

Greater Ireland

Irish Communities

'Linking the Global Irish Community'

The Island of Ireland 6 Million

World 72 Million (without Ireland)

Irish Affiliated Unknown

The Proposition:

‘Linking the Global Irish Community’

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Introduction:

We were inspired by our Government's "Global Irish Economic Forum" initiative in September 2009 in Farmleigh. We believe the empathy, the vision and the enthusiasm expressed at the Forum can now be articulated and implemented in many ways. It is our strong desire to play our part in contributing to that vision and initiative. We passionately believe now is the time to take this big idea, to energise it and to take it to higher ground.

It is clear one of the most important challenges of the coming decade will be our individual and societal ability to reorganise and to achieve reinvention. As a race we Irish have tremendous tangible and intangible assets to revive and to build upon. Throughout our history we have demonstrated our ability to respond to change and to adjust well and quickly to new and challenging environments.

It takes creative steps to reorganise and to reinvent. We recognise the "world is flat" and we are ready for an empathic leap beyond national boundaries to biosphere boundaries. We understand the need to empathise as a global family, to evolve from "local to global". Yet we recognise also that national identity and national pride informs us and shapes us within the global family.

As a race we are acknowledged globally for our leadership skills, intellectual expertise, cultural achievement and human connectivity. Our international likeability rating is very high! Our human DNA chain is spread across all continents. 70 million of us identify ourselves as Irish, with 6 million of us living on the island of Ireland, 34.7 million in the U.S.A, 14 million in Britain, 3.48 million in Canada, 1.8 million in Australia.

Our recent economic and societal difficulties and challenges at home can be best dealt with by evolving and connecting in a more meaningful way to our global family. Our kinship and empathy can be taken to a deeper level and can create a dynamic energy that will forge new ways of connecting with each other to ensure we survive and we flourish.

Franklin Roosevelt said "national recovery was dependent on the spirit of the pioneer, of firm leadership, bold moves and the importance of dramatic steps to reorganise industry and national life" and that "happiness lies not in the mere possession of money, but in the joy of achievement, and the thrill of creative effort"

A global network facilitates a vast extension in empathic consciousness. It is our belief that our proposed "Global Hub" endeavour will develop the power and the passion of real connectivity, with an ethos of co-operation and inter-dependency.

Our own personal backgrounds and achievements give us the connectivity and the resources to develop this global network. We propose that our digital global network will embrace business, cultural and social dimensions, and that by using internet technology we will grow a powerful business that will benefit many. In conjunction with our global internet portal, we have identified a number of international locations that will be home for "Celtic Connections" offices throughout the world.

Celtic Connections: An Overview

Document Purpose: Because of our unique history, up to 70 million people worldwide claim Irish descent. No formal comprehensive attempt has ever been made to tap into this enormous potential resource. There is a potential additional (much smaller) market, the so-called 'Affinity Diaspora' - foreign nationals who have lived in Ireland but have now returned to their country of origin. **Celtic Connections** is an initiative to bond these groups, commercially and socially. Our goal is simple: *Build a powerful business and social community which is unmatched by any nation on earth.* The subtle messages: *Buy Irish, hire Irish, and support Ireland.*

The time-span envisaged goes beyond any particular economic cycle. This is not a moment-in-time effort to re-float the Irish economy after the fall of the Celtic Tiger. It is a more ambitious project, an attempt to change the way Irish people do business globally and how we use the potential asset of 70+ million global supporters, many of whom have achieved significant leadership positions.

Global Leaders: Across the world, many Irish people have attained positions of leadership. For example, it is estimated that up to 30% of the Fortune 500 CEO's, claim Irish descent, an enormous potential asset for the country - if - we can find a way to harness this. With just 5 million people on the island and 32,000 square miles of land, we certainly don't have a size advantage. This project offers us the potential to start swimming in the big pool.

Empathy to Energy: People of Irish descent typically feel a gra for the country and wish to contribute to the future success of Ireland. Many wish to maintain or renew their links with Ireland, or to discover more about their Irish heritage. We need to turn this '*empathy into energy*'. The Global Irish Economic Event demonstrated evidence of the desire to do something productive for Ireland if the right vehicle for this could be developed. **Celtic Connections** meets this particular need. It will allow the Irish Diaspora to continue to link with the country. It also provides a vehicle for Irish people living at home to connect with the global marketplace, reaching people of influence across the world. It provides forums where people can meet, connect and do business. In addition, **Celtic Connections** will showcase Irish talent and Irish products. It communicates the pride that we collectively feel in being Irish.

Services Menu: There are a wide variety of potential service offerings. While these may be expanded as we move forward, we have outlined eight (8) specific initiatives. The primary vehicle to communicate these services will be our Website (**www.CelticConnections.com**). This baseline information will be supplemented with a range of person-to-person contacts and events to bring the 'connectedness' concept to life - a road show that tells the world a single, positive message. *Ireland is open for business.*

Celtic Connections: 1 Big Idea: 8 Specific Offerings

1. Business Connect: Many people would subscribe to the view that 'networking' is a key element in business success. John Donne originally informed us that: '*no man is an island*'; since then, businesspeople have put this lesson to good use. In this arena, **Celtic Connections** offers a perfect vehicle to network with similar-interest groups. Our website will become the network point for people interested in doing business in Ireland, and for Irish people doing business abroad. It will have tips on how business is conducted in Ireland (*Irish Business Culture*) with useful information on government services and supports. A key element throughout the website will be linkages to other useful information sites. A sub-set of this will be access to high-end consulting services to companies who want to do business in Ireland, and Irish business seeking to do business abroad, but find it difficult to navigate the system.

Going Abroad: Celtic Connections will also become the 'registration point' for Irish people & organizations that want to do business overseas. Within Ireland, there are a range of companies that seek access to international markets to sell products, services or secure financing. The website will list all companies within Ireland who are interested in doing business internationally (*Green Pages Directory*) with descriptions of what they do. Our international global hub offices will serve as contact points for doing business.

Special Interest Groups: Through dedicated forums (*St. Patrick's Networks*), we will facilitate 'specialist' sub-groups who will concentrate on particular areas of business. Some examples might include:

a. Food Island: Ireland has begun to position itself as '*the international food island*'. Building on our natural food/organic image, we will put specialist suppliers and producers in touch with each other to nurture linkages and create business opportunity.

b. Sustainable Environment: There are great examples in Ireland of world-class projects, which combine physical infrastructure and community development. The regeneration of Dublin Docklands and Ballymun showcase the type of projects that could be replicated elsewhere. The scale of the ambition is not simply to develop beautiful buildings. The goal is to create sustainable communities, which meet the economic, educational and social needs of the people who live and work in regeneration areas. Across the globe, 'City Hall' is becoming more and more involved in large-scale redevelopment projects. The 'Sustainable Environment' approach gives development projects more chance of success at both the concept, planning and funding stages.

c. Inter-Continental: Ireland has a special relationship with a number of developing countries, for example the 7 priority aid countries identified in Africa. Our long history of support in working with these countries offers opportunities to progress a business development agenda for companies who have the competencies to add value in the developing world. A more detailed explanation of this opportunity is captured in Appendix A.

c. Import Substitution: Working with Enterprise Ireland, we will develop a database of companies in Ireland who are seeking to 'substitute' products currently sourced abroad. Their preference would be to substitute current imports with materials made in Ireland or sourced from overseas manufacturing companies with Irish connections.

d. Cead Mile Failte: Within the hospitality sector there are opportunities to collaborate, encouraging tourism through a range of promotion and incentives. Outside of the country, the growth of 'Irish Bars' is one of our cultural export success stories. Our website will link people with specialist business interests in this key sector.

e. Education Network: The Irish education system is recognized globally as producing excellent graduates, with an ability to problem-solve and innovate. Many people of Irish descent would welcome an opportunity for their children to study internationally, particularly spending time in Ireland during a semester abroad or a longer study period. We would target the Irish Diaspora, with a specific campaign to have children and grandchildren complete part of their 3rd level education in Ireland. We would also build a network of 3rd level institutions that wish to co-operate in getting study abroad students.

There are several elements to this. The first is 'branding' Ireland as a place of educational opportunity e.g. within North America. Secondly, we will target specific growth markets e.g. China where Ireland is not as well known from an education perspective as, say, the United Kingdom. The third area is to identify opportunities where there are world-shortages of skills e.g. the training of medical graduates. The final area is to offer some programmes from Ireland on a distance-learning basis (e.g. Irish History).

Customized Agenda: The niche areas listed above are offered as examples. People who become members of **Celtic Connections** will drive this agenda. We see possibilities for collaboration across a range of businesses including, biotech, digital media, Green Energy, ICT/software and medical devices. We also envisage the establishment of groups within specific geographies e.g. the Atlanta Group. Where there are existing groups in place e.g. university alumni associations we will seek to collaborate (rather than to compete) with these.

Values Driven: A foundation stone of the **Celtic Connections** global Irish business community will be a well-articulated set of business values (see Appendix B). We want to build a reputation for ethical business practices with stated commitments to ethics and organization sustainability. People who join will sign up to support these, not simply '*abiding by the rules*', but as a way to demonstrate leadership in this space where we have suffered enormous reputational damage in the recent past.

Business Partner: LinkedIn

2. Job Connect: For centuries, the skills of Irish people have been deployed within developing countries to build infrastructure. Since pre-famine times, people have been Ireland's premier export! In construction, medicine, manufacturing and social services, Irish people have worked across the globe. **Job Connect** will provide a pool of available talent for companies that want to hire the very best talent that Ireland has to offer. On the 'applicants' side, it will provide *work abroad* opportunities for people who wish to emigrate or to round out their skills with an overseas stint, adding to their Curriculum Vitae.

Jobs Partner: Irish Jobs.ie, MERC Partners

3. Product Connect: We will partner with a range of suppliers of key Irish products. To get the concept up-and-running, we will work with one supplier per category (e.g. Jewellery, drinks, clothing, music, food, books). Our supply partners will have an established reputation for product quality with existing mechanisms in place to support overseas customers. We will have common 'rules of engagement' e.g. on product returns. Over time, this network will be expanded to provide opportunities for smaller Irish producers (e.g. food & craft ware) to sell products abroad. Our goal under this heading is to become the '*point of sale*' for everything Irish.

Product Partners: Will depend on the categories chosen.

4. Travel Connect: We will encourage all people who have any Irish connections to make a once-in-a-lifetime trip to Ireland (*Visit Eire*). We want to encourage a new wave of tourism, a pilgrimage for all Irish Diaspora to visit the land of their heritage. Our specialist Travel Company partner will make the logistics of the trip simple. There is a particular opportunity at the moment to link this 'pilgrimage' idea with the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Irish state in 2016 (*'It's taken 100 years; now, come and see what we've done'*).

Differentiated Offerings: Under the travel umbrella, there is a range of potential products. For example, we could set up a mechanism (*Teach Swap*), which allowed people to swap houses for holidays with other people who are part of the **Celtic Connections** group.

At a more organized level, travel packages would include various 'service levels', with some novel standard elements e.g. being greeted on arrival at the seaport/airport by Irish 'greeters' in traditional costumes. In relation to customized offerings the sky is the limit e.g. visits to particular towns or graveyards to research individual family histories. It will be possible to offer a range of holidays from general to 'specialist' e.g. cheese making, maritime history.

Travel Partner: We will partner with a travel provider who can organize package holidays to Ireland for individuals and groups. Our partner will be an established player in the travel industry and have a fully functioning telesales centre, which operates 24/7. Possibilities include:

a. RCI in Cork....

5. Culture Connect: Wherever Irish culture is a topic of conversation, the arts predominate. Over centuries Irish culture has been exported across the world through writing, song, music and dance. A recognition of the importance of this area, was the recent appointment of Gabriel Byrne as Cultural Ambassador for Ireland.

There is enormous potential to link with the Irish Diaspora through a range of **artistic endeavors**. Through the medium of the arts, we will copper-fasten political and business relationships with Ireland. Some of the key ideas include:

a. World-Class: Identify a number of world-class artistic endeavors in Ireland to showcase Irish talent. These will be available (commercially) to perform at any venue worldwide.

b. Talent Scout: People will be able to upload short video clips of them performing to demonstrate their talent.

c. Stand Up: We would have a specific section for both emerging and established comedians who wish to extend their market overseas.

d. Latest Craic: Members upload funny videos or stories (U-tube with a unique Irish twist).

e. Arts Forums: A lively discussions forum to debate how Irish art is changing, emerging trends at the cutting edge of design, creativity and performance.

Arts Partners: Gate and Abbey Theaters, X, Y & Z.

6. Family Connect: Build/maintain a database of Irish people worldwide. Target = all people who see themselves as having Irish heritage. This would be a 'free to register' database of people whom we would subsequently offer products and services to. Beautifully designed (*Celtic Art*) and simple to use format, matching anything, which exists in the social networking arena. It will be possible to have both an adult and a children's section.

This would include a state-of-the-art genealogy package for people who are interested in finding out about their Irish heritage. The information provided would range from generic information e.g. search feature on Irish family surnames through to customized research about particular family histories, which could be completed by the members themselves (*Family Detectives*) or by our team of genealogy experts. It would include access to software for 'mapping' and printing family trees.

Family Connect Partners: Facebook, using a specific annotation to demonstrate the Irish connections.

7. Personal Connect: An Irish tradition in many rural areas was the role of 'matchmaking' - helping people to find their special partner. As the world becomes high-tech, the human need to establish key personal relationships is undiminished. Today, more and more people are using the internet to make initial contact with others. Personal Connect will offer an 'introductions' service for people who wish to correspond or meet up with other Irish people worldwide. **Celtic Connections** will have a micro site where members can post information on themselves and communicate preferences for the type of person they are hoping to meet.

Personal Connect Partner: ABC Introductions

8. Change Connect: The shared bonds of the Irish Diaspora give us an opportunity to form a powerful alliance. We can leverage our impact and promote key Irish related causes worldwide. While our focus may change over time, the areas we will initially focus on include.

a. Children's Alliance: Adoption of a 'children related' cause.

b. Irish Abroad: Support for established centers, which meet the needs of an aging Irish community.

c. Celebrate Success: Sponsoring visits to Ireland for students who have stellar academic achievements.

Change Connect Partner: The Ireland Funds.

More than just a Website: A source of information & inspiration....

The Goal: Drive significant volumes to the **Celtic Connections** website.

Website Design: The *'Look and Feel'* of the site is critically important. We have an opportunity here to develop a truly beautiful website design, using Celtic Art, on par with or better than anything which currently exists in this space. This website will be unique from both a design and a content perspective.

Website Content: A key part of the success of **Celtic Connections** will be to encourage people to continually use and revisit the site. They will do so partly because of the design and ease of use (with constantly updated content) but mainly because the core functionality encourages multiple usage. In addition to the 8 'product areas' detailed earlier, we envisage a number of additional elements on the **Celtic Connections** website, all designed to encourage high volume traffic. These could include:

Navigation Guide: Our 'Site Guide' to help visitors find what they want on the website.

Breaking News : Partner with the Irish Times

Best Thoughts : *"Be yourself, because everybody else is already taken"* Oscar Wilde. This will change daily. We will also have the best thoughts, grouped under 'headings' for ease of access (ideas for weddings, graduations, retirements, funerals etc.).

History Today: Entries of big events in Irish history - what happened on each day of the year. An invaluable guide for speakers.

Digestible Facts: Key elements of Irish history offered in an easily digestible format. This could be a range of useful/interesting items about Irish history or folklore. We will encourage members to develop materials for this, with editing by the Webmaster.

Discussion Forums: *Irish Executives have been described as 'Professional with an added sense of fun?'* Is there anything uniquely 'Irish' in the way some executives lead and manage organizations? It would also be possible to have people ask questions and have these answered.

Being Irish: What does being Irish actually mean? Thoughts from Irish philosophers.

Story Telling: Seanachie: Inspirational Irish success across business and the arts.

His-Story: Tales from a forgotten Ireland by older members of the Irish community.

Coming Soon: New start-ups and company launches. A showcase of 'emerging Irish business talent' and product innovations.

Competitions & Prizes: Regular competitions with attractive prizes to incentivize members to continually use the site.

Art Update: Updates on the art world including (not available anywhere else) short video vignettes from productions currently playing @ the Abbey Theatre

Tomorrows Talent: A section of the website will be dedicated to showcasing children's art, on particular Irish themes.

Coupla Focal: Irish Language classes, with key words and phrases added daily.

Famous Faces: A host of famous Irish People will contribute to the site (e.g. Maeve Binchy.) talking about what being Irish means for them.

Irish Sport: A section that contained an overview of the key Irish sports with detailed updates on results etc.

Dragons Den: An opportunity for young entrepreneurs to 'pitch' ideas to a global business community in an effort to secure support or funding.

Continuous Improvement: Help us to improve this website. Submit your ideas on how we can offer a better service and suggest additional content you want to see.