



\$3m investment proves Ireland still has the right R&D stuff

John Kennedy

WHILE the full human and fiscal impact of Dell's departure from Limerick has yet to be borne out across the mid-west, it must be remembered this nation still has something to offer, and we need to keep an eye on the future.

That's why a \$3m (€2.2m) investment in R&D by internet giant Cisco at a Galway university research lab could sow the right seeds and cement Ireland's reputation as a core enabler for the future of the internet.

The California-headquartered firm employs 200 people in Ireland - 140 at an R&D operation in Galway, and 60 in Dublin - has committed to a \$3m collaboration with the National University of Ireland, Galway campus organisation, Digital Enterprise Research Institute (DERI), to develop business technologies Cisco aims to bring to market in the next three years.

Cisco established its global R&D arm in Galway two years ago, and general manager Mike Conroy explains that the operation is ahead of schedule in terms of employment and research goals.

He says the group has developed core technologies - ranging from videoconferencing systems based around Cisco's TelePresence technology to voice, video and instant messaging for health workers and business professionals.

"Just last week, our team were part of the team that won the best in show award at the MacWorld event for a collaborative application on the iPhone. We have shipped vital unified communications technologies that are used by Cisco and we have received important industry accolades."

Conroy says we stand at

a pivotal point in the development of the internet.

"What we're seeing is a strong marriage of software applications and the web environment. We're consumed with developing technologies that centre around the physical location of an individual, and marrying that with real-time technology."

With almost 130 people, Conroy says the Cisco R&D lab has had no difficulties in attracting the right calibre of graduates, particularly PhD graduates.

DERI, which was established in 2003, has, so far, attracted over €48m in investment, principally from Science Foundation Ireland, but also IDA Ireland, Enterprise Ireland and the EU, along with technology firms like Cisco, Nortel, Ericsson, Storm Technology, CynTelix, Openlink Software, Celtrak and Fidelity.

The group works not only with technology giants, but also with some of Ireland's leading SMEs to bring them to the next level. Eight SMEs who work with Cisco have seen their typical R&D outlay grow from just €200,000 up to €3m on average.

"These firms have brought themselves to the head of the posse in their respective fields and this will be vital for creating Ireland's industries of the future," says DERI chief executive Mike Turley.

Turley said DERI is now the largest semantic web institute worldwide, with trademarked affiliates at Stanford University and in Seoul.

"We will be working with Cisco to use semantic web and sensor network technologies to create smart services. This will see the use of computer-to-computer networking to deliver a smarter web search than a Google search today.

"If someone has diabetes, we will use technology to take readers off sensors automatically and push the data to the relevant people like doctors."

In light of recent shocks like

Dell's departure, Turley says that it must be remembered Ireland has a lot to offer, having built up an unparalleled reputation as a technology location. The momentum of the past two decades, allied with the vital ground-up investment in science infrastructure, needs to be sustained.

"I've worked in multinationals for 25 years and I don't think Irish people have anything to fear about being world class. The generations coming out now have the education and the confidence. My generation might have had to prove itself, but we have the critical mass in terms of IT and biomedicine.

"We just need to remember to approach the business of research in a business-like manner. We need to keep the pipeline of students studying maths and science alive, and teenagers need to see there are potential careers in research, with opportunities to set up their own companies. Confidence is key."

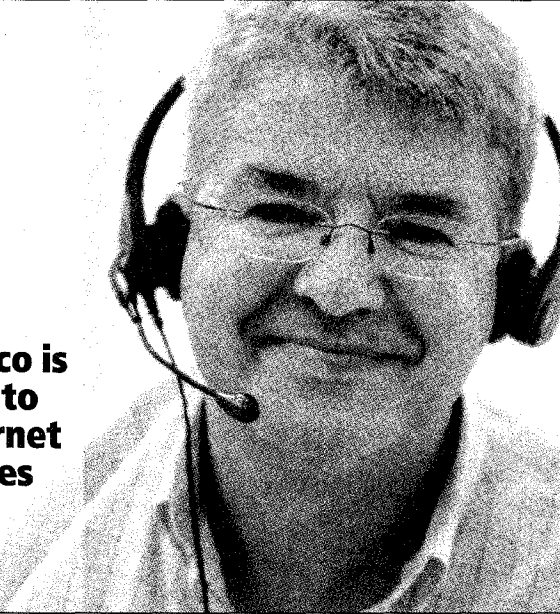
Cisco's Mike Conroy agrees. "We're seeing a global shift occurring. From a uniquely Irish aspect, there's a shift from property-based growth to innovation and export-based growth, which is long overdue.

"It's clearly a painful adjustment, but ultimately if we focus on productivity, innovation, exports and cost control, we will build a solid economy in the next few years," he says.

And Conroy has just given \$3m worth of reasons for us to sit up and pay attention.

IRLAND CONNECTS

- **Cisco employs 140 people in Galway**
- **DERI employs 130 research staff**
- **€48m – amount of funding DERI has attracted to date**
- **€2.2m – amount Cisco is investing with DERI to develop future internet business technologies**



The general manager of Cisco's multimillion euro R&D operation in Galway, Mike Conroy. Cisco is investing \$3m as part of an R&D collaboration with the NUI, Galway-based DERI lab