

magazine

SYNC 

Northern Ireland's Tech & Business Community

SPRING 2014

Issue 13

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NIGHT OF AMBITION 09

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The new name for Crafty Devil

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Welcome to the Spring edition of the Sync NI magazine



foreword

from Paul McElvaney, Learning Pool

Amid all the talk of creativity, skills deficits and venture capital is the conversation about creating a digital economy missing something pretty fundamental?

For most technology businesses, the biggest spend is on people so the biggest challenge is optimising the productivity and ultimately the output of those people to grow the bottom line. It seems to me that only a few companies make the investment or take the time to build groups of disparate people into cohesive teams that can add value way above the sum of their parts. Maybe not surprising though because this is a tough ask.

Given the demographic of Northern Ireland – a small population that is, in places like Derry and beyond, extremely young, the challenge of skills development isn't just an academic one. It's crucial that businesses make the investments they need to develop teams, create a culture of excellence and an environment where people can grow.

At Learning Pool we made our fair share of mistakes on this front through our formative years but we've learned from them and it's made us better. Recently we've worked hard to create a culture where the team is central to everything we do. We've made big efforts

to help the team put our customers first, think commercially and be honest with each other while demanding high standards.

My advice to similar companies is to keep crystal clarity on the vision and how you communicate that to the team as the company gets off its feet. Of course that's not enough on its own: you need to be completely honest about how you are doing against the plan and remember that keeping everyone on the same page isn't always easy but is always crucial to success. If nothing else, remember that the team evolves, changes and grows so keep reinforcing the message, retelling the story and reimagining the vision for people who've just joined as well as those who've been there from the start.

Entrepreneurs, especially first timers like me, often don't think through the details of how teams should work and especially how they communicate across a growing company but the returns can be positive on many levels. It's been seven years since we started Learning Pool at my kitchen table. There's a lot we're proud of and building a cracking team is the best of all.. and if we've done it right, the best is yet to come.

Paul McElvaney

Learning Pool

magazine

SYNC NI

Northern Ireland's Tech & Business Community

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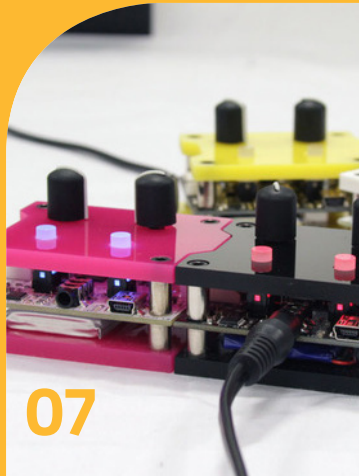
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northern ireland
cancer fund
for children

3

local children diagnosed
with cancer every week

150

families left picking up
the pieces

500

children a year relying
on our support

26 miles

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What Is BREWBOT And How Does It Work?

Brewbot is a smart brewing appliance, monitored and controlled by a smartphone. By using the Brewbot app you can connect your smartphone to the appliance, create or choose a recipe, and begin brewing. The brewer is alerted when to add the ingredients and notified when the beer is ready to drink.

With Brewbot connected to our phone we are capturing data during the whole process meaning we can achieve the exact same results every time, enabling us to achieve repeatable, consistent brews. As our phones are connected to the Internet it means a brewer can share their findings with others, opening up brewing as a platform. Brewers can evolve recipes based on others' findings. This connectivity means brewers can follow the process from adding the water to Brewbot on brew-day to the day they get a notification on their phone to say it's ready to drink.

How Did You Come Up With The Idea?

Before, if you wanted to begin brewing it's difficult to know where to start; there is a wealth of information on the Web and it can get a little overwhelming. We learned by trial and

error which sometimes resulted in off-tasting beer and it can get costly, quickly.

We have a long history in designing and developing mobile apps so we understand the importance of intuitive and experiential design. We are noticing design teams innovating and adding intelligence to all aspects of our lives, be-it watches [GetPebble.com], thermostats [Nest.com], or locks [Lockitron.com]. Many people see brewing as a dark art that is often relegated to the garage, involving buckets, pipes, and unfamiliar ingredients. When we brewed before using the traditional approach we were getting varied results. It was messy and laborious, and we were spending more time fixing the setup or watching timers than focusing on the recipe, that's why we built Brewbot. Connectivity is central to our way of thinking, it was important for us to keep the person brewing connected to what is happening during the brewing process; educating them along the way, communicating what is happening and when, and mirroring what is happening in the appliance. Brewbot automates the tricky parts of the brewing process, freeing up brewers to concentrate on ingredients and recipes — we think of it as the best brewing assistant you could have.

Having Exceeded Your Kickstarter Target Of £100,000 (£114,368 & Counting) Since Launching In September And Achieving High Sales In The Belfast Tech Mission To San Francisco, What's Next For Brewbot?

We are currently in the middle of taking Brewbot into production and we will begin shipping our Kickstarter pre-orders in May. We are constantly brewing and will be taking our latest batches of beer to Mobile World Congress for the attendees to taste.

During our Kickstarter campaign we opened up our technology to others and it's really interesting to see how they plan on using it. We have had people buy Brewbot Core—which is basically the brains of Brewbot—to build coffee-makers and even sous-vide appliances. We are also seeing people in the US, Canada, South Africa and beyond building businesses on top of Brewbot which is really exciting. When we came up with the idea we wanted to enable anyone to brew beer so we can't wait to turn our backers into brewers.

Finally, Where Can People Get Their Hands On A Brewbot?

You can preorder Brewbot on our website: www.brewbot.io



Introducing Patchblocks

pb

What Is Patchblocks And How Does It Work?

Patchblocks are small, battery-powered soundcomputers that you can program yourself. However, programming Patchblocks doesn't mean you have to be a programmer and write code. Instead, you can use our editor software and do this with what is called "Visual Programming" - basically by placing sound synthesis elements on the screen and connect them with virtual cables. Think of it like Lego Technics for sounds and music.

If you have a few Patchblocks, you can also combine them and make them work together. One could produce sounds, which are then routed into another that processes and changes these sounds. You can also share your programs (called patches) online, or download those that other Patchblocks users have created and modify them if you want.

Patchblocks also work with other audio equipment, like iPods or a Keyboard. You can use them as a guitar effect, or you can even connect them to Midi equipment for more professional uses.

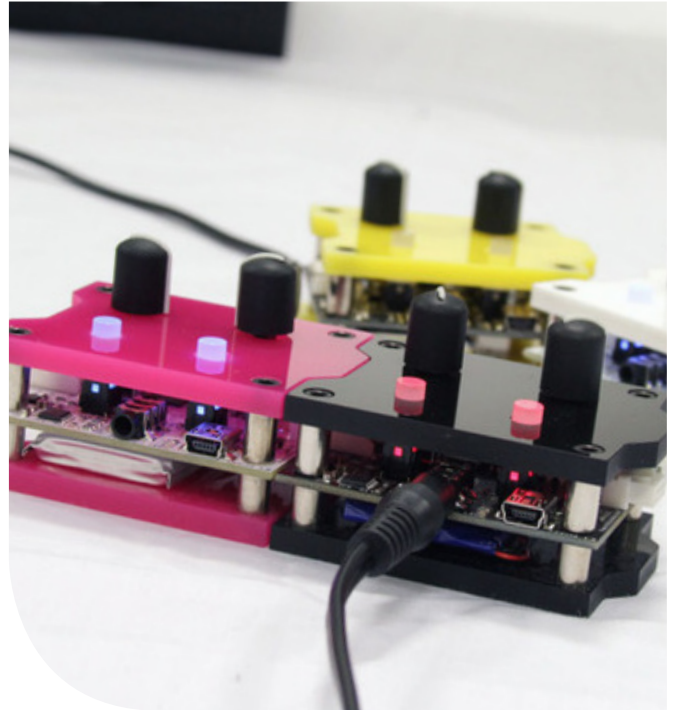
How Did You Come Up With The Idea?

This was actually a long process that started during my Masters in Design for Interactive Media. I wanted to take the idea of a table full of electronic music equipment and turn it partially into a digital system. A table full of drum-machines, synths, effect-processors etc., is like a collaborative playground for electronic musicians, and it is a lot of fun.

Laptops or tablets can't really give you that excitement that hardware gear does. I then started a PhD here at Queen's and focussed on Tangible User Interfaces. What I then wanted to achieve was allowing users create their own hardware equipment - putting their ideas and creativity into a tangible object. Eventually all this led to Patchblocks.

After launching an extremely successful Kickstarter last year where you exceeded your £10,000 target (finished at £67,090), what's next for Patchblocks?

At the moment we get a total website redesign, which should be online as soon as the first series production is in stock. This will be the base for our Patchblocks online community, where users from all over the world can share their patches, showcase and discuss their work, as well as help other members to learn the software. We also want to be active in the hacker, maker and artists community.



That means, being present at festivals, running workshops, sponsoring artists. Of course, beside this there will be ongoing software and hardware development. We are also planning new products that are compatible with our hardware or editor software.

Where Would You Like To See Patchblocks In Five Years Time?

We want to put more focus on the educational side, and test it with a younger and less experienced audience. I believe Patchblocks would be ideal to teach young teenagers fundamentals in programming, music theory, signal processing and mathematical concepts. At the moment we are applying for European funding, to put this idea into practise. If we are lucky, and our strategies work out, Patchblocks will be widely used, by hackers, geeks, musicians and educational institutions. I envision it as a platform for collaboration, a community around a product that brings people together, offline and online, to express their creativity.

Finally, Where Can People Get Their Hands On A PatchBlock?

Our store on Patchblocks.com will be online at the end of March. Locals in Belfast will be able buy them from the Beat Emporium in the centre of town. The planned retail price is £39.

Generation Innovation 'Night of Ambition'



NISPCONNECT

Take 120 of Northern Ireland's most ambitious teenagers, 40 of Northern Ireland's most passionate entrepreneurs and one of the world's most famous innovators, Jack Dorsey (co-founder of Twitter). A potent mix for a sensational evening in Belfast.

On Wednesday 12th February 2014 Mr Dorsey linked-up with the Ulster Hall via Skype for a call with participants in NISP CONNECT's annual Generation Innovation event.

His surprise involvement in the 'Night of Ambition' came about after Sarah Friar, the CFO of his latest company, Square, agreed to be interviewed at the event. Ms Friar is originally from Sion Mills in Northern Ireland and was keen to chat to young people 'back home'. Her message to the 16 - 17 year olds taking part was simple: you can achieve anything if you set your mind to it.

Generation Innovation was set up in 2011 to harness the ambitions of school pupils across Northern Ireland. Claire Burgoyne, NISP CONNECT

Programme Manager says, "We recognise that innovation has to be a fundamental part of the culture and psyche in Northern Ireland to make us more competitive in a global marketplace.

Generation Innovation is dedicated to supporting young people who want to lift their ambitions and aspirations and encourage them to be their own role models in the future.

An event like the 'Night of Ambition' is not only about joining a network and getting connected, it is mostly about inspiring a 'can do' attitude." At the three hour event the students taking part spent time with entrepreneurs from across Northern Ireland – each table had 15 minutes to develop and then pitch an idea for a new product.

The winners came up with a new App called 'Favours', which allows teenagers to barter for the use of the family car.

Parents and teachers also took part in the event, filling the audience's seats in

the balcony area of Ulster Hall.

Host for the Night of Ambition was the Cool FM DJ Connor Phillips and there were also stage appearances by some of newer names emerging on the Northern Ireland tech scene – Chris McClelland of Cargo, Catherine O'Neill of Amelio Utilities, Sheree Atcheson of Women Who Code and Catherine Morris from Taggled.



Flowlens, the new name for Crafty Devil

Through working with many different companies, large and small, we recognise what sets the winners apart. Successful businesses are all about focus, and the flow of information.

We have chosen a new name that aligns with these qualities, so its goodbye Crafty Devil, and hello Flowlens. Here's why...

Flow

When we reviewed our successes and failures, and the relationships we've built since we started in 2006, patterns began to emerge. Our passion is problem solving, helping our customers to reduce information bottlenecks, and streamline business processes. We saw that the best results came through partnership, and 'joined up', strategies for growth. We're happiest when we're increasing business innovation, reducing waste, and eradicating duplication of data across business silos. In fact, we want to eradicate silos full stop.

Lens

Our customers enjoy effective analytics that allow decisions to be taken with confidence. Data without analysis is not useful, and we help our customers capture and process their customer data in a meaningful way. Each business role has unique requirements, and we help managers focus on what matters.

Flowlens is a company and a platform

When we reviewed our strengths and values, healthy curiosity, and 'solving problems' emerged as two characteristics that unite the team formerly known as Crafty Devil. Flowlens sits at the intersection of these core strengths and passions.

Over nearly 8 years, we have worked on many interesting and challenging opportunities. Our solutions have enabled customers to improve their sales, service and their profitability. Our workflow applications have realised savings and more importantly growth opportunities, as our customers can scale more efficiently.

A prime case study of our approach is Survitec Group, the global marine survival leader, with a manufacturing base in Dunmurry, just outside Belfast. We started working with Survitec Group in 2008, working to support their digital marketing strategy and legacy business applications. We built upon our initial assignments to deploy a platform that manages their global raft fleet, and thousands of service engineers worldwide. The system now provides analytics that drive new sales, retain customers, improve forecast accuracy,



ensure compliance and manage risk across the business.

Personalised Technology

We have seen how disjointed IT systems have hampered performance and reduced many managers to 'spreadsheet hell'. We've all heard the horror stories. For too long, the IT industry has required companies to bend their processes, and people, to fit rigid software. Flowlens changes all that.

The Flowlens Platform is a modular, cloud-based suite of applications that can unite a business around a central core of customer and product analytics. Flowlens is tailored to the unique processes and requirements of each customer. Each module contributes to enhance the 'single view of the customer', whilst business functions can collaborate and flow together efficiently.

Flowlens modules can help with Lead Generation, Sales Pipeline Management, Forecasting, Quotations, Operational Planning, Purchasing and Stock, Production Efficiency, Service Desk Management, Customer Self-service, Communications, Expenses. Each element is linked to the customer record, feeding tailored management dashboards.

Goodbye Crafty Devil

We're sad to be saying goodbye to our old name, but energised by the prospect of the next chapter. 'Crafty Devil' got many compliments, some sniggers, and a few raised eyebrows. As a catchy and unusual name, it has been synonymous with our ability to deliver engaging and innovative solutions to our customer problems. Now, our customers will continue to enjoy those benefits from a streamlined and strategically focused partner.

Minister Foster helps celebrate 'milestone' for Securitas in Northern Ireland

Minister Foster, Chamber of Commerce CEO and Belfast business community join Securitas to mark its long term commitment to the region

The opening of a new 3,000 square foot headquarters in Belfast by Securitas Security Services (UK) Ltd is being celebrated for heralding a positive impact on the local economy.

In a significant commitment to the region by the global industry leader, the Belfast premises will oversee Securitas's 350-plus staff operating across Northern Ireland. Enterprise, Trade and Investment Minister Foster, who attended the launch and officially opened the office commented: "This opening is a significant milestone for Securitas and it will enable them to strengthen their competitive position. The company has a strong and established presence in Northern Ireland and their continued commitment reinforces the message that Belfast is a good place to do business."

Securitas has operated out of the city since 2002 and is the only company in Northern Ireland which can deliver province-wide key holding alarm response and patrols from its three bases, in Belfast, Limavady and Fivemiletown.

The new Belfast office cements the company's presence in Northern Ireland, where it already offers a diverse range of security solutions to more than 100 businesses. These include Stena Line, Thales, Siemens, Sainsbury's and Northern Ireland Science Park, with Securitas personnel providing services including front of house, retail and commercial security, controlled response and loss prevention support.

A recent contract win has placed Securitas wardens across Antrim Borough, in a community safety project tackling anti-social behavior in priority areas and reducing residents' fear of crime. It will see Securitas staff engaging with local youths in evening patrols, to encourage them into more positive activities and feed intelligence through to relevant statutory agencies.

With rapid deployment of security personnel a core part of Securitas's business, the opening of the headquarters is expected to boost employment, with job creation anticipated within six months. Securitas have a policy of staffing 30% over all contracted personnel to ensure it can meet customer demand, which will lead to further employment opportunities moving forward. City dignitaries including Chamber of Commerce CEO Ann McGregor MBE also attended the



Pictured left to right are: Danny Williams, Minister Foster, Brian Riis Nielson, David Lee, Shaun Kennedy and Ann McGregor.

opening. In an address to guests, McGregor said: "As chief executive of Northern Ireland Chambers I'm delighted to see an organisation like Securitas, which is a globally-recognised brand, demonstrating its commitment to Northern Ireland.

"We're dedicated to working alongside the Government to drive the economy. We launched a campaign last year called 'Growing Something Brilliant' to set a mood of confidence and optimism in the business community as a catalyst for change. Our core message is that the economy is on the turn, but it won't gather momentum unless we each play a part. With more than 350 staff already employed here, and with these wonderful new premises, Securitas is already an example of a company growing something brilliant."

Securitas Country President Brian Riis Nielsen said: "It's a fantastic recognition of the commitment and expertise of our Northern Ireland workforce that we are celebrating the launch of our Belfast headquarters.

"While Securitas is a global knowledge leader within this industry, it is our local experience that defines success and drives our business forward. We look forward to building on our firm foundations in this region, and hope our long term growth plans will also help boost employment in the area."

WWC Belfast: If we want more females in tech, we need more female role models

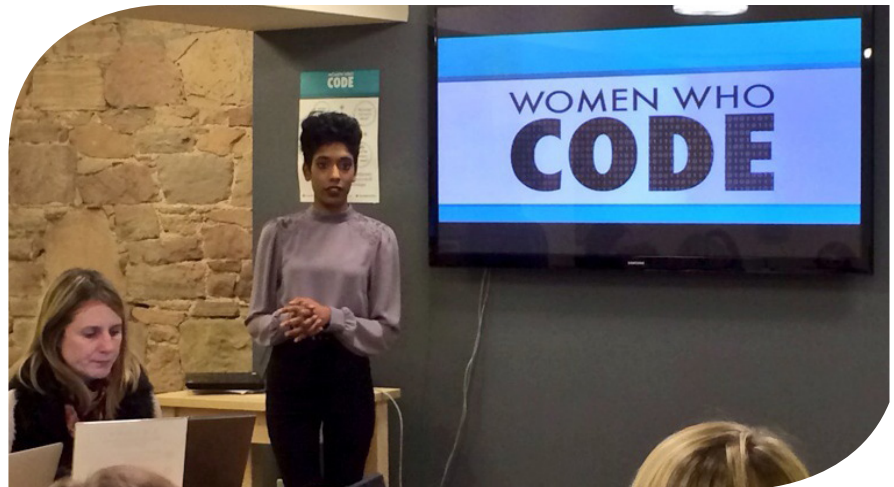
“If we want more females in tech we need more female role models to show them they can do it” – Belinda Parmar, Guardian

The 2012 E-Skills Technology Insights report revealed that of the 28,000 individuals in Northern Ireland working in the IT and Telecoms industry, only 4500 (25%) were female. Although higher than the UK average (18%) the need to level out the gender balance in Technology is greater than ever.

Not only because we are losing out on approximately 51% of the population that could contribute towards addressing the current skills gap in IT, to help support existing females in tech, or because of the potential of facilitating improved tech products/services for women. It is about choice, having it, and being given the best chance to make the right one for you, regardless of your gender.

2013 saw some developments in progress to get more women involved in Technology here in Northern Ireland. We attended an all-girl CoderDojo and 'Women in Digital' as part of CultureTECH, and, E-skills hosted a 'Leading Women in Tech launch' to help inspire a new generation of IT Girls, amongst other initiatives. However what was really refreshing to see last year was an initiative that came from a young female working in IT. In November 2013, Sheree Atcheson, a software engineer at Kainos in Belfast founded Women Who Code (WWC) UK. WWC is a monthly group for female coders, designers, founders, developers and anyone who is interested in tech to meet and learn new skills and receive career advice, and it has already built up almost 300 members across the UK (140 in Belfast alone).

Sheree says that she wanted to develop a group where females



interested in tech could meet and learn from one another. Though, once she got talking with other women she realised that there was a need to create an environment for them to, not only learn new technical skills, but a place where they could get career advice as well and, importantly, feel comfortable



no matter what level they are at: “We don’t need to talk about Artificial Intelligence, or things we have already learned in University. We want to know where to get a job, how best to promote ourselves on social media and tips for our CV’s. That is one of the things that I realised when I began this process. It’s bigger than me. I am putting in the hard work now so that other women can

benefit from this”.

Consequently WWC encourages members with any level of experience to attend for, tech talks, career trainings and hack nights, as well as the technical study groups. Ran by experienced professionals, the idea is to start with the basics so that everyone is at the same level and can progress together.

Therefore, anyone from beginners, students and those more experienced are welcomed to the group. All you need is your laptop (a list of software is posted on the WWC website before each meeting) and a eagerness to learn new things!

If you are a female in Tech, or are interested in the industry, WWC is an excellent group to expand your skills and business network, so why not join today!

For Information on how to become a WWC member visit:

www.womenwhocode.co.uk, follow @WWCBelfast on Twitter or, if you have any queries, please mail queries@womenwhocode.co.uk.



Looking for the 1%

All it takes is 1% to help nurture Northern Ireland's future talent pool

The IT industry in Northern Ireland is a major employer, and essential for the local economy. With global organisations including Citi, Allstate and Liberty IT setting up in NI, and local companies such as Learning Pool and First Derivatives formed here, the evidence for demand is undoubtedly there. Unfortunately, as is the situation globally, the supply is not.

In Northern Ireland, there are approximately 28,000 working in the IT industry. In 2013 the government announced that they plan to increase this number to 50,000 over the next 5 years. Our higher education system produces approximately 1000 IT graduates every year, that means that 3000 additional talent has to be found, and indubitably educated, each year to achieve the 4000 individuals required.

To help tackle this issue directly there are some initiatives out there; Software Tester Academy and Cloud Academy etc. from the government. Nevertheless, to make sure the future supply is there and that the demand is sustained we need to ensure that a much larger talent pool is produced each year. Unfortunately, if we consider the talent coming out after these 5 years, they are now at A-Level age and therefore will have already made their higher education choices. As a result, the need to introduce computer programming to students before they make key decisions for their future is greater than ever. However, computer programming is not in the current

curriculum and, with no clear path to a career in IT, it becomes harder for younger generations to choose a career in this industry. Fortunately, there is help, an incredible initiative called CoderDojo.

In 2011 a student, James Whelton began, what has now become a global movement, in his school in Cork. Having received some publicity after hacking the iPod Nano, some younger students expressed an interest in learning how to code. James setup a computer club in his school (PBC Cork) where he started teaching basic HTML and CSS. Later that year he met Bill Liao, an entrepreneur and philanthropist, who was interested in growing the project into something bigger.

In June 2011 the first 'CoderDojo' was launched in the National Software Centre in Cork which saw extreme success. By making the movement open source it has led to hundreds of dedicated champions setting up more Dojos around Ireland and subsequently around the world. The aim is not to turn every kid into a programmer, but rather to let those who are truly interested in it shine through.

At Dojos, young people between 5 and 17 learn how to code, develop websites, apps, programs, games and more. In addition to learning to code, members meet like minded people, show off what they've been working on and so on. CoderDojo makes development and learning to code a fun,

sociable experience. Although it can't promise that every member will become an IT professional, it is a real step in introducing coding to students that may not have had the chance to experience it otherwise. Having this experience before they make key decisions is paramount to their future career choices.

Dojos are set up, run by and taught by volunteers. These mentors and volunteers are the driving force behind CoderDojo, enabling the spread of Dojos around the world and getting more young people coding. There are no set requirements in order to mentor at a Dojo. Quite often if you have a basic understanding of programming languages such as Java, HTML & CSS and, most importantly, are willing to encourage and learn with the Dojo attendees, then you could be able to mentor.

In Northern Ireland, there are some amazing professionals and technology enthusiasts who offer their services as mentors at local CoderDojo's around the country. We spoke to Niall Carlin, a Motion Graphics Designer at Whitenoise Studios, one of the mentors at a Belfast 3D Dojo, about his experience:

"All my life I wanted to be a part of making movies, animations and film. I would watch a movie and be completely blown away by the visual effects and wonder how it was done. However, there was no avenue to get involved in the industry from Northern Ireland. Even obtaining the skills to get a job in the field was impossible. Never the less I persevered and completed a degree in Design and 3d Animation. Despite having this education the route to industry was still very elusive.

After a few years working I realised that I could help by giving back to the community. By sharing what I had learned I could help grow the industry too and help others achieve their own ambitions. Its great to see young people being given the chance to learn these skills and they really embrace it wholeheartedly.

Furthermore, it's important to give back to the community. At some point someone invested his or her knowledge with you to help you grow, learn and develop. Being a mentor at a Dojo allows you to give back the skills you have learned and help others while at the same time you are developing a whole new set of abilities. The ability to communicate, teach and motivate people is extremely rewarding.

Seeing young kids produce something in a matter of hours that would have taken you weeks to learn is scary! Its great to see the future of the industry in Northern Ireland and be a part of helping it grow. The biggest reward is making great use of your time and investing it in others. Most people would lie in bed on a Saturday morning but these kids are building robots



and spaceships! Its great to part of making that happen right here at home"

In Northern Ireland numerous Dojo clubs can be found across every county, and the demand for more is growing fast. Unfortunately, although we have the resources, the supply of mentors isn't high, and this is a real hurdle to their growth.

With IT organisations across NI simultaneously running recruitment campaigns, the skills shortage is clearly prevalent. Although, it is important to address the issues affecting a company presently, there needs to be a much greater investment in the future generation. After all, these will be the future drivers of the industry here.

With this in mind, we want to encourage IT organisations in NI, both small and large, to invest in the next generation and help tackle an issue that affects our entire industry, by pledging their support to CoderDojo. Additionally, if you are an IT professional and want to inspire the next generation here in NI then we urge you to get involved.

Fortunately, the good news is that it doesn't take much to achieve this! Infact, if just 1% of the IT Industry workforce pledged their support as a Dojo Mentor, there would be enough mentors to help grow the clubs across Northern Ireland.

To find out how your organisation can get involved, or to become a mentor yourself, visit www.coderdojo.com

NISP CONNECT

Challenges you to 'INVENT'

For over 400 years Northern Ireland innovation has been changing the world; the tractor, mobile defibrillators, whiskey distilling, even chocolate. What are the innovations from today that will be remembered 100 years from now?

This is the challenge laid down today by the Northern Ireland Science Park CONNECT as it launches INVENT 2014, the search for Northern Ireland's new heroes of innovation, in partnership with Bank of Ireland.

INVENT 2014, an evolution of the former £25k Awards, is an opportunity for anyone with an innovative idea, from farmyard inventors, to engineers, to dynamic research scientists and our high tech youth with new gaming or app ideas. INVENT 2014 is now open not only to research institutions but to any private sector company or individual with a breakthrough invention or concept.

"We want people to release their inner innovation," says Steve Orr, Director of NISP CONNECT. "Many of the key advances in engineering, health and science originate from this tiny place. It's in our DNA, that's why we're calling out to all innovators and entrepreneurs across Northern Ireland to step forward and bring your innovation to life through INVENT!"

"Our message is simple to everyone out there. If you think you've found a solution to an everyday problem, INVENT 2014 is here to help take it to the next stage, so please apply now"

Ian Sheppard Head of Business & Corporate Banking at Bank of Ireland UK said, "The Bank is delighted to continue to support this programme as it evolves into INVENT 2014, which will harness ingenuity across the public and private sectors in Northern Ireland.

"The introduction of the new categories in agri-food and enterprise software, both of which have significant local businesses, are already re-inventing our local economy.

"Northern Ireland's economic growth and competitiveness depend on its capacity to innovate, as supporting creativity and innovation will create jobs and industries of the future.

"Supporting talent with practical guidance, access to

NISP CONNECT

INVENT 2014

Bank of Ireland UK
Official sponsor

www.invent2014.co

expertise and providing financial support is an important part of the bank's commitment to be Northern Ireland's Enterprise Bank. We look forward to seeing this years' talent, uncovering innovative gems and playing our part in realising their ambition of creating world class products and services with global appeal."

The online application process is currently open at www.invent2014.co and will close on Friday 4th April. Successful applicants across six categories will take part in a unique six month programme which will see their ideas challenged, refined and cultivated, ready to launch a successful start-up business.

With direct input and expert advice from some of Northern Ireland's top business mentors and like-minded innovators and entrepreneurs, coupled with a £33,000 prize fund, INVENT 2014 is Northern Ireland's biggest and brightest opportunity to make an inventive idea become commercial reality.

At the end of the six month development programme, finalists will pitch their business plans to a panel of experts to vie for the top prizes. Winners of INVENT 2014 will be announced at a gala Awards showcase in Belfast on 2nd October 2014.

INVENT 2014 Online Applications Now Open

Bring your idea forward and change the world

6 prize categories include Engineering, Creative Media & Consumer Internet, Electronics, Life & Health, Enterprise Software and Agri-food

For further Information, contact Programme Manager.

Peter Edgar : peter.edgar@nispconnect.org

Cyber security: A global problem demanding innovative solutions

Cyber-crime is a growing problem impacting citizens, enterprises and governments on a global scale. It respects no national borders in a world where systems are becoming ever more interconnected and smart devices are reaching ubiquity.

The strain on network capacity and security will be immense, while demand for experts charged with managing and securing systems is growing and evolving to meet new threats.

The challenge of securing our digital tomorrow is what drives researchers based at Queen's University of Belfast's Centre for Secure Information Technologies (CSIT). CSIT, the UK's Innovation & Knowledge Centre (IKC) for secure information technologies,

is the UK's largest university research lab in this field. It is fast developing a reputation as a global innovation hub for cyber security.

Informed by industry members and its Open Innovation model, CSIT's research and engineering teams develop novel technologies securing digital assets, devices and citizens. Its research focus includes critical infrastructure, network security, homomorphic encryption, cloud computing, cryptography, Software Defined Networking, mobile malware and biometrics.

Technologies developed recently include the award winning Liopa, a novel biometric authentication solution for mobile, and Physical Unclonable

Functions (PUFs), the next generation of anti-counterfeiting technology, currently being trialled by LG in Korea to prevent man-in-the-middle fraud at electric vehicle charging points.

This world leading research has been packaged into CSIT's new MSc in Cyber Security which is accepting full and part-time applications for September 2014 enrolment. Demand for cyber security experts is growing at 12 times the rate of the overall job market.

The MSc will prepare graduates for successful careers in secure systems development, security architecture, network security, data analytics right up to board level positions such as Chief Information Security Officer (CISO). More: <http://www.csit.qub.ac.uk/msc>

Ulster secures £150m investment from European investment bank

The University of Ulster has secured a £150 million loan from the European Investment Bank that will support key campus development works. The announcement was made at Ulster's Belfast campus by Professor Richard Barnett, Vice Chancellor of the University and Jonathan Taylor, Vice President of the European Investment Bank.

The main project to benefit will be the University's landmark Belfast City campus development, a £250 million project that will relocate most of the Jordanstown campus to Belfast City Centre by 2018.

Ulster is also investing a further £55m in upgrades at its Magee,

Coleraine and Jordanstown campuses.

Professor Barnett said: "This commitment from the European Investment Bank is a major vote of confidence in the University, in our ambitious development plans and in the future of Northern Ireland.

"As a University that is leading in widening access to higher education, it is important that our students enjoy facilities that match their aspirations. These investments in our campuses will build on our existing strengths, providing a world class learning environment for our students and an excellent working environment for our staff.

"The benefit to higher education

combined with the wider positive impact on the economy, will ensure the university's investment leaves a lasting legacy for future generations."

Jonathan Taylor said: "Investment in education is essential to ensure Europe's competitiveness in the global arena and enable future generations of students to innovate and benefit from new opportunities.

"The clear vision of the University of Ulster's scheme will help deliver both educational and economic benefits across Northern Ireland both during construction and in the years to come. We are committed to supporting similar quality investment in key infrastructure in Northern Ireland in the future."

Social skills

by Sarum PR

In this noisy digital age, companies must consider what value they can add to the conversation - rather than simply try to shout louder than everyone else. Carina Birt, founder of boutique IT PR firm, Sarum PR, argues that social channels should be treated like any other part of a well-rounded marketing strategy – rather than be a battleground between PR agencies from different backgrounds.

PR has never been such a dynamic discipline to be involved in, with all of the new channels and associated opportunities that have emerged in recent years.

In the technology sector, which should have the advantage in exploiting digital media, this is a chance for smaller firms to achieve reach on a new scale. But in their excitement about the possibilities, some companies are becoming unstuck – because they are not thinking through their digital PR strategies, and are being wrongly advised.

One of the saddest developments is the turf war that has broken out between 'traditional' PR consultants and those positioned as being 'digital down to their DNA'. In the purist camp are some agencies which claim that only they understand the new playing field. Shunning more established channels, they maintain that the only communications of value now are those taking place via the web and through social media - through chatter on Twitter and LinkedIn.

I disagree. Without question social channels are a huge liberator for communicators. BUT, if you're a technology company targeting business customers that wants to do outreach, you still have to do PR properly. Social channels are fantastic but the real value and measurement so far has been confined to consumer and B2C activity.

That doesn't mean social media has no place in B2B PR however. Nor does it mean that some more established

practices shouldn't be reviewed. Verbose, acronym-ridden 'news' releases may have lost their value – but what's really happening here is that newer channels are helping to highlight badly thought-out PR from messaging that really hits the mark.

The worst press releases have always been those that have paid little heed to the audience and its interests. Changing the channel to social media isn't going to change the result; rather it will turn off more readers who can now more readily deselect content by 'un-following' badly targeted content or 'noise'.

If the rise of social media makes software and service companies and their PR agencies think about what busy people might actually want to read, it will have done us all a huge service. It obliges us to think differently

and the impact will be diluted. So being strategic remains vital.

The role of an agency should not be merely to help you go viral across Twitter – but rather to safeguard your brand, get your voice right, then ensure it is heard in the right places. It is often as much about holding back and choosing the right moment and the right vehicle, as about being heard by anyone who'll listen.

The current turf war is bound to have casualties, on both sides of these meaningless, media-oriented demarcations. But if the fallout helps PR clients see where agencies' real strengths are and where the true value will come from, this can only work in everyone's favour.

GUARDIAN OF YOUR VOICE BLOG

Contains moderate humour, strong opinions and frequent bouts of honesty



about what's being said, and to put this across more concisely and selectively - which is how everybody wants to consume information.

It is here that the experience of the PR advisor comes in – in helping businesses to work out what it is that they want to say, and how and where they should do this to maximise the impact. Generate too much noise, or say the wrong thing in the wrong place,

Carina is also the author of Guardian of Your Voice a blog that debates B2B communications in a digital world. Follow it today on guardianofyourvoice.com. Find out more about Sarum PR at www.sarumpr.com or follow Carina on Twitter @birtie.

A new paradigm in competitive advantage

One of the supreme challenges in this century is the ability to manage businesses that transcend all the conventional boundaries, whether to produce global products or compete effectively in global markets. The bureaucracy of the Industrial Age, with its rigid focus on "we have always done it this way, will disappear or look like what old Royal type-writers do to tablet and lap-top users.

The philosopher Heraclitus observed that, "There is nothing permanent except change." Nothing new you say in this statement, and so we concur. As the world continues to change rapidly; centres of economic power and high value jobs are shifting. The west is being challenged not only by China but other developing economies.

The economic global shift continues unabated in spite of regional anxieties. European and UK "competitiveness" continues to be the dominant economic issue of the day. Experience tells us that a proven winning strategy to improve competitiveness is by increasing our value add through innovation, productivity and quality excellence in everything we do, yet so many have yet to take up the challenge.

Quality Foundation

The mass movement to improve competitiveness through quality in Europe really started in earnest in 1990 with the help of the European Commission, academia and big business such as BMW, Phillips, BT, and others collaborating in the development of the European Business Excellence Framework. This provided for a holistic look at an organisation to identify those priority areas for improvement as opposed to individual rifle shot quality initiatives.

For those organisation throughout Ireland who have adopted a holistic approach to improvement, their stunning achievements reflect a consolidated effort towards higher performance and business success.

Global quality concepts such as Leadership and Customer Focus and Satisfaction are distilled into operational issues involving employees and business processes with opportunities for continuous improvement in individual firms and regional quality levels. Many companies and organisations that have applied the fundamental concepts of Excellence have asserted their positions and have turned away challenges from home and abroad while achieving international recognition.

Surviving the Crash

During the economic downturn, those firms who had applied the EFQM Fundamental Concepts of Excellence are still in business while many of their competitors have gone out of existence. New organisations are springing up around the world to deal with rapid scientific progress.

Many of these industries are marked with extreme specialization in a complex network while traditional organisations are feeling the pressures of moving from where they are to creating a new competitive position or simply surviving. It's now time to prepare for the uplift and gain a new competitive advantage.

Start Simple

Recognizing the current economic pressures, the European Foundation for Quality Management has not remained

Centre for
Competitiveness

www.cforc.org

passive. A new, easy to apply, excellence framework scalable for all sizes of companies and organisations has just been launched for which there is already a significant demand by those who wish to create a new paradigm in competitive advantage.

No matter which sector or size of enterprise, this new assessment framework is simple to use and provides a structured management tool for every CEO wishing to take a strategic and holistic view of the needs of their organisation.

How does it work?

This new self-assessment framework has been specifically designed to provide a comprehensive and independent feedback report with one day support from an EFQM Assessor with considerably less paperwork. The assessment process focuses on 6 key themes:

- Your organisation's strategy
- The key results you have achieved
- Customer Management

- People Management
- Process Management
- Sustainability

Depending on the outcome score from the assessment, you could be eligible for the European "Committed to Excellence" 1 Star or 2 Star European recognition which puts you firmly on the roadmap to be European Recognised for Excellence, 3*, 4*, 5* and the European Quality Awards.

ARE YOU READY TO START ON THE ROAD THAT LEADS TO EXCELLENCE? If so please contact the Centre for Competitiveness, George Wilson or george.wilson@cforc.org or call Lorraine on 02890 737950 to learn more. This new paradigm and approach to competitiveness is designed to get you started and provide a blue print for continuous improvement and competitive advantage.

**Bob Barbour, Director & Chief Executive
Centre for Competitiveness**

Ulster Bank helps Belfast companies 'Get Ahead for Business'

Ulster Bank recently hosted a Business networking series, 'Ahead for Business', to help companies throughout Northern Ireland plan for 2014 and beyond.

The business briefing sessions took place over five locations across Northern Ireland and were open to new and existing Ulster Bank customers. They included information on accessing finance, business planning and cash flow management.

Speaking after an event, Tracy Morrow, Head of Ulster Bank's Belfast Business Centre, said: "We are delighted to have had the opportunity to host these 'Ahead for Business' series. Not only is there an abundance of talent in Northern Ireland, but also some extremely innovative business ideas. These sessions gave us the opportunity to hear from local businesses so that we can help them develop their ideas and hopefully turn them into reality"

Ulster Bank recently announced that it has a dedicated £1 billion available for business in 2014. Building on Ulster Bank's existing supports for businesses of all sizes, this is available to both new and existing Ulster Bank customers and is open to all businesses who are seeking finance to support their growth plans in 2014.

Speaking about the £1 billion, Ken Murnaghan, Head of Business Banking, Ulster Bank said: "In 2014 we are delighted



to have £1 billion available to help business as the real drivers of growth, employment and confidence in our economy. We know that many of our business customers view 2014 as a key year in terms of implementing growth plans, from introducing new products and services to expansion overseas and hiring additional employees. Access to funding is essential to ensuring they are able to fulfil these ambitions."

Funds are available at existing rates for business customers extending their facilities. Normal terms and conditions apply to new customers. Those interested in finding out more about the support available can visit www.ulsterbank.co.uk

For Further information on the 'Ahead for Business' series, please visit: www.ulsterbank.com/aheadforbusiness

Plotbox Wins company of the year at Invest NI Propel Programme Awards

Plotbox- an online tool that combines cemetery management software and genealogy resources - has emerged as the winner of the Propel Company of the Year, sponsored by Danske Bank, at Invest Northern Ireland's Propel Programme awards ceremony.

Bringing together the 26 participants who successfully completed the Invest NI programme - aimed at developing high growth potential, export focused start-ups - the Awards, held in W5 Belfast, celebrated their dedication to the growth of their businesses and their commitment to succeed on an international stage.

Other businesses recognised at the Awards were See.Sense winning the breakthrough Company of the Year, and Beacon, winning the Best Go-to-Market Strategy. Joined by representatives from the start-up and wider business community and media, the Propel participants were addressed by Halo NI Business Angel of the Year, Stephen Houston.

Speaking after the awards ceremony, Plotbox co-founder Leona McAllister said: "Gaining this recognition is a huge honour for us, particularly as this year's programme has been so strong. It's fantastic to step back and appreciate how far our business has come during the course of the programme, as well as to look to the future and the potential now before us."

"Invest NI's Propel programme enabled us to look critically at our business idea from an outsider's perspective and focus on getting the right business model allowing us to operate on a global scale. It's been a fantastic experience from start to finish and I couldn't recommend it highly enough" Leona continued.

Jeremy Fitch, Invest NI's Executive



Niall Harkin, Danske Bank pictured with Leona and Sean McAllister, winners of Best Company of the Year, and Invest NI's Jeremy Fitch

Director of Business Solutions, who presented the Award said: "The Propel programme has been developed to fast track high potential start-up businesses that have the ability to grow and helps to turn them into high growth, export focused businesses. In Plotbox we have found such a company, representing the best of innovation, drive and commitment, and I'd like to congratulate the management team on their success. Their innovative use of cloud based technology has brought new vigour to the genealogy market, and based on recent export sales figures the potential for growth is evident."

"I would also like to extend my congratulations to all the participants celebrated at this event, who individually have shown fantastic dedication, and collectively shown the strength of Northern Ireland's start-up potential."

Niall Harkin, Head of Business Acquisition at sponsor Danske Bank, said: "Danske Bank is proud to sponsor the Invest NI Propel Programme

Awards, which sit well alongside our commitment to supporting indigenous companies on their growth journey. With all the economic indicators now pointing towards a modest recovery, we must focus on securing sustainable economic growth locally by equipping businesses with the knowledge, skills and support they require to grow through innovation and development.

All of the companies shortlisted for these awards are great examples of local high potential small businesses and we wish them well for the year ahead".

About Propel

Propel is a one year enterprise development programme that takes people with a business idea on a journey to commercialisation; from prototype to product; to sales and new customers; seeking funding along the way to fuel export growth and local employment. At the end you will be able to stand and pitch for investment, present your business plan and do business internationally.

Liberty IT partners with local premature baby charity, TinyLife, for 2014

For the past 16 years, Liberty IT has been developing and supporting a wide range of specialist and enterprise scale applications exclusively for its parent company, Liberty Mutual Insurance. However, it's not all about work for this Belfast and Dublin based company; in addition, Liberty IT actively encourages and supports employees to make a positive impact to the wider community.

Charitable giving and employer supported volunteering are just a few examples of the corporate responsibility initiatives the organisation engages in, in an effort to make a real difference to local communities, charities and schools.



Liberty™
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In recent years, the company has supported a number of charities including Macmillan, Heartbeat, NI Hospice and Alzheimer's Research UK, however this year, an all-employee vote and consultations with the Liberty

IT Charity Committee, decided that TinyLife would be the charity partner for 2014.

Northern Ireland based TinyLife (formerly NIMBA), is a premature and vulnerable baby charity, dedicated to reducing premature birth, illness, disability and death in babies born here. Every day in Northern Ireland 7 babies are born too soon, some will arrive as early as 24 weeks and weigh as little as 1lb.

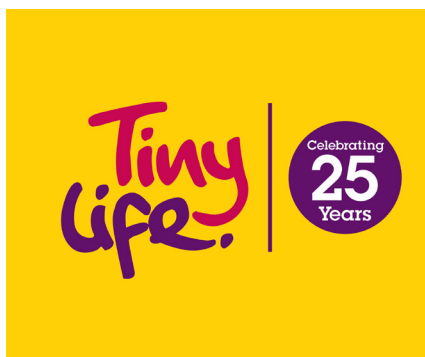
For the past 25 years, TinyLife has been committed to providing a range of support services to meet the growing needs of families of premature and ill babies in Northern Ireland. TinyLife continues to support vital research to ensure that every pregnancy has the best chance of a healthy baby.

A number of employees proposed the charity as the partner for the year, many of whom had been supported by

TinyLife themselves. Liberty IT employee, Gillian Blair, commented:

"TinyLife is a charity very close to my heart. They provided both practical and emotional support to my family when my daughter was born and had to spend a week in intensive care. In my case this was lending me a hospital grade breast pump so I could establish a milk supply when my daughter was too weak to feed. Without their support we wouldn't have been able to breastfeed, something I was very in favour of given the health benefits."

Thanks to the support of generous individuals, companies and community groups, TinyLife has been able to carry out its vital work within Northern Ireland for the past 25 years. Given that almost 1800 babies spent time in the Neonatal units here last year, the funds that Liberty IT will raise throughout 2014 will be vital to the precious lives of the premature babies born here every day.



Disruptive accelerator company Analytics Engines secures £1m+ investment 'to expand global footprint'

Analytics Engines, a Belfast-based specialist in accelerating applications for databases and Big Data, has announced closure on the final part of a £1,000,000+ funding round.

Analytics Engines products are designed to offer significant benefits to companies that need to run faster, more accurate analytics on large volumes of data – such as those in the finance, genomics, utilities and database sectors. Led by venture capital fund Crescent Capital, the £1 million+ investment will be used to speed up productisation and exploitation of IP, diversify current offerings into new sectors, support the product development road map and expand the company's global footprint.

Winners of the Silicon Valley 2013 Best Emerging Technology Award from ITLG, Analytics Engines improves business performance by enhancing the speed and efficiency of software applications up to a magnitude of 1000x. The company has used its partnerships with Philips Healthcare, SAP, Credit Suisse and others to demonstrate significant performance benefits over systems in current usage.

Dr Stephen McKeown, CEO of Analytics Engines, said: "The Analytics Engines suite of plug-in accelerators allows increasingly complex analytics and enhanced real-time processing of Big Data in areas such as database analysis and transactional processing, to financial risk and medical imaging. Tasks that formerly took hours to perform are now possible in minutes – this creates significant business opportunities that were unobtainable only a few years ago. "We are very excited with this new funding round as it will allow us to more rapidly progress our product roadmap, improve our product portfolio and diversify our offering into new markets."



Analytics Engines CTO Professor Roger Woods, currently seconded to the company under an EPSRC Impact award from Queen's University Belfast, said: "This is a QUBIS spinout company doing remarkable things from a technology point of view. It is clear that simply adding increasing numbers of computer servers has its limits from both a scalability and cost perspective. With its disruptive accelerator technology, Analytics Engines is allowing extremely computational analytics to be efficiently run on large data volumes."

According to Crescent Capital, this investment is further evidence that high technology firms with market changing export potential are emerging from the indigenous entrepreneurial culture in Northern Ireland.

Deirdre Terrins, who led on the origination and completion of this investment for Crescent as Investment Manager said, "This investment demonstrates our belief that Analytics Engines is building highly attractive and disruptive technology which is at the forefront of the needs of businesses now and in the foreseeable fast paced future of Big Data across a number of high growth sectors. We are looking

forward to supporting the development and success of this exciting proposition."

About Analytics Engines

Analytics Engines is a global leader in the development of extremely high performance data processing accelerators. We improve the ability to operate on and analyse big data, accelerating processing by up to 2900x in a compact, cost efficient solution. Our customers benefit from the ability to run more sophisticated analytics on larger data volumes at much faster speeds.

We build on existing technology platforms in a number of different markets including retail, banking, security, and biomedical. By singling-out and accelerating specific data intensive operations, we can offload as much as 20-30% of the server workload to commercial plug-in accelerator cards running Analytics Engines' high performance accelerators. The result is high-volume data analytics at a level of performance and lower cost that far exceeds what can be achieved with software running on standard CPU hardware.

Web: www.analyticsengines.com

Event Preview

Belfast Technology Conference 2014

Wednesday, 2nd April - Friday, 4th April 2014



O The inaugural Belfast Technology Conference event will be the premiere high tech event of 2014, curated by KAINOS and hosted by Aisling Events Ltd .

This major conference and exhibition will be the premiere high tech event of 2014 and will bring together tech and business leaders as well as politicians from Belfast, USA and Europe.

It will inform technology professionals and businesses of the emerging technologies and approaches that will allow them to innovate and compete effectively at a global level.

It will educate and inspire kids/parents/teachers about the potential of a career in Technology, thereby building the NI digital skill base and reinforcing our global

lead in this area.

The event will showcase the best NI talent and achievements and will illustrate how Belfast/Northern Ireland is the perfect location to create and grow digital businesses.

Industry leading speakers such as Joe Drumgoole - Director, Partner Technical Services MongoDB, Tom Hartley – Co-creator of airpi, James Whelton – CoderDojo & HWF Founder , Alana Percival – CEO WWC San Francisco, Emma Mulqueeny – CEO Rewired State/ Young Rewired State will all be in attendance at the conference.

Tickets to the BelTech Conference are priced at £199, for more information and to purchase your ticket visit www.beltech2014.com

Upcoming Events

1 Female Professional Development Workshop

BY Recipro

WHEN 28th April 2014

WHERE MAC Belfast

2 Smart Business Show

BY Smart Business Show

WHEN 29-30th May 2014

WHERE Odyssey Arena

3 Q-Con XXI

BY Queens Dragon Slayers

WHEN 20-22nd June 2014

WHERE Queens University Student Union

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CLOSING DATE: Friday 30th May 2014



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