
What are the tech trends to watch out for in 2020?

What are the tech trends to watch out for in 2020? A recent Digital Dún Laoghaire meetup delved into digital skills, automation and 5G as the key trends that will shape another innovative year.

As the year and the decade winds down and mince pies hit the supermarket shelves, over 50 business owners and digital experts made the 7.30am start in Bank of Ireland Dún Laoghaire for the Digital Dún Laoghaire November Meetup last week (28 November) to hear from a panel of experts about what opportunities and challenges technology will bring for Irish businesses.

During their final morning meetup of the year titled “Tech Trends of 2020,” a fireside chat discussion took place with an expert panel including: John Coolican from Accenture; Cathy McGovern from Inspiration Marketing; Paul Swift, head of Technology Sector at Bank of Ireland; and Gene Murphy from Startup Boost.

The occasion marked the third anniversary of the launch of the Digital Dún Laoghaire network, which has successfully delivered over 30 free events with 87 expert speakers to over 1,250 attendees since its inception. Minister Mary Mitchell O’Connor (Minister of State for Higher Education), Digital Dún Laoghaire’s honorary patron, opened the meetup by noting some of the successes of Digital Dun Laoghaire and highlighting the role of social enterprises in building strong communities. She said this is something the Government supports strongly through Minister Ring’s Department of Rural & Community Development’s recently launched [Social Enterprise Policy for Ireland](#).

Digital Skills are More Critical than Ever

MC Eoin Costello (DigitalHQ) opened the discussion by asking the Panel what are the big tech trends small businesses need to prepare for in 2020.

Paul Swift (Bank of Ireland) highlighted a PWC report [Digital IQ survey](#) of Irish businesses and their investment and fluency in digital strategies. The results found that less than two-thirds of respondents said they had the digital skills needed to future-proof their business for the digital economy. Half said their lack of skilled teams was a barrier for their business.

https://twitter.com/leo_dlr/status/1199964203337039872

Paul outlined a number of key supports available to management teams and small business owners to help address this challenge.

Things have improved since then, but the panelists at the meetup impressed upon the audience that upskilling and digital adoption are more important than ever.

John Coolican (Accenture) said: “Three years ago, we were organising our life on our phones...today, people are effectively ‘living’ online. The people who are your customers are living a considerably greater part of their lives on the web. Do you really understand how they’re buying your services? There’s been a shift from organise to live via the web.”

But it’s not just skills and trends that Irish businesses need to look out for.

<https://twitter.com/HoeyGill/status/1199961434878291968>

Audience member David Tighe, director of Customer Experience at Bank of Ireland, noted that we need to engage with new technology and skills in a way that’s designed to greet customers and meet their needs. Rather than saying, “here’s the solution, where’s the problem,” digital skills in 2020 are as much about the customer experience as about the trend itself David said.

5G could change everything

One of Gene Murphy’s (Startup Boost) top tech trends for next year is 5G. The speed difference compared to current systems will be staggering. He asked attendees to imagine what can be achieved in business with much higher speed, no latency, no buffering etc. The subject 5G came up over and over again during the following discussion because it means more than the end of buffering.

Audience member Gerard Corcoran of Huawei mentioned that Vodafone switched on its 5G coverage in parts of Dublin, Cork, Galways, Limerick and Waterford back in August (with rural localities expected later).

Corcoran said 5G means we can run conference calls without lagging and buffering, but it’s also going to power new technologies used by Irish businesses across the economy. Any business who relies on the Internet of Things will see dramatic new opportunities from 5G, particularly among industrial IoT applications.

For small businesses, said Cathy McGovern (Inspiration Marketing), it will mean a change in the way we work. The 5G network’s capabilities offer up more possibilities for remote work across Ireland. The local businesswoman noted, “I think everyone should consider, do you need your

office space and do you need your team to sit there?” Indeed, 5G offers opportunities to not only skip the commute and save on costs but to recruit talent from across Ireland seamlessly she said.

Indeed, the November Digital Dun Laoghaire meetup was a perfect example of these possibilities. Owen Laverty, head of enterprise at Dún Laoghaire Rathdown County Council, joined the meeting by videolink, while a social media manager joined via GoogleHangouts from Sligo to live Tweet the meetup.

Automation is for Everyone

John Coolican said that automation is a trend often described negatively: they say the machines will replace people. So far, that hasn't been the case. Certainly, the robots are among us, but they're still behind the scenes and will always be in a supportive role.

It's important to note that automation isn't just an opportunity for industrial settings. Automation is now a part of the wider business landscape through apps and business admin software. Cathy McGovern noted that there is an app for everything now, and businesses can be doing more to take advantage of it.

<https://twitter.com/Davetizer/status/1199961115263934466>

For example, hospitality and leisure businesses of all sizes can skip the hours spent creating weekly rotas and use apps to generate shift rotas for you based on employee availability. It allows you to skip mental gymnastics of scheduling, and your staff can update it with the latest availability in real time. She recommended Irish company <https://www.bizimply.com/> .

All the Future Trends are Available to Irish SMEs

Perhaps the biggest takeaway from the morning was the realisation that so-called tech trends aren't just important for the multinationals in the Docklands and CityWest. All of the future trends — from 5G to automation — are available to Irish SMEs across the country.

Paul Swift said that every business in Ireland has a chance to build their digital presence and make themselves irresistible to people who now live life on their phones and mobile devices. Even if you don't see opportunities for your business in the more esoteric ideas, tech trends often start in one area and over time evolve for wider adoption.

Cathy McGovern said did you ever believe that customers would find your digital profile through AI? This was a far-fetched idea only ten years ago, and now, it's exactly how Instagram operates.

If you're a small business, then there's no wrong time to start examining the role that tech trends can play in your business. Those unsure where to start can follow Cathy McGovern's brilliant

advice: “Google yourself. See what comes up. See if you’re happy with it, and edit it.” And then, work away from there.

- *For a full list of all the resources and links that the Panel shared at the Meetup please see - <https://www.digitaldunlaoghaire.ie/post/tech-trends-for-2020>*
- *Would you like to join in on Digital Dun Laoghaire’s next event? The next meetup is a Lunchtime Business Briefing in Bank of Ireland, Dún Laoghaire on the topic: “How to Increase Your Sales Online” on January 30, 2020. [Bookmark the event link here.](#)*

Published 30 November 2019