

Media & Marketing

The podcast REVOLUTION

Very few Irish podcasts are making money, but as more and more people embrace the advances in digital media, advertisers will realise they are missing a trick



Colette
Sexton

Muhammad Ali. Sex. Technology. Ryan Tubridy. Arsenal FC. Brexit. What do these six items have in common? All were recent topics on popular Irish podcasts. While it is still in its infancy in Ireland, podcasting has been making waves across the world in recent years thanks to new technologies and to the massive mainstream appeal of innovative shows like the real-life crime series, Serial.

What is the draw of podcasting?

It is fair to say that Andrew Mangan, Ireland's first full-time blogger, was ahead of the curve when it came to podcasting.

Ten years ago, when most people in Ireland were still using a dial-up connection to get online, Mangan set up Arsecast. The Arsecast is a twice weekly

podcast that runs on the Arseblog, Mangan's daily blog on Arsenal, which is counted among the most popular football blogs in the world.

"It started relatively slowly. This was 2006 and we're still at a point ten years later where people ask: 'What's a podcast?'," Mangan said.

However, podcast audiences in Ireland have increased significantly in the past couple of years, he said, particularly due to the popularity of shows like Serial.

With more than 80 million downloads, Serial was described as podcasting's "first break-out hit" by David Carr in the New York Times. The US podcast, released in 2014, explored the story of Adnan Syed, who may or may not have been wrongly convicted in 1999 of killing his ex-girlfriend Hae Min Lee, over 12 episodes.

Serial changed the landscape, according to Mark Horgan, producer of Ireland's most popular podcast, Second Captains, which focuses on sport.

"Serial was the first show that drew a mass audience in. After that, people realised that podcasting is a really nice medium to consume," he said.

A Second act

The Second Captains story is an interesting one. The team – Horgan Eoin McDevitt, Ken Early, Ciarán Murphy and Simon Hick – have been working together for more than 12 years.

They started out producing and presenting the Off the Ball show on Newstalk, but after a disagreement over time slots on the radio station, they broke away and set up Second Captains in 2013.

Second Captains is an independent production company that does TV, radio and live shows, but the mainstay of the company throughout the year is its podcasts, which are broadcast exclusively on the Irish Times website.

The five-man team had built up a huge following while on Newstalk, and there was a lot of speculation about what they would do after leaving the station. They had always been interested in podcasts



Roisin Ingle and Kathy Sheridan of the Irish Times: their Women's Podcast is a weekly affair

Fergal Phillips

and doing content online, Horgan said, but it was a matter of finding the correct medium, and they felt the Irish Times was a good fit.

"There were a few directions we wanted to go in after doing radio for so long. We saw there was a trend towards online radio and podcasts and we also wanted to make a move into television which we had never done before," he said.

Its podcast audience is constantly growing. In the seven days to last Tuesday, it hit its highest ever weekly listenership, with 270,000 tuning in for a

Euro 2016 special. Normally, the team release four podcasts a week, but they have been doing a podcast a day during the tournament.

With the podcast, they have more of a chance to do what they feel is right, according to Horgan.

"It's never filling airtime. It is only about making good-quality output. It takes a lot of the frustration out of it and allows you to think more when you're not focused on massive output every day," he said.

One of Second Captains' most popular shows recently was a tribute to Muhammad Ali, for which

Commercial profile: Storm Technology

Applications: should they stay or should they go?

Storm Technology is expert in knowing how and when to modernise applications – something it's urging businesses to understand if they want to achieve competitive advantage and succeed in a digitally driven world

Most businesses now accept that software applications are central to what they do, facilitating faster processes and greater efficiency, enabling them to drive internal productivity and interact more effectively with customers and partners.

The challenge comes when the IT department identifies a problem with legacy applications and knows that better solutions are available. It's time to upgrade and modernise, but some business units see no issue with the existing solution and want to stick with what they have, ignoring the risks of running software that is no longer up to the job.

The need to modernise applications is practically a mantra for digital enterprise consultancy Storm Technology, one that its customers have happily embraced because they have seen first hand how it helps gain competitive advantage.

"If there are two organisations competing for the same business, it's the one with new systems and processes that's always going to outbid the other. The benefits

from operational efficiency, cost savings and new innovative uses of software allow them to compete more effectively and win," said Ronan O'Halloran, Storm's director of sales. "And if companies are disrupting your business and doing things more efficiently on a continuous basis, then it's only a matter of time before you go into decline."

Dealing with legacy

The challenge for businesses is knowing when legacy systems have run their course and the right time to invest in new solutions. The first part is self-evident. "A big clue is when the vendors stop supporting them and it's down to you to attempt enhancements, or worse, when the application starts to creak and totter towards end of life," said O'Halloran. "The temptation is to sweat software assets for too long and risk damaging the business. Don't do it."

The hard fact of life is that older software relies on disappearing skills to maintain and support it. It drives up the cost for the IT depart-



John Tallon, Practice Director, Storm Technology



Ronan O'Halloran, Director of Sales, Storm Technology

ment, who either have to train internal people in technologies that are on the way out (never a good idea) or track down external expertise that will be expensive.

There is an alternative. "Application modernisation, properly executed, doesn't mean throwing the baby out with the bathwater," said John Tallon. "You can squeeze more life out of old applications without missing out on the

new."

The first thing that Storm will do when it engages with a business is carry out a portfolio assessment, looking all across a company's software, analysing workloads and the technology stacks they are running on. "We start drawing lines between them and often find systems using very similar paths so there's a duplication of effort there straight away," said Tallon. "It's a starting point for finding more innovative ways to use the systems and bringing in newer technologies where needed."

Storm will help businesses understand where they need to replace or where they can repurpose and re-engineer old

applications, making them work alongside the new, protecting the original investment while reaping the benefits of more modern solutions.

Digitising the business

All of this is happening at a time when companies are under pressure to reinvent themselves as "digital businesses". The good news is that application modernisation is a significant milestone on the journey, according to John Tallon. "You have to address and replace legacy to compete in the digital world. Right now that's made a lot easier with new applications that are more advanced out of the box. Security and integration

components are built in and you don't have to do a lot of customisation," he said.

He does, however, stress the importance of making a rock solid business case. The only thing worse than legacy is buying the wrong replacement. There are searching questions that business leaders and their IT departments need to explore together to make sure they get a return on their investment.

"You have to ask yourself if spending two million on a new system is going to make the business significantly more efficient or are you just getting the same system back on newer technology," said Tallon. "What Storm ensures is that you get what your old systems delivered plus a lot more, with innovative improvements that advance the business on its digital transformation journey."

Modern applications are built from the ground up to be delivered from the cloud, and consumed easily on smartphones and tablets used by an increasingly mobile workforce. These are key pillars in becoming a digital business that older applications struggle to support.

Easy integration

Modern software is smarter, more efficient, and, in most cases, a lot cheaper than building out a custom solution, according to John Tallon. "Take CRM. If I wanted a system 10-15 years ago, it would have cost an arm and a leg. Now, it's available in the cloud for a basic monthly fee," he said.

Storm will give customers the best of both worlds, tailoring a one-size fits all cloud solution to dovetail seamlessly with the specific needs of the business.



Every organisation is different, but there are guaranteed efficiency improvements, through the correct combination of increased productivity and software innovation

"You end up with features and functionality that are far more advanced and cost much less than an old CRM system that would have cost you €5 million to support and develop over the last 20 years."

The other big change is the way new applications are standardised for easier integration. As a Microsoft gold partner, Storm is used to selling a portfolio of products designed to work together. "Microsoft has been strategic about the architecture, design and integration capabilities of

their most popular platforms and technologies," said Tallon. "They are easier to integrate so we can concentrate our efforts on delivering more value to our customers through software innovation rather than putting all our efforts into integrating systems. Legacy systems simply do not carry these benefits and introduce blocks on digital transformation roadmaps."

Vendors also recognise that companies have their own processes and put out products with a set of services that can be adapted and used as needed. There are often different features for different roles within a business. "They know that each customer will have their own way of doing things so we're seeing some applications become more of a platform than a product," he said.

With Storm's under-the-bonnet expertise this new generation of applications can be fine-tuned, integrated and customised to speed up a company's digital journey and drive competitive advantage. But by how much? "It's a 'how long's a piece of string' question," said Ronan O'Halloran. "Every organisation is different, but there are guaranteed efficiency improvements, through the correct combination of increased productivity and software innovation."

For more information on Storm Technology visit www.storm.ie

