We also design products for people with physical disabilities,” explained Alison Littlewood, marketing manager. “They might have unreliable movement so we give them simple buttons and specially developed software to make computer interaction more accessible.”

The firm also makes interactive plasma screens that are height adjustable for wheelchair users.
Other companies have business solutions that they have adapted to the educational market. Acumen Insights is a UK firm that specialises in online mobile solutions. For schools, it has developed mobile access software that works on a number of levels. SMS can be used to relay information direct to pupils, but schools can also create a parental messaging service, sending out texts that pass on important news or provide secure links to content on web space where pupil progress can be reviewed.

“We are device and software agnostic. All we need is an XML-feed to take content and repurpose it,” explains Paul Robinson, one of the company directors. “Pupils or parents just need a smartphone with a web or wap browser.”

What about call costs? “It can get quite expensive, but the good thing from our point of view is that operators now bundle web access and data downloads with tariffs.”

The company currently has seven UK schools using its software, but many are reluctant to allow mobile technology on to the premises. This attitude, similar to the reluctance to embrace games, is starting to change, according to Robinson. “There is still some resistance and some schools still want phones switched off, but in the last two years we have seen schools and colleges moving to mobile-based access.”

Another UK software company that has carved a niche for itself in the UK education sector is 2 Simple Software, winner of the 2009 BETT ICT company of the year award for its online paints and arts packages. Online content manager Anthony Evans is an advocate for using technology to unlock creativity in the classroom and believes there is plenty of room for new entrants into the market.

Speaking at a BETT seminar, he urged teachers and software developers to look beyond traditional models. “You have to think beyond virtual learning platforms, which have not turned out to be as exciting as we would have hoped. When there is too much of a focus on integration, you lose out on innovation and creativity,” he warned.

Tim Rylands, another educator speaking at the same session, imagined an even more open scenario where teachers could download teaching tools on a much more ad hoc basis. “Why can’t education have the equivalent of an Apple App Store? Developers would be encouraged to spend 500 hours making something for the classroom if they got paid every time their application was downloaded.”
In the last 12 months, the geotechnical engineering firm Byrne Looby has established new offices, staffed by senior company personnel, in Tripoli, Jeddah and Abu Dhabi. The deployment is part of a concerted effort to find new business overseas, company co-founder Michael Looby told *The Market* magazine.

“Before the recession, we had opened offices in Galway, Belfast and London in the last three-and-a-half to two-and-a-half years, and we were employing 40 people. We then realised, about two years ago, that if we wanted to keep those people employed, we would need to find work elsewhere, because the workload in Ireland and the UK wouldn’t be enough to keep us all busy.

“We looked at mainland and eastern Europe, the Balkans, the Middle East and North Africa. We did a number of one-off projects from our Dublin and London offices so that, while we were doing the work, we could get a good look around to see the volume of work available in these markets and the trading conditions. About 18 months ago, we decided to focus on the Middle East and North Africa, and, a year ago, we established new offices in Libya, Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi. These countries, and their neighbours, have the large-scale projects that would be suitable for our technical knowledge and our business model. And they were willing and able to pay reasonable fees for high-end geotechnical expertise. It’s simple, but it is crucial: as well as getting the work, you need to be sure you will be reasonably paid.”

The strategy means that Byrne Looby is managing to keep fee income levels at about €4.0m a year, with 45 per cent of income generated in Ireland, 30 per cent in the UK and 25 per cent from other overseas markets. While the company has worked in countries as diverse as Australia, Albania,
Romania, Denmark, Hong Kong, Singapore, Thailand and Taiwan, it sees a large proportion of its future income coming via its three representative offices in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region.

**BUSINESS MODEL** As part of its expansion overseas, Byrne Looby has had to change the business model that it had adopted when first established. “From day one, our approach had been to look for contractor design work on large-scale infrastructure and building projects,” said Michael. “We would target large contractors, rather than anyone or anything else. We would look at whatever projects they were doing and try to provide them with a value-engineering solution that would reduce their costs. If they liked our ideas, we would get the work designing the solution for them.

“About 60 per cent of our work is still as consultants to main contractors or to main contractors’ consultants, but about 40 per cent is to government authorities or bodies commissioning work, where we do pre-tender design studies, front-end engineering work or client representative roles on ongoing projects. Working as consultant to the client, we are sitting on the other side of the table. We’ve deliberately grown our expertise so we can act as both contractor’s consultants and client’s rep.”

Byrne Looby’s earlier expansion to offices in Galway, Belfast and London had chiefly been driven to serve the contractor market more effectively; it is only now that the company actively seeks client’s consultant or owner’s consultant work. Michael said: “Opening an office in London was a natural progression of what we had done previously; we were chasing the contractors who were working on big UK infrastructure projects, and many of our customers in London were engineering contractors we had worked with previously in Ireland. There is very little hassle setting up in London – it’s the same language, same time-zone, similar legal/registration system and there would be a familiarity with their building codes.

**MOVE TO MENA** Opening offices in the Middle East and North Africa was more daunting, he says. “The first thing we did to explore these markets was to go on trade missions with Enterprise Ireland and make our first introductions to potential partners and clients. Choosing the right trading partner is of vital importance, because the whole procurement process in these countries is very much reliant on contacts and introductions.”

The procurement process is somewhat different to the formal European tendering process, there is a pre-qualification round before interviews take place, he added. “The partners we selected were able to give us very strong introductions to senior decision-makers; without them, we would not have achieved the volume of commissions.

“When you are going into business with a partner in these countries, it is not just about agreeing the commercial aspects; it’s about finding a partner that has the same mindset as you,” he continues. “They need to be as aggressive, or as non-aggressive, as you in how you are going to go looking for work; they need to want to be in the same market and client base as you, and they need to be agreeable to using the same strategies as you, such as agreeing to a reduced rate for work initially until long-term relationships are established with clients.”

**BUSINESS CULTURE** Each of the three new offices and their markets have their own distinct attributes, but as part of the Arab and Muslim world, there are many similarities between the cultures of Tripoli, Abu Dhabi and Jeddah, Michael says.

“Relationships in the Arab world are very important, and a good relationship needs to be established before people will do business with you. They are very interested in people – where do they come from and what are they about. If you don’t seem interested in them, it’s not just inappropriate, they will think there is something wrong with you! “Some Westerners can find it disconcerting, this giving of oneself, but I think it is just natural conversation that you should engage in and enjoy. There are lots of similarities between the Arabs and the Irish, and making these connections is critical for business generation. You need to have people in these countries who can present themselves clearly and who have a personality that can engage with others. It has to be someone of a reasonably senior level, because they need to have confidence and to not be intimidated by working in a different culture.

“When making a presentation, I would always say that I was the owner of the
company, because they like to feel that they are talking to a decision-maker; I would not have mentioned this when making presentations in Ireland or the UK. We have modified all our presentations slightly in these countries: when a director or an associate director is presenting, they always give their title and to say something like ‘I have responsibility for all financial and technical decisions made by our company in this country,’ Michael says.

FUTURE PLANS  Comparing the three locations, he believes that the Tripoli office is likely to supply Byrne Looby with the greatest growth in activity in 2010. While the Abu Dhabi and Jeddah offices are currently involved in 12 projects each, the Tripoli office is busy with 35 live projects in Libya and that office is also likely to serve the projects in Algeria and Egypt in the future.

BLP has also just opened an office in Lagos, Nigeria, and is looking at potential in Poland. The Abu Dhabi office has been somewhat hit by the property slump in the region. However, some recovery is happening, Michael says, and the office is being used to serve the other Emirates, particularly Kuwait. Moreover, it is also involved in a number of Iraqi projects – although none that involve site visits to Iraq.

In the meantime, from its Dublin and London offices, Byrne Looby is also actively pursuing work in Albania, Kosovo and other parts of Eastern Europe. “There is an effort that you have to make to become established in these countries,” Michael says, “but providing you can agree the right fees structure, the volume of work is huge.”

Irish construction goes international in 2009

In 2009, some 180 Irish construction services companies came onboard as new Enterprise Ireland clients across the construction, specialist sub-contractor, architect, engineering project management and quantity surveyor sectors.

– Eighty construction service companies were approved for ‘Category 1’ funding, providing support towards the costs of feasibility studies and market research, working with strategic consultants, hiring a key manager and being assigned a business accelerator.

– Enterprise Ireland worked with the professional industry bodies – the Royal Institute of Architects in Ireland, Surveyors Ireland, Engineers Ireland and the Construction Industry Federation – to develop a CPD module in internationalisation, awarded by Waterford Institute of Technology and accredited by HETAC.

– 20 construction service companies took part in First Flight, the Enterprise Ireland training programme aimed at helping a company assess its export readiness, and address any capability or capacity gaps identified. In turn, this led to many participants being teamed up with one-to-one mentors.

– Three construction service companies took part in the International Selling Programme, an Enterprise Ireland’s programme, delivered by DIT, and aimed at helping Irish companies to strengthen their export sales development in international markets. 12 companies are participating in the current (2010) programme.

– The first Construction - Leadership4Growth programme has helped 28 companies from the industry internationalise. The current programme, starting in February 2010, Leadership 4 Growth – The Built Environment, will help a further 24 construction services companies to develop in global markets.

– Enterprise Ireland co-ordinated a construction industry trade mission to Saudi Arabia and Qatar as well as market visits to Libya, Moscow and Algeria and supported missions and markets visits by ACEI to Dubai and by RIAI to Dubai and Sochi, Russia, the home of the Winter Olympics 2012.

– Sixteen construction services companies, so far, have received Enterprise Stabilisation Funding, The Enterprise Stabilisation Fund aims to help companies sustain and develop their business during these difficult times. The funding is provided primarily through preference shares, repayable after 5 years and typically at 3 per cent coupon rate.

– Two companies were awarded Growth Funding to the tune of approximately €300k each. The Growth Fund provides co-funding for SME clients of Enterprise Ireland to achieve greater competitiveness by improving their export potential.

[ Dermot Reidy]
A DIFFERENT KIND OF ENERGY

In a region better known for celebrating high-impact, Masdar City is a planned low environmental-impact development in Abu Dhabi, being created in partnership with the US’s MIT. If all goes according to plan, it could serve as a global showcase of all that is best in futuristic clean technology, writes Donal Nugent.
For all the pyrotechnics that attended it, the official opening of the world’s tallest building, the Burj Khalifa, in Dubai at the start of the year, seems more to book-end an era rather than to herald a new one. As the challenges of sustainable living gain a growing sense of urgency, the idea of set-piece architecture as a ‘race to the top’ increasingly has the air of a grandiosity the world can no longer afford.

So, while it has yet received only a fraction of the attention that surrounded Dubai’s gleaming Leviathan, it is another, distinctly low-rise building site just 100 kilometres away, springing up beside Abu Dhabi airport, that may well offer the region’s greatest contribution to the urban living project in this coming decade.

**IMPACT** On first glance, Masdar City may, too, seem a throwback to a different era. A self-contained, square and walled city, this is an urban footprint with more resonance of the 11th Century than the 21st. As a new-built city, in a region where building cities from scratch has become a defining passion, Masdar City aims to be unique not for the impact it will have, but rather for its very lack of impact. The flagship project of the Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company, this is an exercise in urban planning that will, if successful, not only surpass all previously defined goals for sustainable living but leave them for dust.

Home to 40,000 people, and aiming to attract a further 50,000 daily commuters, Masdar will be a city powered entirely by solar and other renewable energy sources, will be carbon neutral and will have a waste output of precisely zero.

Even more intriguingly, if all goes to plan, the city’s residents will be far more than passive participants in a cutting-edge slice of science. Instead, they will be its chief protagonists.

The engine of the planned city’s economy is the Masdar Institute of Science and Technology. Created in partnership with the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, it aims to be a world centre in the development of sustainable energy solutions, and a conduit of research that will effectively drive the pistons (if the image of a petrol-driven engine can be forgiven) of some 1,500 clean tech companies from around the world. These, in turn, will provide the employment, the employees and the basis of the city’s civic life. The dream then, is not simply a showcase of environmental stewardship, but a city that can become the Silicon Valley of global green energy, where R&D, commercialisation and adoption overlap, interact and, ultimately, reach out to the world.

**FUTURE PERFECT** While the layout of the new city is inspired by traditional Arabic urban planning (narrow streets, shaded courtyards), there is more than a touch of science fiction to its conception, albeit science fiction more resonant
A series of joint ventures between the Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company and some major European players is opening up just the kind of channels of innovation and funding it envisages as essential to the future impact of the city as a hub of innovation.

Perhaps not surprisingly, given where Ireland’s recent economic growth has been centred, the particular strengths of Irish clean tech are in construction, electronics, IT and building management. Encouragingly, a culture of innovation has seen creative convergences and genuine synergies between the sectors.

Marina Donohoe is Manager - CleanTech & Paper, Print and Packaging with Enterprise Ireland. EI supports some 200 companies either completely or partially focused on the sector. In terms of export focus, Marina explains that “Irish companies are looking at countries where there is a clear demand for their services, for example where there is a higher cost of energy, a greater demand for renewables and where green stimulus packages are prevalent. The UK, increasingly the US, and the bigger markets in Europe are key opportunities.”

In this context, and with legitimate question marks over whether there really is an appetite for clean-tech solutions in countries where energy costs are so low, the Gulf region hasn’t yet counted as a priority and, though there are a number of success stories of Irish suppliers gaining traction in the region “you could argue some of the business being done by Irish companies here is opportunistic,” Marina says. “They’re being brought in on the basis of a relationship they have with another partner, in the UK for example, and getting business on that result.”

HOME GROWN Closer to home, a sizeable clean-tech sector has emerged in Ireland: one that is not only innovative and progressive but, critically, best-in-class in several niche areas such as ocean energy, waste-water management and waste-to-energy. Exports from the sector are currently rising at Celtic Tiger-growth levels and, in 2010, will reaching €500m. The main players include larger operations such as NTR, Kingspan, EcoCem and Glen Dimplex as well as niche companies like EFT, Kedco, Clearpower and Shabra.

of the colourful world of Avatar than the dystopia of Bladerunner: Solar umbrellas will unfurl automatically above the city’s streets, turning the midday heat into electricity and retracting as the temperature cools at night. Futuristic electric cars will provide a kind of automated taxi service where, at the touch of button, you’ll be taken to wherever you want to go in the city.

But this is also futurism on a tight deadline. Masdar is currently a work in progress with completion of the first phase expected by 2014 when the headquarter building for the Masdar Institute is completed. Designed by the renowned Foster & Associates, it aims to be the most sustainable piece of public architecture on the planet with chief architect Norman Foster describing “a challenging design brief that promises to set new benchmarks for the sustainable city of the future.”
The challenges of doing business in the Gulf region stretch far beyond the standard issues of gaining an understanding the dynamics of a foreign market.

“Few Irish businesses have achieved successful results in this region through full frontal assaults,” Marina points out. “Partnership is the model, so the question for prospective entrants is how to find the right partner. In Dubai, for example, a local partner will typically have 51 per cent of the business proposition with the foreign company holding 49 per cent, so you’re not in the lead and, if you choose the wrong partner, you could spend years trying to get out of it.”

CHANNELS The UEA, in fact, holds 9.5 per cent of the world’s proven oil supplies and 3.5 per cent of its proven natural gas supplies, but while there may be scepticism as to whether renewable energy simply offers the prospect of some elegant ‘green washing’, key aspects to the Masdar project point to something much more substantial at play. Firstly, a series of joint ventures between the Abu Dhabi Future Energy Company and some major European players in renewable energy globally is opening up just the kind of channels of innovation and funding it envisages as essential to the future impact of the city as a hub of innovation.

A joint-venture with a Spanish company is currently seeing construction of three concentrated solar power (CSP) plants in Spain, while a second joint-venture in the UK will lead to construction of the largest offshore wind farm in the world, in the Outer Thames Estuary close to London.

Even more encouraging is evidence that the business model proposed for Masdar City will be a step away from the partnership model. Its planners say it will offer 100 per cent foreign ownership of businesses; the freedom to repatriate capital and profits without restrictions; and a ‘one-stop shop’ for business registration and visa processing.

Setting up shop is, of course, some way off just yet, but for companies interested in getting directly involved at the construction stage, EI says there are three modes of engagement. For technology-based companies, Masdar has prepared a detailed technology roadmap document, outlining current and planned needs and the timelines for their rollout. This can be accessed on signing of a non-disclosure agreement after which a company can submit its proposal for consideration.

To get on a preferred supplier list, material and product suppliers need to complete a questionnaire assessing their green credentials. Those that meet the required rating can then offer their goods and services to the city’s contractors. Finally, professional service providers such as architects, consultants and engineers need to be prequalified to respond to tenders. EI Dubai can provide the details to interested parties.

ANSWERS Masdar City, undoubtedly, represents an entirely different kind of proposition to the dazzling skyscraper culture that has seduced urban planners in the UAE since the start of the millennium. It may yet, however, suffer from being in their shadow. With news of the debt crisis in Dubai shaking the self-confidence that has driven growth in the region, the future direction of the UAE looks, at least momentarily, uncertain. The underlying questions around sustainability, even in purely economic terms, have yet to be convincingly answered.

Nevertheless, it is clear that there is more than spectacle and pomp at stake here. “Build the world a better mousetrap and it will beat a path to your door,” Emerson said. It is the kind of adage that can only be fully appreciated where there is a sense of genuine urgency in the air. Just a few weeks before the world’s tallest building was unveiled, the world’s most important conference provided just this context as it stalled inconclusively in Copenhagen. With the climate change mouse loose around the house, it would be extraordinary if Masdar’s door isn’t knocked on by many influential parties over the coming decade. While the questions are clear, the opportunity to be on the other side of the door with the answers makes this development a tantalising prospect that no one involved in clean tech can afford to ignore.
Electrical engineer Tom Lynch has seen Kabul's power problems up close. A former ESB employee, Lynch is team leader of an electrical study conducted by Cork-based Energy Services in the Afghan capital. The project, along with a similar one in neighbouring Tajikistan, are both funded by the Asian Development Bank (ADB), which is funding the overhaul of local power grids.

Verifying and guiding such giant projects has created opportunities like Energy Services. Lynch's assessments are vital in guiding how and when the donor money is spent in overhauling Afghanistan's power system. Energy Services got the contract via a referral from Mott McDonald, the global building services firm.

Energy Services is one of several Irish firms pitching for ADB projects - Dublin-based SRI Executive is another - since Ireland joined the ADB in 2006. Given that Ireland is a member (contributing US$44 million to the Manila-based bank's coffers as part of its membership) Irish firms can hope to land more contracts: the ADB spent US$7.5 billion on outside contractors last year, up from US$7 billion the year before.

Pat O'Riordan, director of Enterprise Ireland's Singapore office has noted a "clear trend" over the past five years of donors increasing their technical assistance budgets for projects in Asia. "We expect this trend to continue." In May, the capital base of the Asian Development Bank (ADB) was expanded from US$55 billion to US$165 billion, a 200 per cent increase.

Its work in Central Asia puts Energy Services' ADB-sourced fees at over US$250,000, explains company CEO Steve Flint, who adds that the firm is pursuing several more ADB-linked projects throughout Asia. The firm is in the running for projects worth US$2 million in fees over a period of 12 to 18 months.

Also based in Cork, the larger project management and engineering firm, the PM Group, is turning in a wealth of experience gleaned in EU-funded projects helping Eastern Europe overhaul its government systems and infrastructure to Brussels norms. The company's engineers and other experts are now in demand among Asian governments seeking to conduct similar improvements using ADB funding.

PM bids for such consultancy projects through the ADB headquarters in Manila. The process of applying for projects is similar to the EU process, says Trevor O'Regan, PM's international services business development manager, who spends much of his time lately flying between Manila and other points of South East Asia as projects pop up.

The firm, which has a much larger business in Asia building manufacturing plants for multinational corporations, sees the bulk of its donor-funded consultancy work in Vietnam, Indonesia and the Philippines, explains CEO Michael Shelly. He sees future projects in Cambodia and Laos: as an ADB member, Ireland has invested US$5.5 million in a hydro power plant in Laos.

PM has dispatched experts as far afield as Uzbekistan and Vietnam to advise on ADB-funded environmental projects. The application process may be the same but Asian donor-funded projects are typically smaller, explains O'Regan. "Sometimes they [ADB] are just looking for one expert." While projects are more plentiful, the biggest challenge is in getting the first project, important as a reference in pitching for future work. "To get those first jobs often start out small, by supplying single independent experts to small projects under the company flag," O'Regan elaborates.

PM's ease of access to the ADB headquarters in Manila has been helped by Ireland's solid experience with the private public partnership (PPP) model of financing infrastructure. The ADB wants to use PPP as urbanisation continues apace in Asia, says O'Regan. He adds that Ireland's solid reputation for education and ICT [information communication technology] has also drawn the attention of the ADB, which has prioritised both areas as development tools for Asia's poorer regions.

Though still a small part of the company's overall earnings – which hit €250 million in 2008 – PM's consultancy business in Asia will grow. And it's useful: "It gets us into markets, helps us develop good business," says Shelly. Already the company's presence in Vietnam through an ADB-funded project has impressed a client of its industrial wing enough to consider the firm to build its plant in the country.

It's clearly early days. But Irish firms skill sets give them a good chance, says Shelly, who notes many of the country's engineers have been keen to work overseas. "They're not afraid of going abroad for a year." True indeed in the case of Tom Lynch: he'll spend the winter figuring out Tajikistan's power problems.
Enterprise Ireland’s Information Centre hosts Ireland’s most comprehensive collection of business information and is staffed by specialists who can aid quick and effective searches. The team can help clients of Enterprise Ireland find information on markets, products, companies, technical standards and management.

The centre subscribes to a wide range of databases, including:
- Datamonitor Profiles
- Espicom
- Frost & Sullivan
- Mintel

Here is just a sample of the types of research and reports to which the centre has access.

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**Market intelligence**

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**ICT/SOFTWARE**

**Trends 2010: Financial Processes and Applications**
*Forrester Research*

December 2009

Macroeconomic forces and ongoing regulatory changes will have significant impacts on how the office of the CFO carries out its mission-critical responsibilities. Out of necessity, finance will make process and systems investments related to regulatory requirements, including International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS) and eXtensible Business Reporting Language (XBRL). On a more strategic level, continuous improvement in finance will focus on better automation of the close-to-reporting cycle, as well as expense, payables, and controls processes. Although finance is not ready for widespread adoption of software as-a-service (SaaS) as a deployment model for applications, new vendor offerings in 2010 will lead to higher levels of interest.

**The Top Five Changes for Application Development in 2010**
*Forrester Research*

January 2010

Over the past year, the recession has forced everyone in IT to think differently about where to cut costs and what projects and tactics are still worthy of investment. So what are the opportunities for application development professionals? Forrester recommends that application development professionals make five key changes in 2010: embrace cloud as an emerging platform; find their ‘inner start-up’; favour flexibility and cost over platform loyalty; become passionate about user experience and find and coach their talent.

**Case Study: Siemens IT Solutions and Services Successfully Positions a Community Cloud**
*Forrester Research*

January 2010

Cloud computing has become the dominant theme of the marketing campaigns of many infrastructure outsourcing and services providers. Siemens IT Solutions and Services (SIS) — one of the largest European-based service providers — felt challenged by the aggressive cloud marketing of its North American competitors. But with a customer base that mostly consists of rather conservative enterprises across Europe, SIS had to carefully balance the desire to position the innovative potential of the cloud and the need to convince conservative enterprise stakeholders of the tangible business value that the cloud can provide. The cloud positioning that SIS has thus created, initially for the media industry, represents a best practice for how vendor marketing professionals can develop a cloud story — in this case, around the concept of a community cloud, which targets different client stakeholders.

**Goodbye Aughts: Issues to Watch in 2010 and Beyond**
*Frost & Sullivan*

January 2010

More than ever, IT managers must align themselves with their line-of-business counterparts, ensuring that everything they do has clear business benefit, and measurable value. As they do so, they should pay attention to some of the bigger trends in IT for the coming year. Five issues that will be top of mind for many in the industry are briefly outlined in this technical insight.
FOOD, RETAIL AND CONSUMER PRODUCTS

Successes and Failures in Consumer Goods Innovation and NPD - a review of 100 global consumer goods case studies
Datamonitor
December 2009
This presentation provides a focused rundown of one hundred of the most compelling brands in recent years, along with brands that have failed to last the course. It looks at how they have succeeded or failed with their marketing and innovation strategies. The categories examined are food, drink, personal care and household goods in North America, Europe and Asia Pacific.

Innovations and NPD in Dairy: Emerging opportunities, flavour trends and new healthy, ethical and premium products
Global Business Insights
January 2010
There are three significant trends in dairy product innovation: emotional wellbeing, functional health and indulgence products. The importance of these drivers is set to increase as consumers demand more from dairy products. The report provides detailed insights into the key issues facing dairy manufacturers, the key trends driving innovation and packaged products and the next level of development. It points to the future development of the market and which countries to invest in if you are maintaining your existing product portfolio.

Consumer Food Labelling UK
Mintel
January 2010
This report looks at the awareness and importance of different food labels, as well as the understanding of them within the context of the changing nature of the overall food market in the UK. While the focus of the report is the retail sector, developments in the foodservice industry are also covered to a lesser extent.

Innovations in Mood and Mind Health Food and Drinks: Growth opportunities, effective product strategies and evolution in NPD
Business Insights
January 2010
The mood/mind health food and drinks market is one of the most exciting and innovative in the global industry thanks to its strong growth (albeit from a small base). This report focuses on current new product launches, analyses potential new profit hotspots, investigates the sub-categories and regions set for the strongest growth and provides actionable recommendations for manufacturers and retailers who want to branch out into a new market within functional food and drinks.

Consumer Food Packaging UK
Mintel
January 2010
This report examines the UK market for food packaging in relation to consumer products. It excludes packaging used for bulk transportation and industrial purposes but includes transit display material used for in-store merchandising. The report finds that easy to recycle (biodegradable) packaging is the top packaging attribute sought by 23 million consumers. The report also considers the role that labelling plays in enhancing product packaging in terms of on-shelf appeal and providing product information.

ENVIRONMENT, INDUSTRY AND LIFE SCIENCE SECTORS

Point of Care Diagnostics
BCC Research
November 2009
This report estimates that the global POC (point-of-care) market was worth nearly $1.4 billion in 2009 and is estimated to increase to $18.7 billion, at a five-year compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 7.0 per cent. The largest test blood chemistry and electrolyte market was nearly $2.1 billion in 2009. This is expected to rise to $3.8 billion in 2014, at a CAGR of 12.0 per cent. The glucose monitoring test market reached approximately $7.7 million in 2009 and is projected to reach $9.9 billion in 2014, at a CAGR of 5.1 per cent.

European Plastics Industry Report
AMI
2009
This report provides an overview of trends and developments in the European thermoplastics industry. It covers commodity polymers, engineering polymers, thermoplastic compounds and plastics processing. Separate sections look at the market for plastics in France, Germany, Italy, the United Kingdom, Spain, Belgium, Netherlands, Nordic countries, Switzerland, Austria, Portugal, Greece, Ireland, Poland, Hungary, Czech and Slovak Republics, Romania, Bulgaria, Baltic states and Slovenia.

Avoiding the 14 Biggest Mistakes made by Emerging Life Science Companies in Reimbursement, Valuation, Investor Presentations and Regulatory Strategy
Windover (Webinar & Audio Presentation)
December 2009
The objective of this presentation is to present the 14 biggest mistakes that prevent successful commercialisation and to illustrate how making the right decisions can ensure funding and avoid costly, time-consuming and sometimes disastrous errors. It focuses on the following four areas: funding, regulatory strategy, reimbursement strategy and the competitive landscape.

Light-emitting Diodes for Lighting Applications
BCC Research
January 2010
This report covers technologies and materials for fabricating coloured and white LEDs. It estimates shipments and their value for 2009, and forecasts compound annual growth rates (CAGRs) through to 2014. Key industries using HB-LEDs are reviewed to evaluate their current market status and future projections. Various LED technologies and the processes used to fabricate them are also covered along with the global industry structure and company profiles and patents.

Strategic Assessment of Growth Opportunities for Smart Buildings Markets in Europe
Frost & Sullivan
October 2009
This report provides a strategic analysis of the emerging growth opportunities in the European smart buildings market, examining the concepts and technologies that make up 'Smart Solutions' in the marketplace and analysing their impact on customers, competitors and incumbent solutions in the building technologies industry.
EU ‘VAT package’ now in force
The EU’s new ‘VAT Package’ has come into force as of 1 January, 2010. The package contains major changes to the rules governing the VAT treatment of services, and a new electronic procedure for claiming VAT incurred in other Member States. Among the elements of the package are provisions that will see VAT for business-to-business services paid in the country of consumption rather than the country where the supplier is located, while for business-to-consumer services, VAT will continue to be paid in the Member State in which the supplier is established. For more information, see: http://ec.europa.eu/taxation_customs/index_en.htm

Machinery directive now in force
The Machinery Directive 2006/42/EC, which was published in June 2006, has been applicable from 29 December, 2009, replacing the Machinery Directive 98/37/EC. The new directive provides the regulatory basis for the harmonisation of the essential health and safety requirements for machinery at European Union level.

Essentially performing a dual function, it not only promotes the free movement of machinery within the Single Market, but also aims to guarantee a high level of protection to EU workers and citizens. Being a ‘New Legal Framework’ Directive, it promotes harmonisation through a combination of mandatory health and safety requirements and voluntary harmonised standards. Such directives apply only to products that are intended to be placed (or put into service) on the EU market for the first time.

UK’s new regulations for industrial and automotive batteries
In the UK, new legislation, designed to ensure that all waste industrial and automotive batteries are recycled in the future, came into effect on 1 January, 2010.

Producers of industrial and automotive batteries are now required to arrange the collection, treatment and recycling of such batteries, free of charge, if requested by business end-users and final holders.

Key elements of the new regulations include the requirement for any person placing batteries on the market to register as a producer of batteries, and report on waste batteries collected and sent for recycling, as well as requirements for the treatment and recycling of waste batteries.

The Waste Batteries and Accumulators Regulations 2009 complement the existing Batteries and Accumulators (Placing on the Market) Regulations 2008, which set out the requirements for introducing new batteries onto the market from 26 September last year. These regulations also introduce a ban on the landfill disposal or incineration of waste industrial and automotive batteries.
UK proposes review of consents for development

The UK’s Business Minister, Ian Lucas, has announced a new review, and a call for evidence, to identify and address barriers to investment created by consents for development, other than planning permission.

The independent review, which will look at consents for development made alongside or after planning permission for all sizes of projects, will be headed up by Adrian Penfold, and is part of the UK government’s wider programme to improve the planning system and development process. It is intended that it will report as part of the Budget in 2010, making recommendations on areas such as improving co-operation between agencies, removing bottlenecks in the process and improving the experience for the investor.

The call for evidence is aimed at all those with an interest in improving the operation of consents. It offers the opportunity for all with an interest in this area to air their views. The responses will provide evidence to enable the review team to gain a full and representative understanding of the consents environment, to highlight key issues and to develop its overall analysis.

Easier access to information on standards in China

Currently, many small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) lack resources and face a language barrier when trying to obtain information on standards in China. However, this is to be made easier with an upgraded Standardisation Information Platform, to be created as a result of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) signed by the two territories.

With the help of the platform, enterprises can more easily find the information they need on European and Chinese standards, whether already adopted or under elaboration. The platform provides information on four sectors: environmental protection, electrical equipment, machinery and medical devices. The information - to a large extent in English and Chinese - is free of charge.

Currently, the platform exists as a pilot project. The aim of the MoU is to shape, develop and define the platform activities as well as the role of the cooperating partners. The platform (pilot version) can be accessed at www.eu-china-standards.eu. The extended services should become available in two months.

EU to launch FTA negotiations with individual ASEAN countries

EU Member States have just given the green light for the Commission to pursue negotiations towards free trade agreements (FTAs) with individual countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN).

As a first step, the Commission intends to begin negotiations with Singapore early in 2010. With around €55 billion of bilateral trade, Singapore is the EU’s most important trading partner among the ASEAN countries. However, the door remains open for other ASEAN countries willing to negotiate a comprehensive FTA with the EU.

After the US and China, the group of ASEAN countries is the EU’s third largest trade partner outside Europe. Trade in goods and services between the EU and ASEAN has grown by more than a quarter between 2004 and 2008, reaching €175 billion in 2008.

The envisaged FTAs are expected to lower or abolish the currently existing tariff and non-tariff (i.e. regulatory and technical) barriers to trade and investment in many ASEAN markets, so as to further strengthen the EU’s commercial ties with the dynamic ASEAN region. Creating new export opportunities in the ASEAN markets is a priority under the EU’s Global Europe trade strategy.

US introduces new centre to ensure safety of imported goods

The US Department of Homeland Security Secretary has announced the creation of the Import Safety Commercial Targeting and Analysis Center (CTAC) – a new US Customs and Border Protection (CBP) facility designed to streamline and enhance federal efforts to address import safety issues.

The Import Safety CTAC will combine the resources and manpower of CBP and other government agencies, including US Immigration and Customs Enforcement, the Consumer Product Safety Commission, the Food and Drug Administration and the Food Safety Inspection Service, with the aim of protecting the American public from harm caused by unsafe imported products by improving communication and information-sharing and by reducing redundant inspection activities.

The new facility, which will be headed by and located adjacent to CBP’s Office of International Trade in Washington, DC, reflects the three core principles announced by President Obama’s Food Safety Working Group in July: prevention, surveillance and response.

REMINDER:

Key resource on export tariffs and documentation requirements

The Market Access Database, produced by the EU, gives Irish companies access to a large amount of very valuable information on documentation and tariffs for exporting to countries outside the European Union. The database is searchable by country and tariff code. A wide variety of information is available for each country listed, including details of applied tariffs, import formalities and documentation requirements (including samples of the various documents). Information on trade barriers and trade statistics is also contained in the database.

A guide to using the database was recently added. The database is accessible from the EI website (in the Export – Duties and Regulations section) or directly using the following web address: http://tinyurl.com/ygs4sd7

*To obtain a tariff code for your product, call Revenue on 1890 666 533 and ask for the Revenue office in Nenagh where you can obtain the tariff code for your product.

[Michelle Healy]
Lucille Redmond reviews three very different books of interest to the entrepreneur: Taytos’ cheeky marketing triumph *Mr Tayto*; Peter Thornton’s roller-coaster memoir *Thorntons, My Life in the Family Business*, and psychologist Albert Bernstein’s work-psychology book *Am I the Only Sane One Working Here?*

**LIGHT GRAZING**

The surprise bestseller over Christmas was a modest little book produced by the Irish potato crisp brand Tayto, owned by Largo Food in Meath. *Mr Tayto - The Man Inside the Jacket* sold like, well, hot potatos. Taytos have a special place in the Irish heart. Anyone going abroad always packs a few packets to give to emigrant friends. In fact, a friend of mine – an American who had returned to the US after 25 years in Ireland – re-immigrated after a tearful afternoon in a California pub full of Irish people eating Taytos and drinking Guinness, watching the All-Ireland Hurling Final. The ‘homesickness’ was too much for her, and she ran for Dublin.

The book is great fun. It’s a tongue-in-cheek parody of all those heart-of-the-rowl entrepreneurial memoirs by tycoons proud of their working-class roots. And at the same time, it’s a piece of genius, as marketing. The book’s charm - its naughtily satiric take on the late Celtic Tiger - turned it into an unexpected viral marketing wonder. In the weeks before Christmas, it outsold a rake of sad books about the economy, and booted perennial bestsellers Marian Keyes and Stephanie Meyers into second and third place on the Irish bestseller list.

The secret? Mr Tayto namechecks the much-loved memories of the Irish experience. In the ‘memoir’, the ordinary Joe Spud from Dublin’s inner city remembers going to the Gaeltacht with his mates, playing GAA, loving the childhood Christmas (eating crisps and drinking red lemonade).

There are parodic historical notes: “Turlough O’Taytaigh (b.1540, d.1601) Cork and Spain. Turlough had a lifelong hatred of Walter Raleigh as he brought a half-stone of spuds back from Spain 20 years before Raleigh, whilst on a spice and gun running trip in 1560.”

It’s a feast of 1970s’ nostalgia - the teenage years and a start in the factory, being an escort at the Rose of Tralley, dancing to Horslips and Thin Lizzie. The book is garlanded with the kind of colour-leached old photos greeted with ecstatic screams of “Look at his hair!” - starring Charles Haughey, a baby-faced Pat Kenny and Jackie Healy-Rae appearing with the Zelig-like Mr Tayto.

By the 1980s, Mr T has turned into a masher and is advertising for a hot potato of his own, with his chat-up lines carefully typed up so he won’t forget them. “Excuse me, you owe me a drink. I looked at you and dropped mine.”

A couple of chapters on soccer, the Celtic Tiger and the recession are less successful; Tayto’s branding is tightly wound into home thoughts from abroad. But emigrants – and in Ireland we’re all emigrants in our hearts
Thorntons chocolates started as a shop and a van, and became a multi-million-euro worldwide business. In *Thorntons, My Life in the Family Business*, Peter Thornton tells its story from the inside.

When Peter Thornton joined the family firm in 1956, the factory wages were £250 a year. It was a small Sheffield firm making sweets for local shops. Thornton’s account of the company he and his family developed through those years is a must-read for entrepreneurs.

The great businessman’s father obviously regarded him as a bit of a gom. Though Peter was brought into the business, he had to fight for every innovation. When his little brother, John, 10 years younger, came in, his every golden word was listened to.

His father was a fool: Peter Thornton’s gentle courtesy and bumbling manner hides an acute business brain. He brought in work study experts - radical at the time - and instituted productivity bonuses. When that no longer worked, he subsumed the bonus into the wage and changed the mix of workers, on the advice of another expert. To the wails of his conservative family, he set up works councils to decide on wage rates, productivity targets, etc. It worked.

After a lifetime’s commitment to the company, he was ousted in a 1987 boardroom coup by the backers of his brother, John.

It is a pity that Thornton did not recognise that writing is an expert job too - his book would have been so much better if he had got the help of a good co-writer. As it is, he does not know what to leave out and what to stress, and gives the same storytelling value to dull details as to gripping stories.

I’m waiting with interest for the TV version, because the drama of the difficult Thornton family and the story of the business growing from sweetshop to multinational would make a new Dallas.

Albert Bernstein is a clinical psychologist and - most valuable - a conflict resolution specialist. In *Am I the Only Sane One Working Here?*, he brings his knowledge to bear on the world of work.

Unusually, this is largely a book for managers. Subtitled ‘101 Solutions for Surviving Office Insanity’, Bernstein’s book should be on every workplace bookshelf. It is full of simple good sense. Take the section on working with a bullying boss. Bernstein makes the point that the first and best solution is to get another job. But if you can’t, he offers useful strategies. Don’t go into teen mode, he warns. Instead, become indispensable in an area where your boss lacks competence. Transcend temper, he says: if your boss criticises you in front of others, answer politely and ask what she or he wants you to do. Know the facts and figures of your department exactly. Warn your family that you may have to work odd hours or miss family occasions. Don’t gripe. Keep records. Demand top dollar – because a tyrant is willing to pay for the privilege of pushing you around.

Bernstein has witty observations of how companies work: the way that confidentiality can slide into a habit of secrecy for its own sake, for instance. In the chapter ‘The Care and Feeding of Invisible Elephants’ he outlines some of the ways companies hide from trouble - like spending the whole training budget on feelgood motivational speakers.

Unusually, this is largely a book for managers. Subtitled ‘101 Solutions for Surviving Office Insanity’, Bernstein’s book should be on every workplace bookshelf. Some of his most valuable insights are themselves motivational - simple rules like ‘four praises for every criticism’, ways to deal with slackers, how to encourage a polite, adult attitude in a workforce.

In these troubled times, he has excellent advice and help on facing the fear if your company gets into trouble or your job goes from under you.
Travel News

Aer Lingus and Ryanair cut services

From March 31, Aer Lingus is to reduce its services from Gatwick airport to just four routes. Existing destinations to Malaga, Dublin and Knock will remain in place, and a new route to Cork is being introduced. Separately, Ryanair has announced that it is to further reduce its flights and traffic at Dublin Airport this summer by up to 20 per cent.

FleetMatics Partners with Google to offer enhanced fleet tracking

FleetMatics, a market leader of GPS fleet tracking for commercial fleet vehicles, is to expand its strategic partnership with Google. Currently, FleetMatics is tracking over 10,000 vehicles in Ireland. As a result of the expanded partnership, Google Maps functionality, including the ability to visualise real-time asset locations and deliver optimised routing and driving directions, will be seamlessly integrated with the FleetMatics software, which delivers pertinent vehicle data such as speed, idle time and start/stop times. This will enable fleet owners to more accurately track their fleet vehicles, with in-depth traffic reporting, satellite views, hybrid satellite/street name views, terrain views, powerful zoom features and other features.

New layout at Dublin Airport

As of January 26, passengers being dropped off by private car at the existing passenger terminal, Terminal 1, have been accessing that terminal via a new road that takes them through the centre of T2.

Passengers using the short-term car park and those arriving by taxi, bus and coach will, for another two months, continue to access Terminal 1 by the existing approach road that runs alongside the front of T2.

The traffic changes are part of the ongoing programme to upgrade the airport’s campus roads and will be sign-posted on overhead gantries and other signage as vehicles enter the airport. See www.dublinairport.com

T2 will accommodate all Dublin Airport’s long-haul traffic and offer a new customs clearance facility for US-bound passengers. The development will also feature a new 19-gate boarding gate facility and new aircraft parking stands. The new terminal is due to commence operations in November.

Separately, Dublin Airport Authority has unveiled a new financial incentive scheme to encourage traffic growth at Dublin Airport this year. Measures include effectively waiving all airport charges for passenger traffic once a threshold of 19.5 million passengers has been reached and an expansion in existing financial supports that it provides to airlines launching new short-haul routes from Dublin.

Business travellers rate online check-in

Online check-in and wifi internet access have been voted among the “business travel innovations of the decade”, according to a recent survey of 2,400 corporate travellers, commissioned by the UK’s Business Travel and Meetings Show (BTMS). Other favoured innovations of the past decade included airline flat beds and notebook computers.

When asked what innovations would “enhance their enjoyment of business travel”, faster airport security, check-in and immigration processes were also rated highly, ahead of “a miracle child silencer”, supersonic aircraft, carbon-free travel and in-flight wifi.
New website to help those migrating to Abu Dhabi

‘MyMoveAbuDhabi.com’ is a new website that aims to provide information to residents of the United Arab Emirate capital, both new and old, on how to take the stress out of moving to, living, and working in Abu Dhabi.

It follows the successful launch in February 2009 of the MyMoveDubai website, with information on everything from legal red tape, to the best places to eat, drink, meet, play and spend.

Abu Dhabi has seen unprecedented growth and development in the last five years. According to estimates made by the Plan Abu Dhabi 2030, its population is expected to increase to 1.3 million in 2013, 2 million in 2020 and to 3.1 million in 2030. In addition, Abu Dhabi was recently named by Lonely Planet Guide as one of the top city destinations for 2010.

BMI relaunches short-haul service

bmi, British Midland International, is relaunching its short-haul product across all UK and Ireland flights to and from London Heathrow, with the introduction of a single Economy cabin and with an enhanced service for customers travelling on Flexible Economy fares. As a result of the changes, bmi will no longer offer a separate Business Class cabin on UK and Ireland routes.

The one-cabin product will offer customers the benefits and flexibility of a business class ticket, without the price tag, the company says. Customers travelling on Flexible Economy fares will benefit from no change fees, use of business lounges at both ends of the route, guaranteed seating at the front of the aircraft and complimentary food and drink onboard. Flexible Economy customers will also benefit from lower rate Air Passenger Duty (APD) in the UK.

Customers travelling on Economy tickets will continue to enjoy bmi service benefits such as free checked baggage to a total weight of 20kg, online check-in and access to bmi’s business lounges for Gold and Silver Diamond Club members, while drinks and snacks will be available for purchase on board. See www.flybmi.com
GENEVA CITY BREAK

by Tony Clayton-Lea

located in the Rhône Valley at the southwestern corner of Lake Geneva (or Lac Léman, as you would say in French) between the Jura Mountains and the Alps, Switzerland’s second-largest city basks in an idyllic setting on one of the biggest alpine lakes and with a tantalising view of the pinnacle of Mont Blanc.

Geneva is a city of international organisations distinguished not only by Calvinist tradition but also by sleek cosmopolitanism and easy-going democratic sensibilities. It may be the visual equivalent of the opening to a James Bond movie (exotic location, harbouring glamorous women, edgy men in expensive suits killing time, ubiquitous ski slopes in the background), but it has the reputation of being just a teensy bit dull.

True? Well, it certainly isn’t Berlin or Amsterdam or Rome, but it’s worth remembering something your parents and teachers told you when you started complaining about how the Louvre (or the Hermitage or the Tate Modern) was “boring”: only dull people find things and places dull.

FROM THE AIRPORT TO THE CITY:
Geneva Cointrin International Airport is a mere 5km from the city centre.

You can take a taxi, of course (it takes about fifteen minutes, and costs in the region of €25), but the train from the airport to the city centre takes about six minutes and costs around €2. Over to you!

SLEEP:
1st Choice: Hôtel Les Armures is a very fine 17th century residence situated right in the heart of the city's Old Town, close to the lake shops and business district. Rooms from €350. 1 Rue du Puits-Saint-Pierre, 0041-22-310-9172, www.hotel-les-armures.ch


EAT:
Lunch: There is nothing else for it - you’ve got to try the rustic tavern/hotel eatery Auberge Communale de Carouge, which offers winning traditional French food alongside an extensive wine list. 39 Rue Ancienne, 0041-22-342-2288, www.aubergedecarouge.ch

Dinner: Floor Two Restaurant, Grand Hôtel Kempinski Geneva, is a bold combination of design, culinary substance and atmosphere. Simply put, this sophisticated place is a hostage to good taste. Quai du Mont-Blanc 19, 0041-22-908-9081, www.kempinskigenveva.com

3 THINGS TO DO IF YOU HAVE A FEW HOURS TO SPARE:
Tours: At the Place des Nations, guided tours are available inside the duty station of the UN. Contrary to popular perception, they are nowhere near as uninteresting as you might think. 14 Avenue de la Paix, 0041-22-917-4896, www.unog.ch

Exercise: Geneve Roule generously offers free bikes during the summer months (up to the end of October) for a period of four hours. Spin around the lake via the walkway and see Geneva from a different perspective. Arcade Montbrillant 17, 0041-22-740-1343, www.geneveroule.ch

Culture: Espace Rousseau - this is the birthplace of philosopher Jean-Jacques Rousseau, whose life, times and work is explained via a highly informative audiovisual tour. 40 Grand’Rue, 0041-22-310-1028, www.espace-rousseau.ch
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