

## Accenture's Dublin Dock designs the future of business

[Accenture](#) Ireland country manager Alastair Blair deftly sums up the ethos its innovation lab The Dock in Dublin: “It is about getting ahead of trends before they get ahead of you.”

This mindset, he believes, will be true for most organisations and will require a kind of agility and sense of purpose that will be the common thread of all our careers and businesses in the decade ahead.

Blair heads up Accenture's 3,500-strong workforce in Ireland and The Dock is something of a jewel in the crown for the Irish operation, serving as a global destination for business leaders from all over the world who visit to envision where their business might be going next.

On the surface the building serves as Accenture's flagship R&D and Global Innovation Centre, where a diverse team of 300 creative problem solvers gather under one roof in a modular building to design the businesses of tomorrow. Their job is to help organisations from banks and governments to airlines, restaurant chains, retailers, healthcare providers and tech firms, to name a few, figure out how to serve tomorrow's customer.

Look closer and you'll see the 60,000 sq ft building is something of a technological marvel itself, with 10,000 sensors gathering 1m data points every day.

### A legacy of innovation

In Ireland Accenture has a legacy of innovation, spearheading notable projects including the Irish Government's Revenue Online Service (ROS) which this week revealed [the most sweeping changes to personal taxation since PAYE was introduced 60 years ago](#) with the abolition of the old P45 and P60 forms.

In many ways, the history of Accenture in Ireland is closely tied with the evolution of the Irish business landscape.

“On 1 September 1969 the then Arthur Andersen company decided they wanted to get into what

they then called 'administrative services' around technology. It started with four people. It must have taken some guts back then to get involved with computers. But back then people were thinking about what technology could do for the health services, for example."

The reality of life is everything is in flux and in the business world it is no different; if you stand still or rest on laurels it is game over.

"We help business leaders and product owners see what the market might do next, rather than waiting for it to come at you," he adds helpfully.

Accenture itself is no different and the narrative of recent years has seen the company acquire a diverse range of businesses that include south Dublin tech firm S3's TV division, advertising player Rothco, Cork life sciences firm ESP and more recently it invested in Dublin firm TradelIX. On a global level, Accenture has just acquired Symantec's Cyber Security Services business from Broadcom.

The single common thread in all of this: digital. The reality is that all businesses from agri to finance, hospitality, entertainment, you name it, are now digital businesses.

"The Dock in Dublin has allowed us to add proper scale to innovation and allow us and our customers to at least think about more than the day to day but more in terms of what's out there six months or six years from now.

"The Dock was set up very deliberately to look at innovations that cut across all industries and help the leaders from these industries to bounce around ideas and see where things like AI or how humans interact with technology are going. If you look at kids today, for example, they actually don't care about the technology or the beauty of a product, they care about the experience. Our customers have the same instincts; they are not obsessed about what the technology can do for them, they are more worried about how it will look and feel for the customer and what are the knock-on consequences of that.

"So we have researchers from technologists to sociologists, you name it, looking at the unconscious consequences and biases of new products and services."

## **Technology you can believe in**

Blair is also cutting into the narrative of Generation Z and the sense that future customers will pay

for goods and services from brands whose values align with what they believe in.

“If you are going to change people’s minds be it customers or people in an organisation, you have to change your systems and your processes too.”

From helping companies like Microsoft establish in Ireland in the 1980s to bringing about pivotal change at a government level, Blair said that increasingly Accenture’s business in Ireland is evolving to include pharma, life sciences and food companies.

“The Foot and Mouth crisis actually created a huge opportunity for food in Ireland, particularly the export of processed meats because you have to trace. And the only way you trace at volume is through data. And honestly, this has changed the perspectives of many of the countries that we now export to. Data is at the heart of everything we are doing and it is underpinning innovation.”

To illustrate his point Blair pointed to work that Accenture has been doing with companies like Kerry Group that have expanded across the world on the back of traceability of quality product.

The acquisition of life sciences player ESP in Cork feeds into this narrative around data and innovation. “Drugs are now at the point of being personalised for the individual. But that process involves tens of thousands of molecules being produced and much like the process of putting wafers on chips at Intel, the costs are huge. ESP are experts in helping to automate that whole process.”

In a way it was an inspired move by Accenture when you consider that the life science and pharma sector employs around 40,000 people in Ireland.

Returning to The Dock in Dublin, which is home to a diverse team of 300 creative problem-solvers made up of highly talented experts in design, engineering, artificial intelligence and internet of things, Blair said that the key to developing the products and services of tomorrow is assembling a diverse set of skills and disciplines. The multi-disciplinary team at The Dock research, incubate, prototype and pilot digital and emerging technologies together with clients and partners to pioneer new ways to fulfil human needs using emerging technology.

## **Is The Dock the future of Accenture?**

I put it to Blaire that The Dock possibly represents the future shape of Accenture across the world, and potentially most businesses in time.

“I think so. It’s the only one of its kind in the world at the moment. It’s a way of thinking about problems of tomorrow that the rest of the world will want answers for. I can’t imagine it will remain the only one of its type.”

His colleague Claire Carroll, Customer Insights director at The Dock, explained: “Bringing a diverse skillset together presents a certain amount of runway, breadth and opportunity to immerse yourself in a problem and really understand it. It allows us to apply everything from AI and data science but also emotional intelligence to it.”

She cited the example of ID2020, a global project that applies technology such as blockchain and biometrics to help solve the refugee crisis and from start to finish over a seven-week period saw Carroll pull together a team of 18 specialists from graphic design to blockchain create a system that went into use in refugee camps on the Turkish border with Syria. “There are at least 1.2bn people on the planet who live without a registered identity.”

In conclusion, Blair said that a diverse approach to problem solving will underpin the future of business, which starts with education. And to do that graduates will need to have a mind set to move at the speed of change and learn different things more quickly and in a modular way, rather than just scoring CAO points.

“You have to assemble enough things in your toolbox to solve the problems that we think we will have tomorrow.”

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