

WORKING TOWARDS ALL-ISLAND BUSINESS

LIAM NELLIS SPEAKS TO MAREE MORRISSEY ABOUT INTERTRADEIRELAND'S ROLE IN SHAPING AND DEVELOPING ALL-ISLAND OPPORTUNITIES.



Embracing change

INNER RANGE

SOME OF INTERTRADEIRELAND'S PROGRAMMES AND INITIATIVES INCLUDE:

- **INNOVA Programme**
Connects firms north and south of the island, prompts them to share R&D for mutual benefit.
Contact: Margaret Hearty at 0044(0)28 30834112
- **FUSION Programme**
Supports companies in developing knowledge transfer initiatives, links them up with the island's universities and Institutes of Technology.
Contact: Dianne Fee at 0044(0)28 30834191
- **Equity Network**
Brings together expertise in the area of equity and venture capital with initiatives such as the Seedcorn competition.
Contact: Grainne Lennon at 0044(0)28 30834163
- **BiomedIreland**
A strategic partnership between InterTradeIreland and the Irish Medical Devices Association, BioBusiness Northern Ireland and the Irish BioIndustry Association.
Contact: Marion McAneney at 0044(0)28 30834131
- **Network+Getwork**
Trade development initiative to assist companies in Ireland and Northern Ireland explore cross border business opportunities with some of the island's largest procurement organisations.
Contact: Grant Gilmore at 0044(0)28 30834186
- **Acumen**
Helps SMEs increase cross border sales and develop other forms of commercial co-operations across the island.
Contact: Paddy Savage at 0044(0)28 30834110
- **Get 2 Business**
All-island business information web portal located at www.intertradeireland.com/get2business

Over the past few years, people have been awakening to the terminology of an all-island economy and its scope for determining our island's future foothold in global markets.

With this increasing emphasis by both businesses themselves and policy makers in nurturing an all-island economic vision, how is InterTradeIreland keying into the process? Liam Nellis, Chief Executive, InterTradeIreland, affirms how InterTradeIreland's strategy is to keep things simple. "It's getting people working together and developing relationships. For far too long the two economies grew back to back."

EMBRACING INNOVATION

At the time of its genesis, many people viewed InterTradeIreland as a Government driven trade body deployed to advance and increase trade between the north and south. Instead, Nellis asserts, "the job we had was much more about making the two parts of the island work together to achieve higher levels of competitiveness." Swift to ditch the term 'cross border trade,' Nellis feels that InterTradeIreland is really making a difference by bringing activity into an all-island dimension and argues

that their approach is not solely based on trade. "It's more about innovation and competitiveness and enhancing capability on the island."

IN EVOLUTION

Its roots extend back to 1999 when InterTradeIreland was set up as a trade and business development body under the Belfast Agreement (1998) along with five other cross border implementation bodies. Employing 40 people, the organisation is based in Newry, Co. Down.



↑ Liam Nellis, Chief Executive, InterTradeIreland

THE CHALLENGES

WITH SHARED COMPETITIVE CHALLENGES FACING BOTH ECONOMIES, INTERTRADEIRELAND WORKS ON DEVELOPING THE FOLLOWING AREAS:

- The need to respond to globalisation and competitiveness.
- Growing employment rates within the island and increase productivity.
- Innovating and developing greater R&D capability.
- Helping people scale up for the needs of a more dynamic, knowledge led economy.
- Promoting enterprise and entrepreneurship.
- Providing a much more positive climate for business, including more efficient regulation in the areas of telecom, insurance and banking systems.
- Removing any barriers to physical and academic mobility.

Despite being established in political circumstances, InterTradeIreland's evolution has been in harmony with the development of an all-island economic outlook. "We feel that we have developed a very strong economic rationale quite apart from the political beginnings." The organisation has clear objectives particularly in the area of high knowledge growth and in igniting all-island business alliances. In the latter instance, InterTradeIreland provides relevant companies with opportunities to communicate and collaborate while also spurring them to cross over into global markets.

EXPERT SPREAD

Delivering more than 30 initiatives in the areas of supply chain, infrastructure, technology transfer, equity venture capital, R&D, science and technology to logistics, Nellis believes InterTradeIreland is coming to the fore by developing economic cooperation at all levels, creating better information about an all-island economy and by introducing programmes to propel businesses from both jurisdictions to actively trade and engage in technology transfer. "Our position would be to lead the development of an island economy."

BRINGING TOGETHER AGENCIES

While acknowledging that the organisation is restricted by some resources to carry out all of what it recognises as important for all-island economic development, Nellis outlines how InterTradeIreland has been pivotal in bringing together agencies and representative bodies and collaborates closely with entities such as IBEC, the Chambers of Commerce, IBEC-CBI, Enterprise Ireland and Invest NI as well as universities.

THE PERSONAS

Some past public perceptions of InterTradeIreland have been that it is a government run body and slightly detached from real business issues. Is the organisation being marketed correctly to business owners then? Clarifies Nellis, "we are quite small but we have a very strong impact on the business community at a variety of levels from pure sales, sales and

marketing to technology transfer."

Nellis wants business people on the ground to know that InterTradeIreland has a breadth of expertise and specific programmes to support and guide people when looking to develop their business in another jurisdiction, particularly if it's their first time or if they are growing their business. Some of InterTradeIreland's programmes which have a strong SME focus include Network+Getwork and MicroTrade.

ACUMEN

Their Acumen programme targets SMEs involved in added value activities, in areas like buying and selling, manufacturing and product and process development. In the first quarter of 2006, the 48 companies participating in Acumen had an increased business of over £7.5 million sterling and created 65 new jobs.

START COLLABORATING

What types of businesses should be looking to espouse an all-island dimension then? According to Nellis, it makes sense for any business that adds value and is capable of competing in export markets to look into the other jurisdiction, and while taxation, insurance, currency and telecom issues still provide some obstacles to trade, they are not sufficient to deter people from doing all-island business, infers Nellis. "If companies start collaborating and doing business on the island, it gives them the confidence to look further afield into export markets."

NATURAL PROGRESSION

Convinced that an all-island approach is the only way forward, Nellis emphasises the need to remove any remaining barriers. "It's no longer tenable in the global environment in which companies and businesses operate today not to develop the capability and competitiveness on an island basis." 

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AN ALL-ISLAND APPROACH IS THE ONLY WAY FORWARD



↑ Richard Fernandes, CEO Luxcel Biosciences, with Jim Johnson, CEO, Fusion Antibodies



↑ Andy Pollak, Director, Centre for Cross Border Studies ↑ Gina Quin, CEO, Dublin Chamber of Commerce ↑ Dr John Bradley, Research Professor at ESRI

DOUBLE THE IMPACT

InterTradeIreland aims to:

- Help individual businesses access knowledge and share information so they can build alliances and become more profitable and competitive.
- Create and foster networks of people and businesses in high growth sectors to develop business opportunities together.
- Connect business, policy makers and government to base policy planning on a real understanding of the needs of business' across the whole island.

COMMERCIAL OPPORTUNITIES

Cork drug discovery company, Luxcel Biosciences, is in all-island collaboration with Belfast based, Fusion Antibodies.

In partnership to create a new product to detect cancers, both companies were the first to receive funding of €200,000 each through InterTradeIreland's INNOVA programme, which encourages high tech companies to team up on research driven initiatives. Richard Fernandes, CEO, Luxcel Biosciences, affirms how InterTradeIreland is really helping both companies become competitive in the global arena and to extend into new markets. Says Fernandes, "one of the strengths of InterTradeIreland is that they are a government organisation but are quite innovative in that they're fast, efficient and they really do work on the front lines with you."

UNIVERSITY ALLIANCES

The Centre for Cross Border Studies is working with InterTradeIreland on business university collaboration issues.

Andy Pollak, director of the centre, explains how both entities have jointly commissioned a study soon due for launch on intellectual property and technology transfer. "Out of this report, we're going to work on a business plan to set up a marketing entity for university intellectual property and technology transfer which will bring in all the nine universities on the island," affirms Pollak.

Of all the north south bodies, Pollak feels that InterTradeIreland has been the most effective. "They have been very imaginative in looking to where it makes sense for the two jurisdictions to work together in pursuit of an island economy."

ENCOURAGING ALL-ISLAND BUSINESS

Gina Quin, CEO, Dublin Chamber of Commerce, first came across InterTradeIreland through the Northern Ireland Chamber of Commerce.

"We were able to tap into a lot of expertise in InterTradeIreland about cross border mechanisms as well as actually getting some financial support for the cross border procurement programme, Network+Getwork," affirms Quin.

While acknowledging that there is still enormous scope for development of all-island business, Quin believes that InterTradeIreland has been instrumental in nurturing the right environment to consider all-island opportunities. "They're really looking for any entrepreneurial spark that can be brought to bear to encourage more cross border business and they're very focussed on developing small businesses," concludes Quin.

FUTURE NORTH SOUTH POLICY

Dr John Bradley has carried out much research in examining the strategic importance of North South policy.

With InterTradeIreland, Bradley feels it was a great shame that its remit under the Belfast Agreement was so limited. "Back then neither side really wanted to pool resources in the area of island-wide industrial strategy." However, Bradley believes that InterTradeIreland has been doing a great job in pushing the North-South business co-operation agenda forward. "Increasingly, they are pushing out the boundaries." Concludes Bradley, "we should not blind ourselves to the reality that industrial strategy in the South and the North is not really under the jurisdiction of InterTradeIreland, however good that might be in the longer run. Industrial strategy does not yet really have any institutional all-island dimension."