
Discover the stories of Ireland

Imagine a business that captures and preserves local stories from all over Ireland. StoryTracks does this and its ambitions are huge.

The telling of stories has always been integral to Irish life and it's this rich vein of talent that Fergal Nealon's, [StoryTracks app](#) aims to preserve. Collecting and recalling authentic stories of a locality can spawn that sense of belonging and connection for both native and visitor alike. In 2016, the Sligo man began researching the market and outlines below, his hopes and aspirations for StoryTracks, a new storytelling audio-guide.

Capturing stories

The first real exposure, I had to collect tales, was during my time back home in Sligo, when my parents needed caring. At that time, I worked alongside my late father, Ted Nealon on the compilation and editing of 'Tales from the Dail Bar', his collection of yarns and anecdotes, from his career in broadcasting and politics. When he passed away four years ago, so many great tales went with him. Such is the case, multiplied across the country, where stories lay dormant, gathering dust, perhaps lost to local memory forever. This was the initial inspiration behind StoryTracks, a user-friendly means to capture older generations' stories in an engaging digital platform.

It was time for something more sensible

My background and training were in visual storytelling, working in the TV and film industries. After my parents became unwell, I decided to leave the industry and moved back to Sligo 10 years ago, to care for them. During my free time, I discovered the game of poker and was fascinated by the strategy and game theory involved. I threw myself into studying the game, and within two years I was playing at the highest levels in both online as well as poker tournaments in the US. Exciting times and I have great memories and friends, made from my times at the tables. However when our daughter Julianne was born two years ago, I decided it was time for something more sensible,

with less risk - so where do I end up, but in the unpredictable world of entrepreneurship.

In October 2016, I retrained in Software systems and Entrepreneurship through 'DCU Connected'. Part of the Entrepreneurship module was to come up with a business idea and develop a complete business plan, by the year's end. This structure allowed me to explore the idea of StoryTracks in a supportive environment of college.

Discover hidden gems

Researching the tourism industry, I came across a quote within Fáilte Ireland's 'strategy for investment report' 2016-2022. It stated that the number one priority was to enable visitors, to discover Ireland independently and secondly discover hidden gems, through digital and mobile media. StoryTracks is a product designed to deliver on this exact need. At that point, I knew I was onto something, and indeed Fáilte Ireland recently announced a €1.25 million fund for 'Storytelling in Ireland's Ancient East' – and with StoryTracks, we have an engaging, dynamic, user-friendly product which can deliver a unique storytelling solution, to the Ancient East.

What problems do you solve for brands?

On the back of the recent trend towards brand storytelling, StoryTracks provides a unique customer experience, bringing local areas to life through an innovative platform. As we place people at the heart of our new technology, we can provide clients access, to the core of local communities. We at StoryTracks, believe we can significantly enhance your product offering, ensuring continued visitor engagement and digital interaction with your brand.

Unique features

StoryTracks is a dynamic, mobile-enabled, audio-guide app. It's available for iPhone and Android smart-phones and tablet. A unique feature on the StoryTracks app is the ability of the local person, to upload their own unique or interesting story, from exactly where it took place and then pin the exact location, digitally to the map. Within the StoryTracks app, we also have bespoke 'StoryPacks'- audio guide routes, which are designed and curated to bring your locality to life.

It liberates the storytelling process by allowing user co-creation. The StoryTracks app provides local storytellers, with a unique opportunity, to put their patch - be it field, building, the parish, local hero or character on the map.

The customers

StoryTracks offers an affordable solution for key stakeholders in tourism, looking to enhance the visitor experience and increase tourist engagement in their locality. StoryTracks is also being used by businesses to capture their history, extend their reach and increase positive customer engagement.

Without risk, you cannot grow

The first funding I received was a feasibility study from Sligo LEO. This was quickly followed by acceptance onto phase two of EI's, New Frontiers programme, based in the Innovation centre in IT Sligo. This came with a €15k stipend and between these two sources of funding, we were able to produce an (MVP) of the app, now available on Android in google play store and soon to be released on iOS, so please download, listen, and tell your own story.

We took part in the excellent DCU Ryan Academy, UStart programme during the summer months and were delighted to win the award for "best pitch" on its demo day. I enjoy the media side of marketing, and there are excellent hooks in the product story, to quickly engage an audience.

Without risk, you cannot grow anything. Just like in a game of cards, there are significant advantages to be gained by pushing the edge, when the odds are in your favour. This is something I'm certainly not afraid to do. The key is to realise when it's time to push and when it's time to hold. I have a 'unique to the market product' with mobile data and tech capabilities that can deliver like never before - it's now time to push.

The vision thing

In the next six months, we would like to secure our first corporate clients. We plan to engage with

visitor attractions in Ireland's Ancient East and enable them to capitalise on Fáilte Ireland's Storytelling fund. Meanwhile, we will continue to build on our collection of stories and plan to launch a podcast, showcasing the best of these tales. We are also delighted to be working with renowned illustrator [Annie West](#), who will be helping bring the audio to life, through her world-famous cartoons.

I see StoryTracks expanding globally as both a storytelling archive and a unique travel tech solution for today's more sophisticated travellers who are beginning to seek that deeper and more meaningful local engagement, no matter where they travel.

Interview by Brendan Byrne.

DOWNLOAD the StoryTracks app [here](#).