

Technology & Innovation

VMware to create 250 jobs at two Cork sites

Software company already employs 550 in Ballincollig

BARRY ROCHE
Southern Correspondent

THE US software company majority-owned by storage giant EMC is to create an additional 250 jobs at its Cork offices over the next three years.

Minister for Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation Richard Bruton made the announcement at the opening of a major new VMware office in Ballincollig. The company, the global leader in virtualisation, already employs some 550 people at two sites in the town.

The majority of the new positions will be for support and sales specialists and recruitment is already under way.

VMware opened in Ballincollig in 2006 with fewer than 100 employees but it will have 800 staff when the current expansion is complete.

"VMware is a really exciting company operating in the area of cloud computing which the government has targeted as an area where Ireland has advantages and where it is estimated that 8,600 jobs can be created by 2014," Mr Bruton said.

"This is 250 jobs for Ballincollig and for Cork and for Ireland and it shows the dynamic ability of the workforce here in Cork to support one of the most dynamic companies in the world, so it's a very positive story."

The VMware expansion reflects the fact that cloud computing has moved to top of the business agenda as companies seek to cut costs, according to VMware senior vice-president Maurizio Carli.

"The availability of the required skill-sets and languages in Ireland, along with the strong work ethic and solutions-orientated approach of the campus, has proved to be invaluable for our business," Mr Carli said.

VMware Ireland country manager Ian Moore said the expansion was due to the dedication of the company's existing Irish workforce, Cork's development of a cluster of IT companies and its long-established support for global tech-

nology brands.

Mr Bruton conceded it had been a tough fortnight with 575 jobs being lost at TalkTalk in Waterford and concerns growing for up to 400 jobs at Pocket King and Allied Logistics in Dublin, but he was confident for the future.

"Every day is a struggle in this job. We are seeking to rebuild an economy that has had a real hard hammering in recent years but there are really positive achievements and days like today show the underlying trends are positive."

"Many of the most dynamic and ambitious companies in the world regard Ireland as a location of choice and that is a testimony to the IDA and to the quality of the workforce here and it does give us hope and confidence to build for the future."

Mr Bruton noted that IDA Ireland, in its mid-year report, had signalled the number of companies coming to Ireland this year was up 25 per cent while projected job losses within IDA-supported companies was down 50 per cent.

IDA Ireland chief executive Barry O'Leary said his agency expected to make four or five further announcements "with between 700-800 jobs".

VMware is headquartered at Palo Alto, California, and has over 10,000 employees worldwide and more than 250,000 customers.



Maurizio Carli: cloud computing at top of business agenda

Silicon Valley goes to Hollywood: event to boost links to Irish companies



Picture during a visit to the Sony Pictures Studios, Culver City, California, from left: Peter Robinson, Northern Ireland's First Minister; John Hartnett, president of the Irish Technology Leadership Group, and Martin McGuinness, Deputy First Minister, with the throne from the hit HBO television series, *Game of Thrones*, which is filmed in Belfast. The Irish Technology Leadership Group, a Silicon Valley-based network of Irish and Irish-American technology executives, held an event in the studios to boost links between Los Angeles' film and creative industries and companies in Ireland. Photograph: Chris Ryan

Start-up financing secured for online gaming development

KARLIN LILLINGTON

SERIAL GAMES entrepreneurs Hugh Reynolds and Dr Steven Collins have successfully completed a €2.7 million seed funding round for their latest start up Swrve.

It provides tools for game designers to test and adjust their online games by monitoring game players.

Reynolds and Trinity College academic Collins were also the co-founders of Havok, a company that produces tools for creating realistic effects in games. Havok was bought by Intel in 2007 for €80 million. The following year they set up Kore Virtual Machines in 2008, which in turn was acquired by Havok last year.

Less than a year old, Swrve attracted a mix of Irish and American investors and funds, including Intel Capital, Initial Capital, SV Angel, the AIB Seed Capital Fund

(Enterprise Equity), the AIB Startup Accelerator Fund, Bank of Ireland Start Up and Emerging Sectors Equity Fund 2010 (Delta Partners), Mochi Media founders, Enterprise Ireland and others.

"This funding round allows us to have a good long runway ahead of us to build this platform," said Dr Collins, who is Swrve's chief technology officer. Mr Reynolds is chief executive officer.

"With these investors, we also got some great connections and some great advisers."

Dr Collins said the idea for Swrve came about last January, and by June, the company had a functioning prototype. Initial funding came from proceeds from the sale of Kore. Some of the original investors in Kore also invested in the new company, he said.

Dr Collins said Swrve "is designed to provide game developers with tools to manage their

games as a service". Using the cloud-based service, developers can monitor gamers as they play, helping the developers to evolve and improve games over time.

"They can track what users are doing and see if they're finding certain parts of the game too difficult, or are enjoying them, or see where they're buying things or not buying things, and change the game accordingly. You allow the game to adapt to how certain users are playing it," he said.

The service is part of an emerging model of game development where "developers are now connected directly to the consumer, and there's no middle man."

Swrve has offices in Dublin and San Francisco. The engineering team is based in Ireland with sales, support and marketing in California. The decision to keep the engineering team in Ireland was

based on better access to potential employees, he said.

"We are able to find great talent here, whereas it's far more competitive and difficult to find developers out in Silicon Valley."

The company, which currently has 15 employees, will use the funding for engineering and product development.

Dr Collins said that Swrve would be looking for additional engineers in Ireland on the back of the investment.

Swrve supports game development on a variety of online platforms, ranging from Apple's iPhone to Facebook, web or smart TV platforms.

"As more and more games move online, Swrve's analytics platform will enable game operators to deliver increasingly targeted content to every player," Lisa Lambert, vice-president, Intel Capital, said in a statement.

Space not so remote as Trekkies turn techies



KARLIN LILLINGTON

NET RESULTS

It is no coincidence that many gadgets today look suspiciously like things from 'Star Trek'

LAST WEEK, a tweet went out noting that September 8th was the 45th anniversary of the first broadcast of a new television series called *Star Trek*.

How time flies, eh? You'd almost feel you were in episode 12 from the second season of the show - *The Deadly Years* - in which a landing party from the *Enterprise* ran into deadly radiation that causes them to hyper-accelerate into ancient, wrinkled oldies. (Thank goodness, a way to stop the radiation was found and everyone returned to their usefulness before fading into oblivion and ending the series prematurely.)

As a small child, I remember being a bit scared by that episode, and also another that I can now see (thanks to repositories of *Star Trek* information on the internet, an invention that could barely have been imagined back when the original series went on air) was actually the very first programme (after a pilot show). In this one, a woman arrives on board who seems to be an old girlfriend of Dr McCoy, but turns out to be a hideous creature with suckers that drain salt out of people's bodies.

I was fairly young, and wouldn't have been an avid watcher of the series in its first incarnation during the 1960s, but I do remember the excitement of sometimes getting to watch it on someone's colour TV when we still had a black and white set.

And I also remember being at a sleepover at a friend's house, where a flick through the channels after dinner produced an episode. I was thrilled we now had something exciting to watch, but was promptly told that my friend was not allowed to watch *Star Trek* because her parents thought it "too violent".

Too violent! What innocent days those were.

Yes, there were a few battles, and scary aliens too, but surely that *Trouble with Tribbles* episode, in which the *Enterprise* gets overrun by affectionate, multicoloured creatures that looked like those hairy things you put over microphones to get rid of wind noise, is mitigating evidence against excessive *Star Trek* violence.

It would be decades before I realised how much that show had sunk into the imagination of a generation. It's no coincidence that many of the technologies that we use and take for granted today look suspiciously like things that appeared in *Star Trek*.

The inventor of the original mobile phone in brick form, Martin Cooper of Motorola, is on record saying his inspiration came from *Star Trek*.

And it would be Motorola that directly and deliberately duplicated the *Star Trek* communicator design in the first

clamshell "flip" phones.

Rob Haitani, a designer who worked for Palm, has said he based the design of the first Palm handheld user interfaces on the control panels on the bridge of the *Enterprise*. And, when Palm released the Treo mobile phone, he says they deliberately made the form factor echo the communicator, complete with a speaker phone so you could talk into it just like Captain Kirk.

When I interviewed some of the pioneers in computer speech recognition about a decade ago, I asked them what had compelled them to consider voice as a natural or perhaps even superior way of communicating with the computer. Every single one named one or the other (or both) of two inspirational sources: the original *Star Trek* series, and the film *2001: A Space Odyssey*.

Both laptops and more recently, iPads can be found in vaguely prototype formats on the original *Star Trek* series.

This short-lived original series (it only ran until 1969, with the last episode going out weeks before the moon landings) just keeps on fascinating viewers. Its later incarnations and spinoffs have brought in a new generation of viewers.

The *Next Generation* series brought me back into *Star Trek* after many years of not having given it a second thought. It

How much that show had sunk into the imagination of a whole generation

turned out to be a pivotal father-daughter bonding experience too - one that regularly brought us together late in the evening in a kind of conspiratorial partnership after everyone else had gone to bed.

My dad, who loved science fiction yet never really embraced the original series, was a big fan of the *Next Generation* spinoff and could often be found watching it late at night in endless loops on various cable channels. A few instances of joining him just to be generally sociable soon turned me into a fan as well.

That series too, has been deeply influential for those who think about developing technologies. For example, the concept of the holodeck - the place where crew members could go to participate in 3-dimensional gameplay - has become a kind of holy grail in the future of game design. Intel research fellow Genevieve Bell talked about this kind of influence with me last week, noting that such fictional representations prepare us to perceive technologies in certain ways and to think of it as being most natural to certain formats.

So strong are such influences that she noted Intel has engaged a number of prominent science fiction writers to write about what technologies might be part of life 20 years from now.

What a great idea - recognising the (often unexpected) role that creative writers, and television and film producers can have in shaping our technologies and how we use them.

DCU to expand online teaching programmes

CLAIRE O'CONNELL

DUBLIN CITY University has announced a "major commitment" to online education.

By 2015 it is expected that more than 80 per cent of university programmes will be available online or in a combination of online and face-to-face approaches.

"The way students are engaging with information is changing dramatically," said Prof Brian MacCraith, DCU president. "And the future of learning is blended - a blend of the traditional face to face, the online synchronous and the online asynchronous."

It is also planned to train staff and make about 30 programmes available online or with blended content as soon as the 2012-13 academic year.

"We are recognising that the way students learn, access information and collaborate is through online platforms," Prof MacCraith told *The Irish Times*. "The motiva-

tion is to improve the student education experience through technology-enhanced learning platforms."

He described how content could be delivered as podcasts, real-time online tutorials and e-learning.

"There are going to be a range of experiences for the student. It's getting away from the direct transmission approach to a more participative approach."

By next year, the university hopes more than 100 academic staff will have completed training in online education, and a further 200 will be trained by 2015.

"There's a recognition that this is not about putting your lecture notes up online," Prof MacCraith said.

"In deploying all these platforms, you only get the enhancement of learning if it's based on good pedagogical practice."

The strategy stands to facilitate teaching links with overseas partners too, said Prof MacCraith.

"The global dimension to this is significant," he said. "It allows us to embrace teaching and learning collaborations with partners in India, the US and China."

This month also sees the start of a pilot trial where DCU is partnering Google to provide Google-powered laptops called Chromebooks to selected students. It is the first European university to do so, according to Prof MacCraith.

To demonstrate the capabilities of online technology, Tuesday's launch at the Helix in Glasnevin featured a live chat over Skype between Prof MacCraith and learning technology analyst Elliot Masie, who was teaching a class in the Wharton business school at the University of Pennsylvania.

"If we just listen to the hype, we will be taken in the wrong direction," said Mr Masie during the exchange. "Don't look for a solution, look for an environment where many solutions can happen."

Scrazzl aims to dazzle with research information tool

ADAM MAGUIRE

AN IRISH company that helps scientists find relevant materials suppliers is expanding its team and beginning a pilot of its service after securing a six-figure investment.

Scrazzl aims to provide interactive information on materials referenced in research papers, which will help scientists identify the most popular and relevant options.

"All of these products are recorded in the materials section of a research paper but there was nothing to help scientists see how good they were or what to buy, no Trip Advisor-type resource," said David Kavanagh, chief executive and co-founder of Scrazzl.

"But if you could release and extract some of that by doing a count of how many times different products were being used, it would provide a proxy measurement and also show you what works."

Mr Kavanagh said the idea developed from conversations with Desmond O'Shea, the company's other founder. They saw that while many scientists looked at other research papers for guidance on materials, it was difficult to get an idea of what was most commonly used.

They developed Scrazzl, which automatically collates materials information from multiple research papers, to solve this.

Scrazzl sits in the browser and offers an interactive layer of detail about a material, including how many and in which other papers it was referenced.

From there the company moved to the National Digital Research Centre's Launchpad programme in January.

Its recent investment came from Tillmann Ziegert and Mark Long, both formerly of leading antibody supplier Abcam.

The founders quickly saw that the need for their service went

beyond scientists too; materials suppliers and publishers were also trying to find new ways to remain relevant in a changing market.

"We quickly discovered there was a real need from the companies that make these products as they were finding it hard to market these products in a way that was engaging," Mr Kavanagh said.

"Publishers right now are interested in making their content more discoverable too... we hit them at a time when the market is ripe for disruption."

The information Scrazzl collates also allows them to offer other services. One is an programme that pulls research citations through to suppliers' websites to show where their product has been used. Mr Kavanagh said this had previously been a manual job but they could now do it automatically.

The third service is a business intelligence offering which uses the data to identify trends for customers.

HP advised not to dump TouchPad tablet

TARMO VIRKI

HEWLETT-PACKARD should reconsider its decision to dump its TouchPad tablet since the device could double the value of the PC division HP plans to spin off, technology research firm Canalis has said in a note to clients.

HP stunned markets in August by saying it may shed its PC business - the world's largest after the \$25 billion acquisition of Compaq in 2002 - while at the same time killing webOS-based phones and the TouchPad tablet which was launched only six weeks earlier.

HP slashed the price of its tablet to \$99 in the US and €99 in Ireland the weekend after announcing the TouchPad's demise, igniting an online frenzy and prompting long lines to form at retailers as bargain-hunters chased down a gadget that had hitherto failed to excite consumers.

"The TouchPad was overpriced

at launch and did not sell. This led HP to draw a premature conclusion that the product category had failed," Canalis analysts said in a research note.

Canalis said the price cut had helped to make TouchPad the hottest brand in HP's entire portfolio, gathering more interest than anything from HP in more than 10 years.

"The TouchPad has become the 'must-have' technology product of 2011. Perhaps no other technology vendor, apart from Apple, had ever created such hype for a technology product, the research note said.

Apple created the tablet market with its iPad only last year and still dominates the segment. It has sold some 30 million of the devices, which are priced from about \$500 in the US and €479 in Ireland.

"HP has established a lead in the race to be the number two behind Apple in the pad business



The HP TouchPad: Hewlett-Packard slashed its price to \$99 in the US and €99 in Ireland in August after announcing its demise

but the window of opportunity will begin to close if delays occur," Canalis said.

Helped by aggressive pricing and hype around the TouchPad, HP could achieve and maintain 10 per cent share of the global

TECH SHORTS

Drive to highlight 2,500 vacancies

An online marketing campaign will be publicised today to highlight that more than 2,500 jobs are available in Irish-owned software companies.

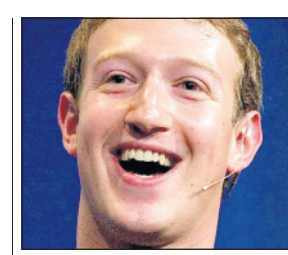
The initiative, called "IT's Happening Here", is a collaboration between local software houses and Enterprise Ireland. The centrepiece of the campaign is a video, featuring Dublin band Miracle Bell's new single *Love Sounds*, which features workers in the local sector explaining its attraction.

"The indigenous sector doesn't have the recruitment budgets of the multinationals and very often can't afford to use recruitment agencies either. This means they can get pushed out of sight of job seekers," said Jarlath Dooley, who is leading the project.

Facebook 2012 flotation likely to achieve more than \$66.5bn

Facebook is preparing to launch its blockbuster initial public offering (IPO) in the US in the later part of next year, although the public debut by the social networking site had widely been anticipated earlier, say people familiar with the company.

The IPO, forecast to be one of the world's biggest with recent private share sales valuing Facebook at more than \$66.5 billion (€48 billion), had been expected to come by the spring and there had been persistent speculation that it could even be this year.



Mark Zuckerberg: focused on product developments

However, sources indicate that chief executive Mark Zuckerberg wants to wait until later in the year to keep employees focused on product developments rather than a payout.

Tech firm expands to exploit gap in US smartphone market

Dublin telecoms software firm The Now Factory has opened an office in Mountain View, California, to support the rapidly growing US smartphone market.

"We already count a number of Tier-1 Carriers in North America among our customers, but we see a huge opportunity for further growth," said Tom Morrisroe, chief executive of The Now Factory.

The Dublin firm's software allows service providers better manage subscribers' data usage.