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Welcome to the Winter edition of the Sync NI magazine

SYNC **ni**
magazine

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Sync NI is the leading media outlet for Northern Ireland's Technology and Business Industries.

The Sync NI website and magazine keeps readers informed on the latest technology and business news, jobs, and events from Northern Ireland, and abroad.

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Foreword

Tom Gray

Head of Digital Catapult NI

So, Resolutions, eh?

Well, I think that, for 2017, every NI business should resolve to use a little more Intelligence. Now, some of you are probably insulted (sorry). But, some of you know exactly where I'm going... *Artificial Intelligence.*

While several important things happened in 2016, I think the emergence of Artificial Intelligence into mainstream use has to be one of the more significant events in the technology landscape. Whether it was people realising that Spotify's Discover playlists were actually really good at digging out songs that quickly became favourites, Uber deploying self-driving cars in Pittsburgh, or Amazon's Echo bringing really good Speech Recognition (driven by machine learning) into homes in the latter part of the year, AI seemed to be everywhere.

From being a staple of Sci-Fi (some good, most really awful), advances in computing power (such as modern GPUs), the availability of huge data sets for training purposes, the availability of cloud infrastructure, and improvements in algorithms (such as the development of convolutional neural networks), have come together to make AI ready for everyday use. And, with this maturing of a pretty old technology – the term "Artificial Intelligence" referring to "the science and engineering of making intelligent machines, especially intelligent computer programs" was coined in 1955 by John McCarthy (of the County Kerry McCarthys) – mainstream businesses and investors have started to take notice.

Businesses in NI continue to be at the

forefront of the application of emerging technologies, and AI is no exception. Local companies are using AI to detect fraudulent financial transactions, automate the legal discovery process, infer the emotional context of passages of text, target promotional offers in retail transactions, detect anomalous behaviour in cybersecurity environments, create personalised treatments for patients. And this is just the beginning.

Amazon CEO Jeff Bezos wrote that, "It's hard to overstate how big of an impact AI is going to have on society over the next 20 years."

I think it is important for NI to build on its existing capability and become recognised globally as a leading region in the development and use of AI technology for the benefit of both our economy and society. It is important to balance both the economic and societal aspects of AI. While I don't think we have cause to worry about the 'Robot Apocalypse', concerns about the ethics of AI and the impact of intelligent automation on jobs are very valid. Nevertheless, the technology isn't going to go away, so it behoves us to ensure that we take a lead in developing and implementing it effectively and respectfully, rather than watching as others take that lead and living with decisions that are made for us.

For any organisation that wishes to explore how intelligent use of AI can benefit their activities, Digital Catapult NI resolves to help in any way it can.

Tom Gray

Head of Digital Catapult NI

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Centrefold



Wonders of Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths will be Showcased at NI Science Festival 2017

The Northern Ireland Science Festival (NISF) returns for its third outing from 16th to 26th February. This annual showcase for the wonders of science, technology, engineering and mathematics will see more than 150 events taking place around the region. Caoimhe Caldwell lifts the lid on the festival's biggest events programme to date...

Roll up your sleeves, stick your pencil behind your ear and prepare for lift-off – the Northern Ireland Science Festival is back in town, with more entertaining adventures into the realms of popular science.

The inaugural event took place in 2015 and registered over 50,000 guests, far surpassing expectations. The 2016 festival saw attendance increase again, with over 65,000 people attending more than 120 events. Now one of the most exciting science festivals to be found anywhere in Europe, NISF 17 will be delivering a heady mix of zombie outbreaks, marvellous medicines inspired by Roald Dahl and the world's first beer to be brewed by artificial intelligence.

Festival Director, Chris McCreery, said: "We are thrilled to be putting on our most exciting festival yet. Northern Ireland has a proud scientific tradition and the enthusiasm we find in our audience adds up to make this one of the best science festivals anywhere in Europe. "Whether you're a five-year-old, a 25-year-old or a 95-year-old, you're going to find something

that will intrigue and excite you, whether it's the genetics of superheroes, a Weird Science cocktail night or a comedy night with a twist."

NISF has also managed to attract some of the UK's most renowned scientific speakers, including Britain's Secret Treasures star, historian Bettany Hughes, who will use the latest archaeological techniques to uncover 800 years of life in Istanbul; Professor Alice Roberts, co-presenter of the BBC's *Countdown*, who goes in search of the Celts; and Simon Watt of Inside Nature's Giants, who will be celebrating the most aesthetically challenged endangered species with his *Lifty Animals* Roadshow.

McCreery added: "We'll also be treated to a fascinating afternoon of conversation with Belfast's world-renowned physicist Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell and Professor Jim Al-Khalili. Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell is best known for her discovery of pulsars – rotating neutron stars that appear to 'pulse' since the beams of light they emit can only be seen when they face the Earth. Her feat is considered to be one of the

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Beyond Bitcoin

Rakuten brings blockchain innovation to Belfast



Last August Rakuten, Inc. announced the opening of the Rakuten Blockchain Lab (RBL) in Belfast, helping to cement our capital city's position as an emerging and fast-growing fintech cluster.

RBL is a dedicated research and development organisation within Rakuten, focused on blockchain technology and its potential applications in the fintech and e-commerce sectors. Fergal Downey, VP Engineering at Rakuten Blockchain Lab, offers readers an inside view of the dramatic impact blockchain technologies could have in the years ahead, and why Belfast is the right place to foster this disruptive innovation.

Blockchain technology is at the heart of the Bitcoin protocol, but its potential extends far beyond virtual currency into all aspects of fintech. It's difficult to overestimate the impact that the technology will have in the years ahead. Some have said it could do to fintech what TCP/IP did for the internet. Others talk in more utopian terms, with Richard Branson saying "Bitcoin has great potential to change the world in an incredibly positive way."

So what is it?

Blockchain is a permanent distributed ledger of transactions that is hosted across a network of computers. Additions to a public ledger can be made by anyone, but only in a way that those additions are recorded and visible to all on the network. It is a secure and efficient way of recording transactions of just about any kind of asset, without intermediaries and without needing existing trust relationships.

In addition to applications in fintech, experiments are underway to apply it to everything from e-commerce and identity verification to land registry, voting, the diamond trade and second-hand luxury goods.

The Lab

The lab, which is based in Belfast city centre, was bootstrapped with the technical leadership team from Bitnet, where we previously built an enterprise-grade payment processing platform for digital currencies. Since then we have added personnel in Belfast and Barcelona, as well as at Rakuten's headquarters in Tokyo. The team has many years of deep engineering experience in addition to knowledge of the banking, payments and insurance industries in both corporate and startup environments.

We are currently focused on two main strategies:

- ▶ We deliver common "Blockchain-as-a-Service" infrastructure to the other development groups within Rakuten so that they can explore the capabilities of the technology on their own.
- ▶ We partner with the various vertical business units to bring new blockchain-based products to market. In the few short months the lab has been open we've met with over a dozen internal companies and have 3 projects actively being developed.

We also provide core blockchain/bitcoin education and consulting services within the company to help others get up to speed.

Life in Rakuten Blockchain Lab

Life inside the Rakuten Blockchain Lab varies from day to day, but is primarily focused on helping Rakuten businesses identify appropriate opportunities to realise value from the deployment of blockchain technologies. On any given day some of the team could be involved in getting to know a

new business area and explaining the concepts of blockchain, whilst others could be working on the delivery of new micro-services offering discrete functionality to one or more business units.

Experimentation is a key part of what the lab was set up to do, so the team gets involved in the evaluation of new tools, frameworks and technologies associated with building blockchain solutions. The lab has already built close ties to the local universities as well as other research organisations, and is currently supporting a number of final year students on blockchain-related projects. The lab is growing, so identifying and meeting potential candidates for the various engineering roles is another regular activity.

Rakuten has over 2,500 engineers globally and organises a number of events that provide opportunities for those engineers to come together and share what they have been working on. These include various hackathons and internal technology summits, as well as the annual Rakuten Technology Conference held in Tokyo in November.

Technology @ Rakuten

The technology landscape at Rakuten is as diverse as the company itself. It's also an open organisation that embraces new tools and new technology. Given the two-part mission of the lab mentioned earlier we have many touch-points within the company; bear in mind the technology group we're a part of has over 2,500 engineers around the globe!

Within the lab we take a modern, agile approach to the stack and tools we use. We're opinionated about the outcomes (happy customers, safe, performant systems, and engaged engineers) but flexible about the tools we use. We have extensive experience with micro-service architectures, modern API tooling and cloud deployments. Current projects are built with Node, Kong, RabbitMQ and



Rakuten Technology Conference Team

deployed to the cloud via Kubernetes and Docker. All engineers at the lab have the chance to participate in technology evaluation, prototyping and product development.

Rakuten History

Rakuten was founded in Tokyo by Hiroshi Mikitani in February 1997. Rakuten dominates the Japanese e-commerce market with its Ichiba platform. Rakuten has since expanded beyond internet services into many other business sectors in Japan, such as travel, banking, credit cards, eReading, and professional sports.

In 2005, Rakuten began to expand globally through many acquisitions such as Buy.com, eBates, Kobo, Wuaki.tv, PriceMinister and more recently, Viber. The latest high profile announcement was a four year deal with FC Barcelona as its Main Global Partner, and its first ever Global Innovation & Entertainment Partner.

Whilst Rakuten may have expanded globally and now has over 14,000 employees throughout Asia, Europe, the Americas, and Oceania, it has kept much of its original culture. This is evident on a daily basis for those working inside Rakuten. When the company first began with 6 employees in 1997, they had a company meeting every week to exchange knowledge as no individual had all the information to be successful.

To this day, the weekly meeting

(Asakai) still happens, all employees attend and the CEO along with other executives share information with the rest of the company. Afterwards, all staff return to their offices and take a few minutes to clean their desks. Why? Well, the answer is that Mikitani believes "A clean office is much more than a nicety". He says "A clean office is representative of who we are as a company. It says: We are all about the details, always, even when we think no one is looking." Simple but effective activities like these encourage the growth of individuals as well as the success of the company.

Bringing It All Together

Take hundreds of millions of registered members, spread across the globe, using services as diverse as advertising, e-commerce, banking, digital content, travel, insurance and messaging; now add to that mix the most disruptive technology the tech world has seen in 20 years, and you've got a potent mix. The Japanese word rakuten means optimism, and it's infectious.

At the lab here in Belfast we're working hard exploring and creating new applications of blockchain for Rakuten and our customers. If that sounds interesting and you are a real team player with strong technical skills we'd love to chat. Drop us a line at the email address below.

Email Rakuten

 info-belfast@mail.rakuten.com

A New Year

Brings a Renewed Commitment to Growth and Leadership for Novosco

For many people the start of a new year is a time to reflect on what they've achieved in the year gone by, and a time to plan a course, with bigger and better milestones, for the year that lies ahead. Businesses, in many ways, are just like people, with hopes and dreams, plans and goals. Patrick McAliskey, Managing Director of Novosco, explains the course his business has set for 2017, and the key milestones the company aims to achieve along the way.

It's that time again, when after a welcome break spent with family and friends, we look to the year ahead with freshness and try to outline exactly what we hope to achieve.

On the back of a busy and exciting 2016, this year has the opportunity to bring further success to Novosco. After 22 years in business it feels like Novosco is about to embark on a new chapter, and I'm energised by the prospects for our business and our plans for the coming year.

Grow

In the latter half of 2016 we acquired NetDef, a network security and cloud managed services company. So far the progress of integrating the two companies has been great, and we plan to develop this further. There is still so much potential to leverage in combining our expertise and skillsets to grow our

business and provide a unified offering to existing and new customers. Through our continued integration with NetDef we plan to increase our expansion into the English market.

Lead

At Novosco we always aim to be the best in everything we do; 2017 will be no different in that regard as we lead the way in providing better managed services and excellent levels of customer service. What is clear to me is that as a company we can't succeed without the right people, armed with the right expertise and a drive for what they do. At Novosco we continually strive to lead and build a talented team who share a vision, and we have created a culture that inspires and enables each member of that team to be the very best, leading the way through all that they do.

As part of this, we continually coach, motivate and invest in our team through training and personal development, and Novosco employees are dedicated individuals who regularly go above and beyond to help our customers. We encourage respect, hard work, and passion within the company, and we want to be a customer service leader and have a fantastic reputation to support the development and growth of our team.

Enjoy

It is vital that we all enjoy the work we do, and at Novosco we aim to provide

an environment in which our team can thrive. Over the years we have fostered a great company culture; our challenge this year will be to sustain this as we continue to expand. With offices now in Belfast, Dublin, Cork and Warrington, as well as many of our team who work remotely, it is vital that we improve our communication and enhance our collaboration this year so that everyone is informed and included and has everything they need to enjoy and succeed at their work.

Give Back

Part of the Novosco way is giving back, and living our values of Excellence, Fun, Respect and Teamwork in all aspects of what we do. I'm proud that throughout 2016 we were able to donate over £10,000 to a range of charities, and my hope is that this year we will be able to match or better this.

It's clear that working together as a team to give back to the communities we live and work in is important and in 2017 we want to build on this further. We will run the Novosco Cloud Camp again this year, giving students the opportunity to learn and develop new skills. 2017 will also see the second year of the Novosco 10K Grand Prix, which we hope will be bigger and better this year with more races and runners competing.

Follow Novosco



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Newry business becomes the first to take part in Danske Business Lab

A field management software company from Newry has become the first business accepted to take part in the Danske Business Lab programme.

The Danske Business Lab is a unique partnership between Danske Bank and Catalyst Inc's hugely successful Springboard programme, a well-proven personalised mentoring process open to innovative companies with high growth potential.

FieldMotion has developed a piece of software that allows field workers to access information at the touch of a button and managers to monitor employee performance, while

added: "The Danske Business Lab has already been a real eye opener. I had to pitch the business in front of a panel of very experienced business people who then examined every aspect of the business. When you are too close to a project sometimes you don't see the bigger picture so I really welcomed their ideas. The tweaks we're making to the business are already opening new doors and allowing us to scale internationally."

Looking to the future, Mr Finnegan said the company will be targeting new markets, "The USA is a big goal for us and we're confident we can do it. We already have a partner in Boston and using the contacts and experience of the mentors at the



Pictured are Jim Finnegan, CEO at FieldMotion (centre); Pauline Torley, Business Banking Manager at Danske Bank and Austin Coll, Senior Manager of Small Business at Danske Bank.

significantly cutting down the use of paper. The FieldMotion system consists of a cloud-based desktop application that works with a mobile app.

Jim Finnegan, CEO at FieldMotion said: "The idea for our CRM system came about in 2012 when I owned another company, JMC Mobile. At the time we used many different systems but always felt they were too complicated and didn't actually fulfil their purpose. When we designed the FieldMotion software it was initially for JMC but we realised we had a really good product that would sell well on its own.

"We currently have 200 companies in Great Britain and Ireland using our software, with 30 partners across the globe in places such as Australia and Boston. We have a team of 12 selling our products to 20 different sectors including engineering, plumbing, pest control and fire safety."

Danske Business Lab participants go through a rigorous, in-business, 16-week process, during which every aspect of the business is analysed, including finance, value proposition, sales, marketing, corporate governance, growth and go-to-market strategy. Mr Finnegan says taking part in the programme will help open new doors for the company. He

Danske Business Lab will help us get a foot in the door. We'll also look to consolidate our position in the UK market and add staff to our sales team."

Austin Coll, Senior Manager, Small Business at Danske Bank commented: "At Danske Bank we are keen to help high growth potential companies harness their true capabilities, providing them with some of the tools and expert advice needed to drive their business forward and scale up. "Northern Ireland is rich with scaleable companies and talented individuals that have the potential to grow into market leaders. These businesses have the potential to be tomorrow's big players. Jim and his team have developed an excellent product that has the potential to be used in a number of sectors right across the world. We are delighted to have FieldMotion on board as the first business to take part in Danske Business Lab and look forward to seeing the business go from strength to strength."

John Knapton, Director of Springboard commented: "FieldMotion is the perfect example of a local company with the potential for global reach. Springboard and the Business Lab was set up to help businesses like FieldMotion reach its full potential, giving it access to the right resources and the expert mentors it need to push it to the next level."

BCS Northern Ireland

60 years old and just getting started

The tech sector has changed rather a lot in just a few short years, so it doesn't feel like hyperbole to suggest that the world of IT looks dramatically different today when compared with a longer time horizon...60 years, for instance.

As BCS, The Chartered Institute for IT, prepares to celebrate its 60th year, Sync NI sat down with Robert McLaughlin, former President of BCS and a current member of the Institute's Professional Board, and Rachel McKane, the current Chair of BCS Northern Ireland and a passionate advocate of women in tech, to discuss the Institute's illustrious history and its ambitious plans for the future.

Founded in London in 1957 as the British Computer Society, BCS now has more than 80,000 members in over 100 countries around the world. It represents anyone working in information technology, and also actively works to encourage more young people and more women to join the IT sector.

The Institute also has the distinction of being the only professional body in the UK that is able to grant Chartered IT Professional status.

From computers as big as buildings to buildings powered by hidden computers

Robert McLaughlin has been a member of BCS since the 1960s, and served as its president from 1985 to 1986. It's fair to say he's seen it all.

Robert explained that when BCS was first launched the computing industry was really just getting started, as well. Miniaturisation was something of a far-off dream at that stage, so if computing was in its infancy then computers were very big babies. In fact, Robert explained how a single 'super' computer in the 1960s took up almost a full building on Belfast's Botanic Avenue...yet, despite its immense size, it had less processing power than a modern smartphone or tablet.

Today, of course, computers are both small and powerful, allowing them to be integrated into a vast array of "things"... from cars to home appliances to entire houses and office buildings.

Just as smartphones have ensured almost everyone in the UK now has a computer in their pocket, the Internet of Things will increasingly offer a computer in every appliance, vehicle, doorway or wall...and the rise of artificial intelligence will mean these computers can manage our homes and our offices without the need for constant input from us.

The Turing Lecture

It is these 'cognitive computing' technologies that will take centre stage at the upcoming Turing Lecture, which

will be delivered in Belfast towards the end of February.

The Turing Lecture was launched by BCS, in partnership with The Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET), in 1999. In honour of a seminal figure in the history of computing, Alan Turing, the annual Turing Lecture offers a glimpse into the future of computing, with insights from a leading figure in the fields of IT or engineering.

The 2017 Turing Lecture will be delivered by Dr Banavar, VP of Cognitive Computing at IBM Research, who will explore the cognitive computing revolution and the beneficial application of artificial intelligence to business and society during a four-city lecture tour.

The Belfast lecture will be held at Belfast City Hall on 23rd February 2017, from 5:30PM to 8:30PM, and is free to attend.

Diversity in tech

It seems certain that artificial intelligence and the Internet of Things will play an increasingly important role in the work of BCS in the months and years to come, so it's no surprise that AI will be the focus of this year's Turing Lecture. BCS will be working towards another very important mission, as well, though: increasing diversity in the IT sector.

It's a mission that is desperately needed – both in the interests of equality and fairness, and to avoid a looming talent shortage in the UK. As it stands right now, 71% of white engineering graduates currently find

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Dr Guruduth S. Banavar



full-time jobs within six months of graduating, compared with just 51% of black and minority ethnic students. People from black and minority ethnic backgrounds earn 25.5% of the engineering and technology first degrees in the UK, yet they hold just 6% of the professional engineering roles.

The gender gap looms large for the IT sector, too: in the technology sector women currently account for just 17% of IT professionals, and recent data suggests the total number of women in tech may actually have fallen – down from around 20% a few years ago.

Given its unrivalled ability to reach, engage with and influence business decision makers through its extensive membership base, BCS is well placed to foster greater diversity in IT. For example, in the past the Institute has run a series of Unconscious Bias Training workshops for board level IT professionals, helping them to understand when and how they allow their deep seated biases to influence their business decisions.

BCSWomen, a BCS Specialist Group created to support and encourage women in the IT sector, works to increase gender diversity in the technology industry, and has grown to become the largest member group for women working in computing in the UK, with more than 1,300 members today.

BCS has also created an Inclusion Community of Expertise (CoE) in order to promote social inclusion and ethnic and gender diversity in the IT sector, and is a signatory to the Engineering Diversity Concordat, the Science Council's Declaration on Diversity, Equality and Inclusion, and the Diversity Framework.

A model example

When it comes to diversity BCS also puts its money where its mouth is. The Institute not only encourages businesses to improve their own gender diversity, it also serves as a model example for the sector: in the Institute's own business

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technology department women make up 33% of the team, more than double the industry average. The Institute also encourages women in IT to become leaders in IT, helping them break through the glass ceiling to reach the highest levels of the profession. Rachel McKane, the current Chair of BSC Northern Ireland, can attest to that.

Many happy returns

BCS has achieved a lot in its first 60 years, and has grown to become the most prestigious organisation for the IT sector in the UK. But although technology has changed dramatically in the past 60 years, the pace of technological innovation means the IT sector is really just getting started. As BSC – The Chartered Institute for IT – celebrates its 60th birthday, it's fair to say the Institute is just getting started too.

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Be ready for a **Mobile-First World**



Mobile-first is the strategy of designing products for smartphones and tablets before any other medium. This definition is too narrow, though, because mobile-first should really mean designing your business, rather than just application interfaces, for mobile.

It is often considered a buzzword, a future project the business should implement, or even a necessary mention in the company's business plan. Mobile-first is much more than that, though. It means recognising that the way we do business has changed forever and that a mobile strategy is essential to growing any company in 2017. We are in a world where brands and businesses are able to select, personalise and connect with consumers in an efficient, relevant and timely manner through smartphones, tablets or wearable devices. Brands are aiming to establish better relationships with consumers, creating premium, high-impact experiences to personalise the customer experience and retain customers.

But how do you go about developing a mobile-first approach to your business?

You can learn about mobile-first strategies at the Mobile Academy Belfast, an innovative part-time course for professionals in Northern Ireland who want to understand and work within the mobile ecosystem, or hatch a new business or product idea, or bring mobile know-how into their organisation, and progress their career.

The Mobile Academy was created by University College London and Mobile Monday London, and its participants were either sent by employers to bring mobile knowledge back in-house, or decided to invest in their own skillset.

Like their peers in London, the participants of the first Mobile Academy in Belfast in 2016, which was set up as a joint project between Mobile Monday Belfast and Ulster

University, had full time jobs and came to deepen their knowledge of mobile and find out about lean business practices. Looking to evaluate an early product concept, work with peers on a new mobile-first or mobile-only business idea, the participants got their ideas off the starting block – for their employer or themselves.

The Mobile Academy also welcomed professionals that were in between jobs or freelance, who benefited from the connections made during the five course days while updating their knowledge of the mobile ecosystem in a structured way, hosted by Ulster University in their Belfast campus. The Belfast 2016 course participants came from a wide range of companies: large ones like BT, CME Group, Invest NI and Liberty IT; medium ones like Anaeko, JR Lighting, Openwave Mobility and Tascomi; and startups like Intelligent Site Technologies and Jumpcut Media.

The participants' professional background was very wide too, from UX Analyst, Software Engineer, Head of Marketing, Operations Manager, Mobile App Developer, Head of Service Delivery, or Software Consultant, to Founder/CEO and Managing Director.

Back for a second year with a revamped curriculum, Mobile Academy Belfast 2017 will run on five Wednesdays between 10th May and 14th June at the Ulster University Belfast campus, and will offer CPD points. You can find full details and register for the course, by visiting the Mobile Academy Website below, where you can avail of an Early Bird rate throughout February and March, giving a healthy 20% off the standard course price.

Visit online **Mobile Academy Belfast**



MobileAcademyBelfast.org

Autonomous Cars Will Usher in the Self-Driving Reset of Just About Everything in Our Cities

Seth Godin is an acclaimed business writer and the founder of two technology startups.

The author of 18 bestselling business books, including *Purple Cow*, *Permission Marketing*, *Linchpin*, *Tribes*, *Free Prize Inside* and the *Icarus Deception*, Godin's two tech companies, Yoyodyne and Squidoo, were acquired by Yahoo! and HubPages respectively.

In this insightful article Godin offers Sync NI readers his take on how autonomous vehicles could be about to change almost every aspect of our towns and cities.

Self-driving cars are going to be a huge transformational disruption, and they're probably going to happen faster than most people expect. Starting in cities, starting with car-sharing, the economics and safety implications are too big to avoid:

- Few traffic jams – cars will have a slower top speed, but rarely stop
- No traffic lights – cars talk to each other
- Dramatically less pollution
- Pedestrians are far safer, bicycling becomes fun again
- No parking issues – the car drives away and comes back when you need it
- Lower costs and more access for more people, more often
- Instant and efficient carpooling, since the car knows who's going where

Most of the physical world around us is organised around traditional cars. Not just roads, but the priority they get, the roadside malls, fast food restaurants, the fact that in many cities, more space is devoted to parking lots than just about anything else. It's pervasive and accepted, so much so that we notice with amazement the rare places that aren't built around them.

Understand, for example, that the

suburb exists because of the car, as does the big amusement park and the motel. All of them were built by people who saw the changes private mobility would cause.

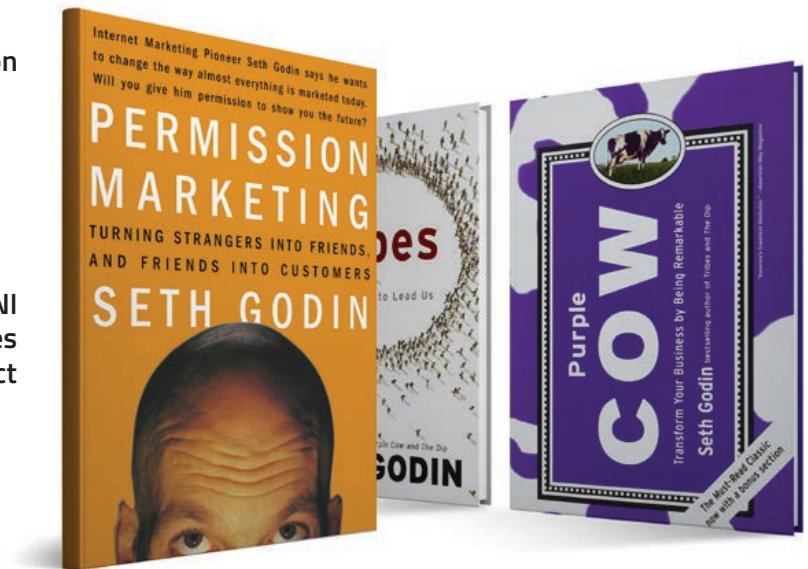
The self-driving car benefits from Moore's Law, which explains that computers get dramatically cheaper over time, and Metcalfe's Law, which describes the increasing power of networks as they get bigger and more connected. Both of these laws are now at work on one of the biggest expenses and most powerful forces in our world: transportation.

Like all innovations, the death of the non-autonomous vehicle is not all upside. The car industry gets mostly commodified, jobs are shifted and disruptions occur. Privacy for teenagers, ordinary citizens and bank-robbers-making-an-escape disappears. The suburbs become even less attractive to some people. But just as you can't imagine a city scene where just about everyone isn't looking at their smartphone and swarming in the virtual cloud, it's going to be a whole

new cityscape once cars retreat from their spot at the top of the attention/command chain.

One way this might happen: Certain models will be labelled as Uber-compatible (or whatever network is in place). Buy that car and with a few clicks, the car starts earning its keep. When you're at work or asleep or otherwise engaged, it moonlights and drives other folks around. The combination of security cameras in your car and rider registration pretty much guarantees that your car isn't going to come back wrecked. It's not hard to imagine organisations building fleets to profit from this, but it also becomes economically irresistible to the individual as well.

This is a bigger shift than the smartphone, and it might happen nearly as fast. Near my house, there's a parkway that was built so that owners of private cars would have a place to go where they could drive them without endangering everyone else. I wonder how long before that's what it will be used for again.





Digital Catapult NI

Driving Northern Ireland's Digital Economy Forward

It's safe to say that the UK's digital economy is booming, and Northern Ireland is no exception. In fact, outside of London and the South East the digital sector in Northern Ireland is contributing a higher proportion of gross value added (GVA) to the local economy than any other region of the UK.

The province's digital GVA amounts to an incredible £1 billion, while the export of digital products and services adds more than £280 million to the Northern Ireland economy each year.

Belfast now has the fastest growing knowledge economy in the UK according to Tech City UK's Tech Nation report, and the province has grown to become an important centre for software development and analytics, in addition to gaining global recognition as a world-leading cybersecurity cluster. With all that in mind it's fair to say that digital is very much a growth

opportunity for Northern Ireland, and to capitalise on this opportunity the province recently joined the UK's growing network of Digital Catapult Centres with the launch of Digital Catapult NI.

Launched in October 2016 by Northern Ireland's Economy Minister, the Digital Catapult Centre Northern Ireland is specifically designed to help organisations across the public and private sectors increase innovation and productivity by harnessing the transformative power of digital technologies.

To achieve this goal the Catapult will work closely with a network of organisations from all over Northern Ireland, both in the public sector and private sector, who share in the mission of helping Northern Ireland-based companies start up, scale up and grow. While some Digital Catapult Centres are sector-specific (the Future Cities Catapult, for example), Digital Catapult NI works across a broad range of technology layers,

DIGITAL CATAPULT CENTRE

NORTHERN IRELAND

including:

► **Data-driven technologies:** new ways to work with personal data with more control and trust, applications of blockchain and smart contracts, cybersecurity, particularly for emergent threats

► **Connected devices:** the Internet of Things and associated enabling networking technologies such as Low Powered Wide Area Networks and 5G

► **Intelligent machines:** artificial intelligence and particularly machine learning

► **Immersive tech:** augmented, virtual and mixed realities, and the evolution of human-machine interfaces.

By applying business and technology know-how, Digital Catapult NI's goal is to unlock new commercial opportunities and gain access to new markets for companies in Northern Ireland. It will do this by:

► **Connecting:** building and communicating a unified picture of Northern Ireland's digital landscape, capabilities and activities

► **Supporting:** assisting in the development and application of the province's digital capability

► **Internationalising:** creating opportunities for Northern Ireland's digital companies to engage with the international community and develop export opportunities.

Programme of activity for 2017

Digital Catapult NI's programme of activity for the year ahead is designed to help give organisations access to technology- and sector-driven community clusters, access to open calls to collaborate on digital projects, opportunities to be part of national and international digital showcases and participation in Digital Catapult's 'Pitstops', a highly focused open innovation activity designed to accelerate the growth of new ideas.

During the course of 2017 Digital Catapult NI will be coordinating a number of initiatives and hosting events around its key technology focus layers and sectors, including:

Intelligent / Immersive Technology Cluster for Growth

Intelligent technologies such as machine learning, artificial intelligence, autonomous agents etc. will have a dramatic impact on businesses across all sectors in the very near future.

Meanwhile immersive technologies, such as VR, AR and haptics, are beginning to redefine how humans and machines will interact in both business and leisure environments.

In collaboration with Invest NI, Digital Catapult NI is supporting the formation of both an Intelligent Cluster Group and an Immersive Technology Cluster, bringing together individuals and organisations from industry, academia, government, and the voluntary sector to develop and evangelise Northern Ireland's capability in this area.

South by South West (SXSW) Trade Mission – Immersive Tech

SXSW is one of the world's leading digital technology events and Digital Catapult NI, in partnership with Invest

Northern Ireland, will lead a trade mission to Austin in 2017 to showcase Northern Ireland's capabilities in emerging technologies like AR/VR and Machine Learning, as well as providing digital companies with an opportunity to network with peers, partners and potential clients.

Sector Technology Roundtables

Digital technologies will have a transformative and disruptive effect on all industries. Digital Catapult NI will actively work to ensure that companies in Northern Ireland have the best possible opportunity to understand the impacts of emerging technologies on their own industries, and the support to become early adopters who can seize the competitive advantage that can come from embracing these new innovations.

To support this, Digital Catapult NI will be organising a series of Sector Roundtables during 2017, where companies can gain an overview of key emerging digital technologies from subject matter experts and, subsequently, participate in more focused sessions on specific technology areas.

The specific focus sectors these roundtables will address in 2017 are manufacturing (including engineering), health, and the creative industries.

To learn more about Digital Catapult NI and its plans for 2017, or to get involved in any of its upcoming innovation programmes or events, contact Lauren Reynolds, Digital Catapult NI Manager: lauren@tdgcs.tech

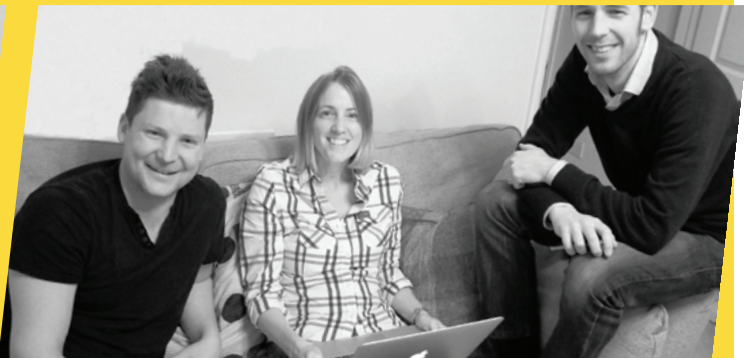
Follow Digital Catapult NI

 @DigiCatNI

STARTUP SPOTLIGHT

Life Ninja

New Year's Resolutions? There's an App for That



New Year's Resolutions; so well intentioned on January 1st, so hard to stick to come the beginning of February. Take losing weight, for instance: it's possible to do a complete, high intensity workout without going to the gym, and without buying expensive equipment. Same goes for cutting down on sugar – it involves replacing high sugar foods with healthier alternatives; simple enough, right?

The difficult part is forming the positive habits we need in order to keep doing these things...the difficult part is mastering our own psychology. If only there was some sort of readily available tool, one that you carried around in your pocket, that could help you master your own psychology and form these positive habits. **Well, thanks to Life Ninja, now there is.**

Life Ninja: The positive psychology startup

Founded by Sarah Mosey, Tom Bailey and Trevor Rishworth, Life Ninja is a new app development startup that specialises in creating smartphone apps to help users track their own behaviours, understand their decision-making processes and improve their

choices when it comes to exercise or diet. Despite a growing proliferation of smartphone apps, a trend that has been dubbed "app overload", many app startups are striving (and struggling) to create an app with mass appeal...an app that generates millions of installs.

Life Ninja's founders saw another way – an opportunity to develop 'Long Tail' apps specifically tailored to niche lifestyle sectors, designed to help users achieve very specific goals.

Life Ninja's first product, the Quit Sugar app, was launched in 2016 and incorporates sugar tracking, mood tracking, and weight tracking features to help consumers steadily, consistently (and permanently) reduce the amount of sugar they consume. The app's 8 Week Challenge also incorporates an element of gamification in order to help sugar fanatics overcome their strongest sugar cravings.

Life Ninja will be supporting Cancer Research UK's sugar free February by offering consumers the chance to download the Quit Sugar app for free during February. Looking towards other niches, the company has now taken everything it's learnt about

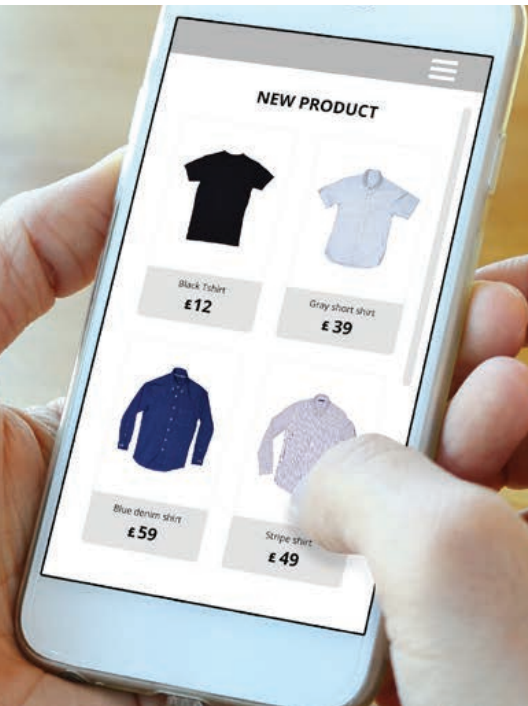
user interaction and habit forming behaviours from Quit Sugar and used it to develop the High Intensity Interval Training (HIIT) app, which is due to launch in February.

The entrepreneurs have partnered with a fitness company to create workouts of varying difficulty, from beginners through to advanced users. Each version offers an instructional video and in-depth explanation of what muscles are being worked and how best to perform the exercises, and users will also have the ability to tailor their own workout, which they can share with other users.

As with Quit Sugar, the Life Ninja team have added an element of gamification to the HIIT app in order to support habit forming, with users scoring points for their workouts based on difficulty – a great motivator when working towards fitness goals, whether they are New Year's resolutions or not.

Sticking to resolutions is never going to be a piece of cake, but with Life Ninja's positive habit forming apps setting (and achieving) health and fitness goals might just taste a little bit sweeter.

Ecommerce The Future's Bright, The Future's Mobile



No matter what kind of business you own, manage or work for, 2017 is likely to see an ever-greater number of your web visitors access your website from a mobile device. Jill Robb, Digital Marketing Director at Origin Digital, explains why the future of ecommerce is mobile, and what retail businesses in Northern Ireland can do to prepare for it.

Are you guilty of waking up each morning and reaching for your phone?

Do you check your news apps or scroll through your social media feeds before starting the day?

Don't worry, you're not alone. We live in a world where technology is instantly available and accessible; a world where mobile devices enable us to find information from anywhere in the world in a matter of minutes. Mobile technology has created a wealth of opportunities, for both businesses and consumers, some of which we didn't even imagine were possible.

But how do retail businesses prepare for this brave new, mobile-first world? The first thing to remember is that

mobile technology is not limited to "tech startups". Regardless of the sector you operate in, regardless of the product or service you sell, if your business sells online (or plans to), you should consider it a digitally-enabled business... and a growing volume of the digital interactions the business will have with its customer base are migrating from the desktop to the mobile.

That's why everyone, no matter their role or job title, should have a clear understanding of the role of mobile devices in the growth of ecommerce. Consumers are increasingly using multiple screens and multiple channels to shop around, find information and interact with both businesses and peers. It is an increasingly rare thing for customers to limit their interactions to one single channel, and many start an online purchase on one device before completing it on another.

The team at Origin Digital are digital natives, with deep roots in both digital marketing and web development. We analyse digital markets, we research digital trends...we know our craft well.

Some of the key findings from our recent NI Ecommerce research include:

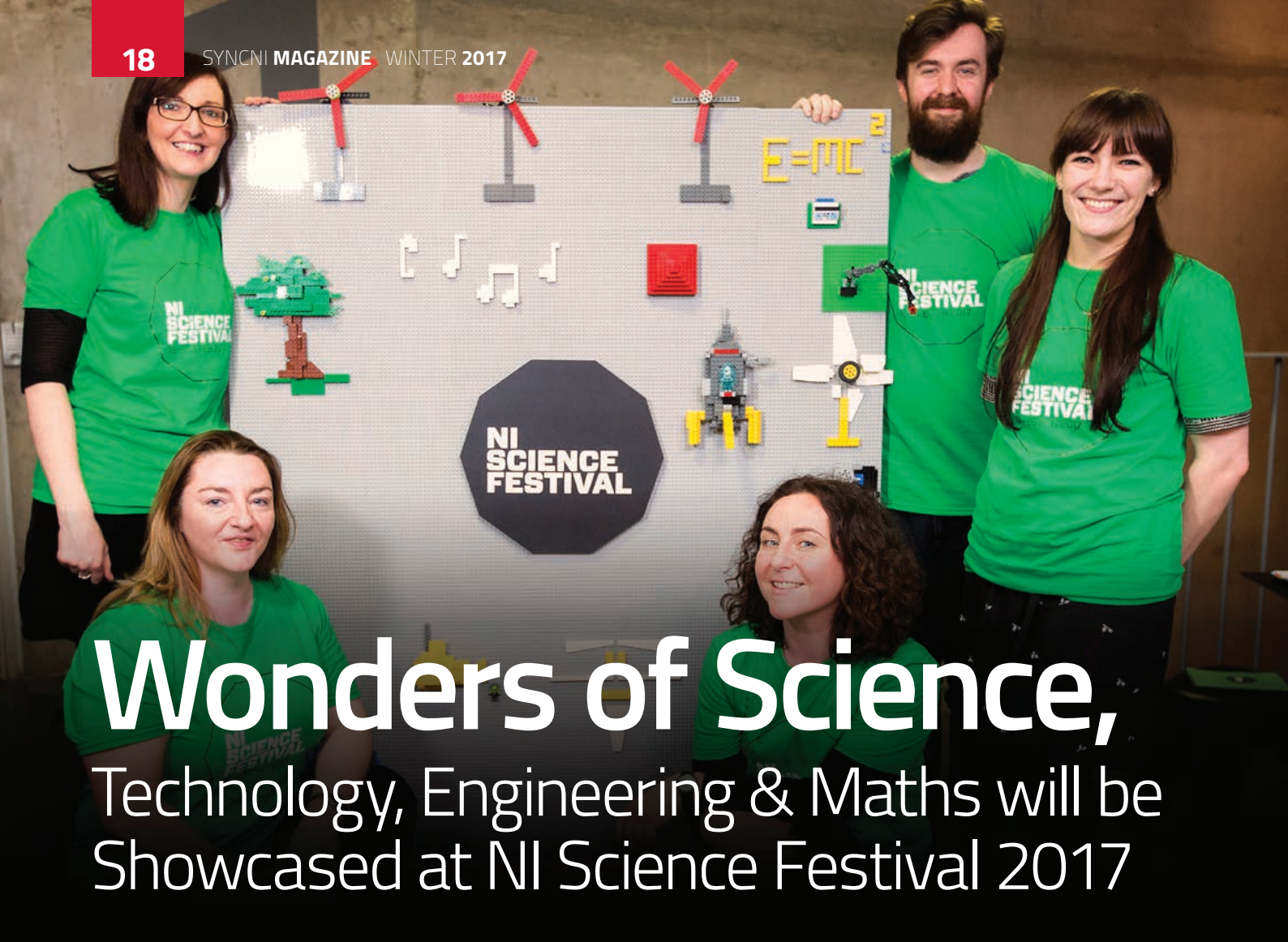
An 11% increase in mobile traffic to ecommerce sites in 2016 (v 2015), with mobile surpassing desktop. Many ecommerce businesses struggling to convert mobile traffic, with higher bounce rates (59% on mobile versus 47.8% on desktop) and lower conversion rates (1.6% average conversion rate on mobile, versus 2.8% on desktop).

Now that mobile has surpassed desktop, retail businesses across Northern Ireland need to move towards a mobile-first approach to their ecommerce strategy. Google continues to plan new updates to better serve mobile users with the roll out of its 'mobile first-index', so a focus on mobile is no longer a 'nice to have'. It's a necessity.

If you'd like to learn more about the future of ecommerce in a mobile-first world, check out the digital training workshops from Mindworks. And if you'd like to have a team of digital natives to help you plan and implement your ecommerce strategy, the team at Origin Digital are at your service.

Follow **Origin Digital**

 @origindigital



Wonders of Science,

Technology, Engineering & Maths will be Showcased at NI Science Festival 2017

The Northern Ireland Science Festival (NISF) returns for its third outing from 16th to 26th February. This annual showcase for the wonders of science, technology, engineering and mathematics will see more than 150 events taking place around the region. Caoimhe Caldwell lifts the lid on the festival's biggest events programme to date...

Roll up your sleeves, stick your pencil behind your ear and prepare for lift-off – the Northern Ireland Science Festival is back in town, with more entertaining adventures into the realms of popular science.

The inaugural event took place in 2015 and registered over 50,000 guests, far surpassing expectations. The 2016 festival saw attendance increase again, with over 65,000 people attending more than 120 events. Now one of the most exciting science festivals to be found anywhere in Europe, NISF17 will be delivering a heady mix of zombie outbreaks, marvellous medicines inspired by Roald Dahl and the world's first beer to be brewed by artificial intelligence.

Festival Director, Chris McCreery, said: "We are thrilled to be putting on our most exciting festival yet. Northern Ireland has a proud scientific tradition and the enthusiasm we find in our audiences adds up to make this one of the best science festivals anywhere in Europe. Whether you're a five-year-old, a 25-year-old or a 95-year-old, you're going to find something

that will intrigue and excite you, whether it's the genetics of superheroes, a Weird Science cocktail night or a comedy night with a twist."

NISF has also managed to attract some of the UK's most renowned scientific speakers, including Britain's Secret Treasures star, historian Bettany Hughes, who will use the latest archaeological techniques to uncover 800 years of life in Istanbul; Professor Alice Roberts, co-presenter of the BBC's *Coast*, who goes in search of the Celts; and Simon Watt of *Inside Nature's Giants*, who will be celebrating the most aesthetically challenged endangered species with his *Ugly Animals Roadshow*.

Mr McCreery added: "We'll also be treated to a fascinating afternoon of conversation with Belfast's world-renowned physicist Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell and Professor Jim Al-Khalili. Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell is best known for her discovery of pulsars — rotating neutron stars that appear to 'pulse' since the beam of light they emit can only be seen when it faces the Earth. Her feat is considered to be one of the



greatest astronomical discoveries of the 20th Century."

He added: "There's also a rare opportunity to hear from the UK's first astronaut, Helen Sharman OBE, as she recounts her fascinating first-hand experiences of life on the MIR space station."

Helen was working as a chemist for a chocolate company when she heard a radio advert broadcasting a simple request: "Astronaut wanted, no experience necessary," and after 18 months of training in Star City near Moscow, became the first British person in space in May 1991 when she launched on a Soyuz spacecraft to spend 8 days orbiting the Earth.

Meanwhile, Zombie Science is back with Worst Case Scenario, where theoretical Zombiologist Doctor Austin will deliver a spoof tutorial putting you at the heart of a hypothetical Zombieism outbreak. "We will also get to hear from Professor Monica Grady of The Open University - and one of the most passionate characters from the European Space Agency's live Philae landing on comet 67P - who will ponder

the possibilities of alien life, what it might look like and where it could live," said Chris.

Keen-eyed observers may notice a rather culinary theme to many of the events, as the 2017 Festival represents a tasty postscript to Northern Ireland's Year of Food and Drink. Themed around the science behind Northern Ireland's world class food and drink, festival attendees have the chance to taste the world's first beer brewed by artificial intelligence, taste the world's first flax-fed Wagyu beef at the Bullitt Hotel and discover the science behind making the

perfect Irish whiskey. Another event, The Geography of Food and Drinks in Northern Ireland, will use GIS to help create a public web map of the finest breweries, restaurants and traditional food across Northern Ireland.

Meanwhile, visitors taking part in Sipp Up in A Brewery will be able to sample some of the best brews in Derry, meeting brew masters to learn the secrets of their craft. Chris added: "Many firm festival favourites are back by popular demand, including Late Lab3,

Regional Roadshow

For the first time, the festival will travel to towns and cities across Northern Ireland, with fun-filled road shows planned for Enniskillen, Newry, Coleraine and Dungannon.

The four regional road shows will feature deep space in 3D, 'exploding vegetables', stargazing with the Armagh Observatory's Portable Planetarium, and building a working lunar buggy. Visitors will get to handle some of the exotic animals seized by HM Revenue and Customs, perform their own exploding scientific experiments and create their own X-rays.

- 16 Feb: STEM Centre, South West College, Circular Road, Dungannon
- 17 Feb: South West College, 1 Dublin Road, Enniskillen (Old gaol site)
- 18 Feb: Southern Regional College, Patrick Street, Newry
- 19 Feb: Northern Regional College, Union Street, Coleraine

Meanwhile, in the north west, a packed programme of more than 45 events is planned for the Maiden City on Saturday 25 February at Foyle Arena. At the all-day event, pupils will get to control and programme robots, use 3D printers, create apps and take part in science shows featuring a teddy bear rocket launcher and even building a hovercraft on stage.





Alice Roberts, co-presenter of the BBC's Coast

a mix of breathtaking live science shows and intimate sets with hot bands of the moment at the Ulster Museum, and the very messy and explosive 'Lotions, Potions and Explosions' show with Scientific Sue."

Backed by the Department for the Economy, Belfast City Council, Tourism NI, Queen's University, Ulster University, Department for Communities, The Matrix Panel, the British Council and STEM recruitment specialists MCS Group, the festival offers a range of workshops, talks and interactive activities for young people and parents during the day; then a mix of scientific debate, talks, theatres, comedy, music

What's your poison?



and film for adults in the evening.

There's plenty for child audiences too, as they can make their own Marvellous Medicine a la Roald Dahl, discover microscopic critters in the sea at Exploris Aquarium, crack the code of 'The Genetics of Superheroes' or be part of a 'Teen Hackathon' where the most innovative projects will receive spot prizes and a share of £1,000. There's even something for infants - a baby sensory space adventure.

Louise Smyth from MCS Group said: "It's so fantastic to be backing Northern Ireland Science Festival



Jim Al-Khalili, physicist and broadcaster

once again, helping to foster the huge surge of enthusiasm for science that is out there. We know one of the most important priorities for the Northern Ireland economy is to build a STEM-educated workforce and this stimulating programme is a great way to capture that enthusiasm and build a foundation for tomorrow's workforce."

For further information about the Northern Ireland Science Festival and ticketing visit their website at the link below.

Visit online **NI Science Festival**

nisciencefestival.com



Helen Sharman, Britain's First Astronaut

NI Science Festival Big Events

Belfast

Anything but Bland

- *Wed 15 Feb, 6.30pm & 8.30pm, Ulster Hall - £12/£8 concession*

Dumbworld joins forces with the Ulster Orchestra and NISF to present a riotous orchestral performance featuring 200 female singers and celebrating the life of Carnmoney-born Lilian Bland - the world's first woman to design, build and fly an airplane.

Helen Sharman - Britain's First Astronaut

- *Sun 19 Feb, 4pm, Whitla Hall*

Scientist and astronaut Helen Sharman recounts her mission to MIR Space Station in 1991 following 18 months of intensive training in Star City near Moscow.

In Conversation: Dame Jocelyn Bell Burnell and Jim Al-Khalili

- *Sun 26 Feb, 2pm, Whitla Hall*

Belfast-born astrophysicist, Dame Jocelyn Burnell Bell, discusses her life and work with physicist and broadcaster, Professor Jim Al-Khalili.

Derry

What's your poison?

- *Fri 24 Feb, 8pm, Playhouse Theatre*

An evening of toxicology and intoxication. You'll be treated to three delicious drinks while finding out some surprising things about pharmacology.

Zombie Science: Worst Case Scenario

- *Fri 17 Feb, 12pm & 3pm, Playhouse Theatre*

The world's first fully certified interactive tutorial in dealing with a real zombie outbreak.

A Taste of Flavour Sense Nation

- *Sun 26 Feb, 3pm, Playhouse Theatre*

An exciting interactive event that takes your taste buds on a roll-coaster ride through the senses.



With Investment in Lean Engineering and Automation, Nitronica Targets 18% Growth in 2017

Nitronica, an electronics design and manufacturing company headquartered in Ballynahinch, County Down, has an ambitious plan to grow by 18% this year. The company outlines how it will make this a reality, and the role its Lean Engineering team will play in its future business growth.

The markets we operate in are dynamic and ever-changing, so as our business grows we need to be ready and willing to fine tune our strategy in order to ensure we are constantly providing the services and products our customers need as their own businesses evolve and change.

Our primary focus as a Contract Electronics Manufacturer is to ensure that the products and services we supply help place our customers at the forefront of their industry in terms of price, delivery, quality and innovation. The more we can help our customers succeed, the more opportunities there are for us to succeed.

Sterling has taken a huge hit over

the past six months and we've seen the price of imported materials rise accordingly. We obviously can't influence exchange rates one way or the other, so it is now even more vital that we ensure we're doing all we can to minimise the costs that are under our control.

We're investing further in our Lean Engineering team, which will focus on methodology, training, systems and equipment to ensure that our people not only have world-class skills, but are also employing optimum operating methods based on the latest manufacturing thinking. This will ensure that the resulting increase in efficiency does not come at the expense of quality, but actually improves it.

This, coupled with further investment in automated manufacturing equipment, management information and quality systems, will ensure we continue to provide our customers with a service that keeps them at the top end of an ever-demanding marketplace.

Customers are at the very heart of our organisation and form a core part of our new growth strategy. We recognise that everyone is unique, each with their

own specific needs and expectations. By building ever-closer relationships directly with our customers, learning from them and sharing their feedback with our internal teams, we can tailor our services to continuously improve our customers' experience.

We are relatively new to the digital side of marketing, including social media which is an area we have decided to focus on and improve. We plan to continually develop our brand presence online in 2017, which should have a positive effect on our organisation both internally and externally.

Each part of this new strategy will play a significant part in helping us achieve our goal of 18% growth in 2017. It's a very challenging target but with our new plans in place we are looking forward to a prosperous and successful year ahead!

Follow **Nitronica**

 @nitronicadotcom



Big Data Startup, Leopard Business Solutions Expands to Belfast

According to recent market research we now create more than 2.5 quintillion bytes of data globally every day...and 90% of all the data in the world today was created within the last two years alone.

As businesses, both large and small, find their own datasets growing at an exponential rate, it is perhaps not surprising that Big Data Management and Big Data Analytics, which empower businesses to centralise their unstructured and widely dispersed datasets, manipulate and analyse that data and extract commercial value from it, are thriving – both in Northern Ireland and globally.

One Big Data startup, Leopard Business Solutions, which already has operations in England and South Africa, has recently expanded to Belfast in order to bring its innovative services to businesses in Northern Ireland. Nigel Ivy, Director of Leopard Business Solutions, offers Sync NI readers an inside view of how his company can help businesses extract commercial value from their boatload of Big Data.

In a world that is generating more digital data than ever before, and because the success of every business relies on its directors making the best possible decisions based on that data, it's become increasingly important that a company's data is as reliable, accessible and actionable as possible. That's where we come in. With offices in England and South Africa, Leopard Business Solutions recently expanded to Belfast in order to better serve Northern Ireland's fast-growing tech and small business sectors.


Leopard has a successful track record of delivering Big Data projects for companies that range in size from global corporations to regional SMEs. Whatever their size, we specialise in delivering significant results for our customers by helping them extract extra commercial insights from their Big Data. At Leopard we see so many business decisions being made based purely on "hindsight" – previous market activity or historical business performance. Leopard specialises in helping organisations take this "hindsight" and turn it into

"insight" – actionable commercial insights that transform the way they do business. In addition to helping them extract value from their proprietary data, Leopard can take customer data and align it with publically available datasets to generate even more commercial insights; for example, correlating a business's food sales with the weather or public holidays. Understanding these insights can lead to better buying decisions and less wastage, in turn increasing a business's profitability.

As an example, Leopard undertook a fascinating project recently where a global software company was losing market share, but couldn't figure out why. They collected a lot of data about their customers (transaction data, customer feedback, customer satisfaction surveys, market "feel", etc.), but because this data wasn't being managed and analysed, our customer had no way of knowing how big the issue was or what was causing the problem...they just knew that their sales were in decline.

Leopard was brought in and worked with them to build the systems and processes they need to really get the value out of their Big Data, helping them to turn their "hindsight" into "insight". The data they had been collecting was turned into information, the quality and validity of the information was verified and the information was easily accessible for them to use to transform the way they made decisions, which led to them changing their approach and increasing their growth: a very happy client!

If you'd like to find out more about what Leopard do and how we might be able to help your business, we'd love to meet you in Belfast for a coffee and a chat.

Visit online **Leopard Business Solutions**
 leopard.solutions

NI Insurtech Company, Cover.net

Well Placed to Serve Europe's Fast-Growing Insurance Markets



Founded in 1995 and with a client base that includes numerous high profile insurance companies across the UK and Ireland, the Northern Irish insurtech company, Cover.net, has ambitious growth plans for 2017...and beyond.

London and Dublin have grown to become major international hubs for the global insurance market, and both are recognised as 'Global Leaders' in the Global Financial Centres Index.

As well as being the largest in Europe, the UK's insurance industry is the third largest in the world, while Ireland's financial services sector has grown at an impressive rate in recent years and Dublin is now home to a number of leading financial services and specialist insurance firms, including AXA, FBD Holdings, Permanent TSB, Bank of Ireland, Ulster Bank and AIB.

Positioned for growth

From its headquarters in Coleraine, on Northern Ireland's north coast, Cover.Net is well placed to serve insurance businesses in these world-leading financial centres, as well as tech-savvy insurance companies elsewhere in the EU.

Cover.Net already provides its insurtech products to high profile insurance businesses in the UK and Ireland, including AXA, Allianz, Prestige, Autoline, XS Direct and RSA Insurance, but the company has ambitious plans to expand its client base across the British

Isles, as well as winning new business in the EU – where they are already active in Spain and Portugal, with local insurance businesses like Ibex showing great enthusiasm for Cover.Net's range of innovative technology solutions.

Innovation in Insurance

Cover.Net has developed a range of highly innovative software solutions that are specifically designed to meet the needs of insurance companies and brokers, both large and small, including:

ISMIS: Cover.Net's ISMIS platform is the most complete, powerful and flexible solution of its kind in the insurance market. The ISMIS system is designed for MGAs (managing general agents) and other product providers to help them sell and administer their product lines. The ISMIS platform is an entirely internet-based, fully-hosted solution, which removes the need for users to have any specialist hardware or software. Built with scalability in mind, the ISMIS system architecture enables incredible speed-to-market for new builds and ongoing change and maintenance.

CHIME: Cover.Net's fully-hosted, web-based claims management platform, CHIME, provides a complete and flexible solution from first notification to settlement. The platform has been designed for, and alongside, claims management companies and insurance companies that are managing the claims process in-house.

CORE: With minimal set up, and

no need for bespoke development, Cover.Net's CORE module provides underwriters with quick and easy access to all that the full ISMIS policy administration system offers; including Renewals, Claims Management, Accounts Reconciliation, MI and Business Intelligence packages.

A growing market

Data from the OECD indicates that the global insurance market has enjoyed a strong recovery in recent years, following its downturn during the global recession. However, according to research by Deloitte the insurance sector's biggest, most entrenched incumbents are at risk of being disrupted by technology-enabled upstarts unless they themselves embrace technological innovation and insurtech solutions.

Lee Stuart, Cover.Net Managing Director, agrees from experience with Deloitte's findings: "We find, again and again that once insurance companies make the investment in a more modern and flexible IT solution they find the rewards returned leads to growth within the market and future proofs their business in a sector where innovation breeds success."

Cover.Net is perfectly placed, both geographically and technologically, to help Europe's leading insurance firms embrace digital innovation...and the Northern Irish insurtech company's plans for the year ahead should see it do exactly that. Watch this space.

Digital technology in 2020 thought leaders weigh in

Dawn has broken on a new year... but we're also on the cusp of a brand new decade.

To many people 2020 might still sound like a far-off setting in a futuristic novel or sci-fi movie, but of course it's actually just a few short years away. The future is (almost) now – close enough to make an educated guess about how digital technology and digitally-enabled business might evolve by the start of the new decade.

With that in mind, a diverse range of thought leaders have agreed to share their thoughts on the future of technology with Sync NI readers; this is what they had to say.

A mobile-first world

By 2020 5G networks will be live, offering a 100x leap in mobile bandwidth, and with this major improvement in connectivity the mobile web will surpass apps, driven in part by Google and Facebook.

Mobile will therefore be defined by the utility of access to online information and content anywhere, not the apps you have. There will be a lot more short videos than photos, even streaming, with the leader Snapchat continuing its phenomenal growth.

Voice-activated AI tools will keep improving, so we will talk to our smartphones and tablets more than we tap or swipe them. VR/mixed reality may become a mainstream tool if VR

Thought Leader
Norbert Sagnard

Angel investor and
Co-founder of Mobile
Academy Belfast and
Mobile Monday



device sizes and costs shrink, and dedicated content increases.

These technologies will leverage ubiquitous connectivity to the cloud, and 'Smart' will extend beyond 'phone' with machine learning, sensors, and video making the smartphone part of a wider ecosystem, increasing the number of mobile transactions.

Digital disruption: career edition

When someone handed you a calculator for the first time, it meant that long division was never going to be required of you ever again. A huge savings in time, a decrease in the cognitive load of decision-making. Now what?

You can use that surplus to play video games and hang out. Or you can

use that surplus to go learn how to do something that can't be done by someone merely because she has a calculator.

Either way, your career as a long-divisionator was over.

Entire professions and industries are disrupted by the free work and shortcuts that are produced by the connection economy, by access to information, by robots. Significant parts of your job are almost certainly among them.

Now that we can get what you used to do really quickly and cheaply from someone else, you can either insist that you still get to do that for us at the same fee you used to charge, or you can move up the ladder and do something we can't do without you.

Thought Leader
Seth Godin

Author of 18
bestselling business
books, founder of
two tech startups



Cybersecurity, front and centre

As the digital landscape continues to expand in size and complexity, it not only supports economic growth and business opportunities, but also new “yet to be thought of” cybercrime threats.

Organisations need to expect security incidents and to plan for cyber resilience, putting more emphasis on detection, response and recovery.

Thought Leader Conrad Simpson

Director and co-founder of Cyphra, leading cyber security experts



The shortage of cyber security skills will drive increased growth in security

outsourcing to support these needs and provide new industry opportunities to combine AI and detection automation.

Data privacy concerns will continue to shape consumer behaviours making them increasingly likely to switch companies if a data breach occurs. This, together with the imminent new regulations in this area, should provide a wake up to organisations to ensure that their cyber risks are understood and effectively managed.

Content without borders

Rather than living in isolation in marketing, over the next few years digital content will make significant inroads to benefit the entire organisation. At progressive organisations salespeople will curate digital content; customer support will send digital content to

Thought Leader David Meerman Scott

Bestselling business writer, author of The New Rules of Marketing and PR



solve problems; and management will use digital content engagement metrics to manage the business.

A digital future, minus the digital divide

Digital innovation has transformed the world of business in recent years. Online meetings, collaborative platforms, and visualisation of data are all now mainstream in most businesses, not just the tech sector. This has created a need for digital skills that are not always in existence in the current workforce, even in roles that would not have needed to have technical expertise in the past.

I believe one of the key challenges for business is to develop a continuous learning culture, that upskills existing employees to explore and adopt new digital innovations to drive business development and creativity. Often skills are learnt on the job, and only a small portion of the capabilities of the tool are made use of. These tools have vast

Thought Leader Carol Fitzsimons MBE

Chief Executive, Young Enterprise Northern Ireland



functionalities that users are unaware of, that have the potential to change and simplify how they work.

Collaborative working is vital. Bandwidth challenges are mostly gone, and the tools exist. We now need to invest time in our workforce to bring everyone along on the journey. By investing in the application of technology to all functions, we can truly realise the benefits of collaborative working.

Global from the get-go

I think the main shift we are going to see is increased consolidation of money flow through the 800-pound gorillas, Facebook and Google. There are a few forces contributing to that:

Subscription or paid business models are continuing to give way to advertising-supported or data-supported revenue models. Who pays for Google Docs? Android OS?

The digital advertising that fills this is increasingly under a credibility threat as a result of bot fraud and non-human

traffic.

Facebook and Google are best positioned to solve this problem because they have identities for their users within their “walled gardens”

Advertising dollars will flow to where the inventory can be guaranteed to be human-viewed and brand safe.

Local marketplace businesses could be disrupted by “loss-leader” products such as Facebook Marketplace.

This means smaller companies get squeezed out of the digital economy and new-entrants have more difficulty reaching adequate scale. This is

important for small economies like ours, and forces Irish/Northern Irish digital businesses to “think global” from the outset.

Thought Leader Ronan Higgins

Founder of TVAdSync, an innovative adtech firm





Will 2017 be the Year Augmented Reality is Embraced by the Workplace?

2 016 could have been described as ‘the year of Pokémon GO’ – a year when the global popularity of augmented reality apps that were specifically designed for consumers, including AR games like Niantic’s Pokémon GO, brought the concept of immersive technologies well and truly into the mainstream.

The extraordinary runaway success of the Pokémon GO app last year, which saw millions of players around the world suddenly begin hunting down virtual Pokémon in the real world via their smartphones, initially added an incredible \$9 billion to Nintendo’s share price (although a lot of those gains were given back after the app’s popularity waned).

Recent research from the technology market research company, Juniper Research, though, indicates that

business applications of augmented reality technologies are actually set to eclipse the consumer AR market in the very near future. The firm’s forecasts suggest the global revenues deriving from enterprise AR apps will climb to \$5.7 billion by 2021, rising tenfold from an estimated \$515 million in 2016.

Juniper suggests business interest in augmented reality technologies will continue to grow at a significant rate in 2017, fuelled by improvements in field-of-vision and latency on Head Mounted Displays (HMDs). Future releases of these dedicated augmented reality units, such as the Microsoft HoloLens, are expected to drive AR content revenues in the enterprise sector, as businesses begin favouring head mounted displays in the workplace over smartphones and tablets.

That said, a number of market forecasts have predicted that the bespoke, tailored nature of content

in the enterprise AR sector, such as DAQRI’s partnerships with Hyperloop and Siemens, will initially lead to higher app prices. Enterprise AR revenues are also forecast to remain on smartphone and tablet devices in the near term, given the prohibitive cost of dedicated AR hardware.

However, a heavy enterprise-focus from manufacturers, including Microsoft and Vuzix, within the next year or two should see the largest revenue opportunity for AR content developers move from phones and tablets to Head Mounted Displays within the next three years.

For now, though, the combination of higher content pricing and the prohibitive cost of dedicated augmented reality hardware could hamper adoption of AR in the workplace this year, with only the earliest tech-adopters in the enterprise space willing to embrace the technology in 2017.

STARTUP SPOTLIGHT

GrifAlgo

and machine learning: the future of graduate recruitment

GrifAlgo, the algorithm matchmaking and talent tracking tool for graduate employers, is on a mission to revolutionise the HR software market. Sync NI recently had the opportunity to chat with Niamh Parker, GrifAlgo's founder and CEO, to learn more about this SaaS product and the company's plans for 2017...



How is GrifAlgo uniquely placed in the recruitment sector, and how does your Clone-Track-Match formula work to ease the pressures on employers recruiting in a saturated graduate job market?

At GrifAlgo our main mission is to bring dual visibility to graduate recruitment. Our Clone-Track-Match system is built around accurate data outputs, based on data entry by both candidate and employer. Our matching algorithm will identify potential candidates with the common traits required to progress successfully within the company based on a common profile of a successful employee/partner. GrifAlgo benchmarks attributes based on a generic profile provided by the client/company, using pattern matching and concept detection. This narrows the search for candidates with the likely attributes and traits required by the employer to ensure a perfect match.

Have you had to overcome any specific challenges during the early development phase?

We began as LawSwot and took one industry to see what the uptake

was like. In the beginning we tried to be all things to all people. We had the academic Q&A section, which brought a lot of traffic and unique visitors, but students were not completing their profiles and it was almost as if they did not want employers to know they were accessing the material. We started out with proof of concept in Version 1 to enable us to test our product and get valuable feedback from our customers. We soon realised we had to work with our potential customers first instead of focusing on our user base. A top legal firm told us to consider changing the name of our product and after careful consideration, we did.

What are your predictions for the future of artificial intelligence and machine learning, particularly amongst startups in Ireland?

Data science as a whole is fundamental for growth. The use of people, social and data analytics are crucial to achieving competitive advantage. Linked data and reasoning algorithms will assist companies, providing more meaningful insights into their clients and assist with marketing strategies, policy driven initiatives,

technology road maps and client reporting.

What advice would you offer to those who are starting out in business, specifically in relation to securing financial investment and building strong support networks?

The best piece of advice we can offer is go to your customers early. Make market research a priority as all investors, government or private, will want to see the size of the total addressable market. Also, retain as much equity as possible in the beginning because you will need to have the equity available when you are going to market. Apply for competitions and practice pitching your product. And tell a story - investors invest in people so look up and engage, don't read from your presentation.

Can you tell us a little about your company growth plans for 2017?

In the months ahead we are planning to open offices in Belfast and Cork, with a launch in the United States scheduled for Q3. This will yield £1.4 million revenue in 2017/2018, increasing to £2.3 million by 2018/2019.

How Can Female Entrepreneurs in the UK Overcome the Gender Funding Gap?

AllBright Builds a Bridge



Despite growing awareness that startups and technology companies need to do more to foster gender equality in the tech sector, when it comes to startup funding around 90% of all venture capital still goes to male-led businesses – a trend that is known as the gender funding gap.

That's why AllBright, a new crowdfunding and angel investment platform with a mission to discover, fund and support the country's best female entrepreneurs, was recently launched in the UK – to help female startup founders bridge the funding gap. The new investment platform combines a crowdfunding service (AllBright Crowd) with an angel investment network (AllBright Angel Network), as well as offering female entrepreneurs access to business resources and learning via its professional training academy (AllBright Academy).

In addition to supporting female entrepreneurs right across the UK, including Northern Ireland, AllBright offers an attractive investment option for individual and angel investors by providing them with EIS tax relief on their investments, in addition to helping them discover the very best female-led startups. AllBright was founded by two highly respected female leaders in the digital and business world: Debbie Wosskow, founder and CEO at Love Home Swap, and Anna Jones, CEO at Hearst Magazines UK. Debbie Wosskow

explained their motivation behind the new investment platform: "There is some exceptional female business talent in the UK just waiting to be discovered and accelerated. I've been on the journey they are making and understand acutely the difference accessing the right funding and support can make, as do our network of angel investors.

"AllBright delivers on two fronts – not only do we get to 'give back' investing in and sharing our knowledge with the next generation, but there is also a real financial opportunity for our investors to benefit from the untapped asset class of some of the UK's best female entrepreneurs."

Anna Jones, AllBright Co-founder, added: "AllBright isn't just about providing the capital, we understand that for businesses to scale they need the confidence that comes from having access to the relevant skills, technology, knowledge and people. Our combined experience and network means we have the ability to tackle every area a business needs to thrive from the start, super-charging both the companies and their executive teams.

"This isn't just a win for existing businesses and investors, AllBright can also play a critical role for the British economy. Recent figures show that if every woman who wanted to run her own business, started a business then it could release a possible £10.1 billion boost to the UK economy."



Patrick Leggett, Director at Xperience IT Solutions

Cybercrime

A risk you can't ignore in 2017

Xperience IT Solutions, an Xperience Group business, is a leading IT Solutions provider in Northern Ireland that has worked with hundreds of SME's across the province to devise security strategies and recovery measures for those who have experienced attacks. Patrick Leggett, Director at Xperience IT Solutions, offers Sync NI readers several steps they can take to minimise the risk of a cyber-attack.

Reports by the Annual Fraud Indicator highlight the fact that online fraud is costing businesses in excess of £190 billion globally each year, while in Northern Ireland an astonishing 9 in 10 businesses suffered a cyber-breach in 2016.

Cybercrime is a real threat to organisations, resulting in downtime, data loss, dented pockets and a diminished reputation. Surprisingly, many businesses still do not have preventative measures in place to deal with threats. With the frequency and severity of cyber incidents increasing, it is a risk business leaders simply cannot afford to take. It's essential they plan ahead and form a strategic action plan to ensure their business is protected.

SME's bearing the Brunt of Cyber-Crime

The PSNI has estimated that more than £13 million was lost to online

fraud in 2015. With lower security defences, outdated software and a lack of awareness, small businesses are bearing the brunt of this cyber-crime.

Patrick Leggett, Director at Xperience IT Solutions, explains: "Cyber criminals are employing increasingly sophisticated means of stealing data, so there is no option but for SME's to do more to protect themselves. We urge all organisations to understand the risks, educate staff, introduce policies and develop a strategic action plan to address security concerns".

Take Steps to Cyber-Resilience

Cyber security preparedness starts with having a complete understanding of the internal and external vulnerabilities that can affect a business. Business leaders must ensure positive steps are taken to manage threats, minimise risk and become cyber resilient.

To tackle this issue head on, Xperience IT Solutions recommends business leaders should take the following steps as a starting point:

- Review internal skills and knowledge to determine if external help is needed
- Create a strategic action plan, which includes measures to prevent, detect and respond to potential security threats
- It's all about education, so leaders should ensure all staff are aware of

potential threats and made aware of preventative measures. It is a good idea to include such information within a company's HR policies and procedures

- Take extra precautions when handling emails with attachments; before opening ensure it is from a trusted source
- Ensure important business data is backed-up regularly to prevent total loss of data. In the event back-up routines aren't followed, or backups are corrupted, seek advice from a trusted IT provider
- Create a knowledge-sharing hub, so that when new threats emerge everyone is aware of what to look out for.

At this stage, the question is not "if" a cyber-attack will take place, it's "when". The harsh reality is the longer the recovery time, the higher the cost is to your business. Ultimately, it is the prevention methods in place that will determine the impact of an attack, and can reduce the risk of mass data loss.

To book a complimentary Security Audit for your business:

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☎ Call 028 92 677 533

Quote Ref SYNC-XP1

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LEGO

Launches New Product that can Help Teach Coding Skills to Kids

LEGO, the block-building toy company that has served as a cornerstone of childhood memories for generations, is bringing a touch of digital innovation to its latest product with the launch of LEGO BOOST, a supercharged building and coding set that lets children bring their LEGO creations to life by adding movement, sound and personality.

LEGO's latest product incorporates an app-based coding environment that children can use to animate their blocky creations, an element of play that could help give kids a basic understanding of, and a taste for, coding.

LEGO BOOST combines the creativity of a traditional LEGO set with a wide variety of movement and sound capabilities, which are made possible through an easy-to-use, app-based coding environment. Developed for children aged 7 and up, and employing familiar LEGO bricks together with a simple, child-friendly coding language, LEGO BOOST offers kids an intuitive approach to interacting with and programming their creations.

"We know that children dream of bringing their LEGO creations to life, and our chief ambition for LEGO BOOST is to fulfil that wish. Once children build a LEGO creation, we give them simple coding tools to 'boost' their models by adding personality," said Simon Kent, design lead for the LEGO Group. "We want children to first and foremost have a fun and limitless play experience, adding the coding opportunity is the means to get there."

Powered by a Move Hub, a LEGO stud-covered brick with a built-in tilt sensor that children can then fit with other LEGO elements, motors and a sensor that combines colour and distance detection, LEGO BOOST is capable of animating almost any LEGO creation.

The set includes building instructions for five programmable models: Vernie the Robot, Frankie the Cat, the Guitar 4000, the Multi-Tool Rover 4 and the Autobuilder, each designed to give children the basic building and coding skills needed to express their creativity by personalising and engaging with whatever they decide to build.

Northern Irish Startup, Hurree,

Reveals Plan to Create 10 New Jobs After Successful Crowdfunding campaign

Hurree, a Northern Irish marketing automation startup, plans to create 10 new jobs following a highly successfully crowdfunding campaign on Crowdcube, where the company raised more than £320,000.

The startup achieved 107% of its funding goal, with 181 investors committing a total of £321,830 in equity funding via Crowdcube. In addition to a significant number of individual backers, Hurree's crowdfunding campaign won support from institutional investors such as Rockfirst Capital, Foresight Group and TechStartNI.

Founded in Belfast in 2014 by serial entrepreneur, Aaron Gibson, Hurree transforms a mobile phone's push notification into a powerful tool for brands to promote and communicate with their app users via multiple channels. By monitoring the data most relevant to them, Hurree allows brands to predict behaviours and tailor marketing campaigns to individual app users. The result is deeper engagement with users and increased sales.

Hurree CEO Aaron Gibson said: "We're extremely grateful for the support we received on Crowdcube, which included

both individuals and institutional investors. The crowdfunding campaign has reaffirmed to us that there is a definite need for our platform and strong support for our business model. Hurree is now focusing on growth in existing and new markets, and aims to create up to 10 high skilled jobs in the next 12 months to facilitate this."

Investor Charlie Barlow, from Rockfirst Capital, said: "Hurree has already begun to develop relationships with market leaders such as Salesforce and Oracle. Indeed, Oracle's last two acquisitions of Netsuite for \$9.3billion and Opower for \$532million suggests there is considerable appetite in the market for mobile marketing products such as that offered by Hurree. We're now gearing the company up for its Series A funding round in the very near future."

Until now push notifications have been hard-coded into apps – requiring an action in order to get a push notification – and that means marketers

haven't been able to fully look at the analytics and get to know what makes their customers tick. Hurree changes all that.

The platform also offers feature-rich push notifications, in-app messaging, cross-channel marketing and email marketing. To date, Hurree has been adopted by over 90 organisations involved in e-commerce, retail, gaming as well as lifestyle. Following a 30-day free trial, businesses using the Hurree platform pay \$99.99 per month with optional add ons, making it 50% more cost effective than its closest competitor.

"For its price point, we lead the market in feature-rich content, supporting emojis, GIFs and video. We are offering something unique to the marketplace and we're extremely excited for the future," Aaron added.

Follow **Hurree**

 **@Hurree_me**

Event Spotlight

syncni.com/events

Google Analytics for Communication Professionals

10th November - Crumlin Road Gaol, Belfast

If you are a PR Manager and you have been struggling with how you can use analytics to report on the impact on your above-the-line marketing then this is the training course for you. Or perhaps you are a Marketing Manager who needs to take analytics reporting to the next level and utilise insight from Google Analytics to build a business case for marketing projects?

This analytics training session is geared towards helping you use the power available through Google analytics reporting.

To find out more and ticket information

Visit online **Mindworks**



mindworkspace.com



The Mobile Academy Belfast 2017

10th May - Ulster University (Belfast campus), Belfast

The Mobile Academy Belfast is an innovative part time learning course for professionals in Northern Ireland who want to understand the mobile ecosystem, hatch a new mobile business or product idea, bring mobile know-how into their organisation, or perhaps move their career on.

The Mobile Academy is a new style of programme created by University College London (UCL) and Mobile Monday London to focus on design, technology & business within the mobile ecosystem. Mobile Monday Belfast and Ulster University's School of Computing and Mathematics are licensing this programme for the second year, and offering it to professionals of all backgrounds in Northern Ireland.

To find out more and ticket information

Visit online **Mobile Academy Belfast**



MobileAcademyBelfast.org

Upcoming Events

syncni.com/events



Monthly Tech Mixer Informal Networking

WHEN 22nd Feb 2017

WHERE The Spaniard, Belfast



Workshop: Building the dream startup team

WHEN 23rd Feb 2017

WHERE Cromore Rd, Coleraine

🐦 @CICConnect



PHA Healthy Working Lives Conference 2017

WHEN 2nd Mar 2017

WHERE Riddel Hall, Belfast

🐦 @bitcni



Google Analytics for Communication Professionals

WHEN 9th Mar 2017

WHERE Church View, Holywood

🐦 @Mindworkspace



Meetup: 99 second talks

WHEN 30th Mar 2017

WHERE Belfast



Get More of the Right People to Your Website

WHEN 13th Apr 2017

WHERE Church View, Holywood

🐦 @Mindworkspace



AppSecEU 2017

WHEN 8th May 2017

WHERE Belfast

🐦 @appseceu



The Mobile Academy Belfast 2017

WHEN 10th May 2017

WHERE Ulster University, Belfast

🐦 @mobileacademynt



Digital Marketing Masterclass

WHEN 11th May 2017

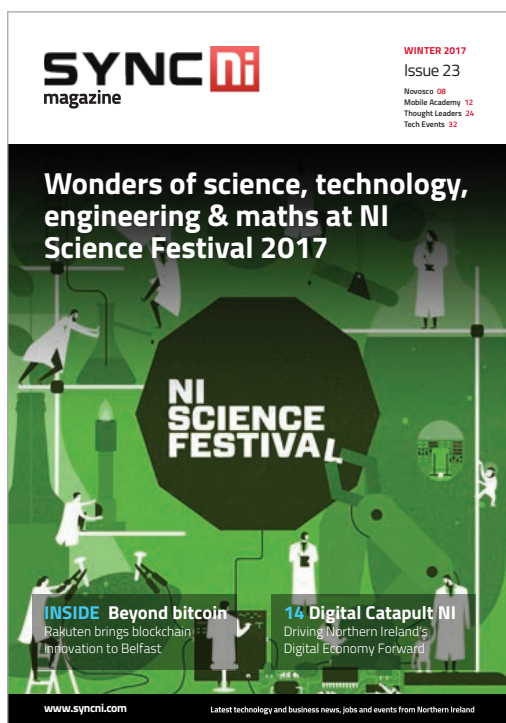
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Isn't it funny that as the New Year rings in, we are somehow conditioned to free ourselves from the baggage that has weighed us down during the previous months? Yes, a New Year means new beginnings: a golden chance to wipe the slate clean, reprioritise and look towards the wealth of opportunities that lie ahead in a world that is faster, and bolder, than ever.

In his foreword, Tom Gray directs us to the opportunities that await our local businesses, particularly in the field of artificial intelligence. Demonstrating how AI is being used by Northern Irish companies across a diverse range of sectors, Tom

Logging Off

emphasises how early adoption is the key to unlocking vital commercial opportunities and seizing competitive advantage. Together with Digital Catapult NI, Tom assures us that further support structures are now in place to help companies make Northern Ireland a leading region in AI, and indeed other emerging technologies.

The recently opened Rakuten Blockchain Lab, located right in the heart of Belfast, is proof that our capital city is also gaining international recognition as a fintech cluster. The new lab, and the high-quality jobs it will bring to the city, makes this an exciting chapter, particularly for the engineering talent in Northern Ireland.

And cloud computing provider Novosco serves as a prime example of a home-grown company that is investing wisely and is deeply committed to the development of its people, not just for business growth but also to help nurture and expand the minds of our young people by enabling them to gain hands-on IT experience through the Novosco Cloud Camp.

Likewise, the arrival of Leopard Business Solutions in Belfast, Hurree's crowdfunding success, Cover.Net's strong position in the global insurtech arena and Nitronica's investment in its Lean Engineering Team should inspire other business leaders to think hard about what they too want to achieve for their companies in 2017. We've

explored the fascinating history of the British Computing Society and the incredible work it has done since its formation in 1957. But this is just the beginning. As we look to the years ahead, where the Internet of Things and artificial intelligence will form part of everyday life, the mission is to achieve greater diversity and inclusion in our workforce, and our economy as a whole.

Stepping forward to help close the gender funding gap, AllBright is actively supporting female entrepreneurs across the UK and Northern Ireland, opening doors to financial investment opportunities, and providing access to critical business skills and knowledge.

From Seth Godin's enthralling take on the future of self-driving cars, to Origin Digital and Mobile Academy Belfast's invaluable advice on how we can embrace a mobile-first world, it is clear that as our society moves ever-forward enormous opportunities lie ahead.

And it is this quest for discovery, this human need to explore and lose - and find - ourselves in the wonders of science that makes the NI Science Festival such a popular event.

Kicking off on 16th February and running for ten days, NI Science Festival's event line-up is truly spectacular. The excitement is building!



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