



Leis an Dr Gearóid Trimble, Business Manager of Foras na Gaeilge

Luach na Gaeilge do Ghnó / The Value of Irish for Commercial Businesses

In recent years the Irish language has attracted significant attention among business circles, particularly as various market leaders have been able to effectively capitalise on its unique properties as a marketing tool. It comes with little surprise that many of the large and international corporate businesses have innovatively adapted the use of Irish in their branding and marketing, particularly since they are already customised to utilising the power of languages to relate to the general customer base in their other European markets. The Irish language holds a prized place in the psyche of the Irish consumer, irrespective of their own ability in the language, and marketers are now successfully harnessing the use of Irish as a means to enhance Irish brand-worthiness and build on the customer-relationship aspect. The most significant point however is that Irish is an untapped asset for many businesses and it can be easily adapted to any business regardless of your own ability in the language. The most practical and ever-popular application is the visual aspect of Irish with effective use of bilingualism on examples such as signage, product branding, stationery, marketing materials, advertising, etc., and this approach can effortlessly be incorporated into any business whether your company has Irish language expertise or not. This approach is particularly effective as it offers the customer the feel-good factor, without questioning their ability, whilst the business can capitalise on the differentiation and additionality aspects are offered within their existing resources.

“The Irish language is a ready made differentiator which if deployed with skill and judgement can assist in the face of competition which is increasingly global competition. The fact is that the Irish language is unique. No-one else has it! It has a brand value in and of itself.”

Tom Trainor, Chief Executive, The Marketing Institute

Deiseanna don Earnáil Tráchtála / Opportunities for the Commercial Sector

The use of Irish has now become commercially viable as a business tool. The recent census of the Republic of Ireland in 2006¹ recorded 41% of the population as having ability in the Irish language, a figure that represents an increase in real terms of 5% of the last census in 2002. In business terms, however, this statistic translates to 1,650,982 potential target-customers in the Republic with a further 167,478 in Northern Irelandⁱ, and as the current Irish Medium Education (IME) sector grows at a phenomenal rateⁱⁱ, the opportunity to utilise the marketing potential of Irish has never been more important in a growing competitive market, both at home and abroad. The census returns may also be used to provide us with an overview of the present and

¹ Central Statistics Office, 2006.

potential workforce, illustrating up to potentially 50% of business employees as having a (limited) proficiency in Irish, a source that could be assessed and harnessed through internal skills reviews / audits, for example.

Although branding through Irish has been prevalent from the early 20th century in many state organisations, it is important to note that businesses of the private sectorⁱⁱⁱ have in the past taken the initiative to develop the effectiveness of Irish as a marketing tool, particularly new and established multinational companies^{iv} which have recognised the use of Irish in their marketing strategy as a significant aspect in relating to the indigenous customer base. The visual / passive use of Irish, in the form of signage and printed materials, is currently the most practised form of Irish language usage in the business sector which according to recently commissioned research, remains to be potentially the most applicable and effective towards consumer attitudes^v.

Seasamh Oifigiúil an Rialtais / The Official Position of the Government

There have been a number of significant developments in relation to the Irish language as a result of the role of the current government. 1996 seen the creation of the Irish language television channel, TG4, which has become a growing success and supports new business opportunities among new and existing companies alike (regardless of language capability!); The inclusion of Irish as an official language of the European Union since January 2007 has given prevalence to Irish as a working business language recognised by legislation in all EU countries, an opportunity which Irish companies can now present the Irish language skills of their employees as an additional asset. Earlier this year the Government announced it's 'Government Statement on the Irish Language' with the vision to create a bilingual society over the next twenty years, a commitment that will also create mutual opportunities for private sector companies.

Acht na dTeangacha Oifigiúla / The Official Languages Act 2003 has been arguably one of the most significant developments in recent times within the Public Sector, particularly as state organisations prepare their 'Irish language Schemes' with the strategic long-term aim of offering a fully bilingual service however, the importance and influence of this legislation can be viewed in the wider context of the general business sector. In implementing government policy, public bodies are in effect the champions of best practice and therefore are recognised as a bench-mark measure in corporate governance for the non-public sector also, particularly the business sector which continue to strive to achieve the highest standards in service provision.

Although there is no obligation on the private commercial sector to implement or adhere to government policy, the growing importance of this aspect of public sector corporate governance is influencing the direction of the general commercial business sector.

In terms of language policy and the advantages it offers to business, existing and future examples may be mirrored with the advancements made by the business sector, both public and non-public sector, in Wales^{vi} where visual and oral use of Welsh has become a unique and prevalent characteristic of domestic commercial activity.

Tacaíocht ar Fáil Duit-se / Available Support

Among sources of specific support for using Irish in business are: Údarás na Gaeltachta (www.udaras.ie) for businesses located within the Gaeltacht regions; Gaillimh le Gaeilge (www.gleg.ie) for businesses located in the city of Galway; Forbairt Feirste (www.forbairtfeirste.com) for businesses located in the city of Belfast; Gael-Taca (www.gael-taca.com) for businesses located in the cities of Cork and Dublin (www.gaeltacabac.com).

Foras na Gaeilge has an all-island remit and our business support team can advise and assist all companies of the private business sector in exploring and developing the business opportunities with the use of Irish. Our expert team provides free consultation on all areas relating to the business application of Irish, from research, branding, marketing, bilingual design, and translations, and we can provide the necessary support for *you* and *your business*. Foras na Gaeilge has developed a number of resources that are freely available and can be used to promote the visibility of Irish within the workplace and in a sales environment. Financial assistance of up to €3,000 for small enterprises, both new and established, is also available through our business support schemes and further details about all our supports can be obtained by contacting 01 6398404 or gno@forasnagaeilge.ie – you will be surprised what we can do for your business.

ⁱ The last census of Northern Ireland (2001) recorded 10.4% of the population as having an understanding of the Irish language.

ⁱⁱ Official figures show that there is Gaelscoil provision in every county throughout the island with over 26,500 of the future generation currently being taught through the sole medium of Irish outside the Gaeltacht regions (official Irish speaking districts of Ireland) alone.

ⁱⁱⁱ i.e. AIB, Bank of Ireland, Barrys Tea, Dunnes Stores, Guinness, Irish Permanent, Jacobs, Superquinn, TOP Garages

^{iv} i.e. Asda (N.I.), Caburys, Heinz, Homebase, Microsoft, O2, Shell, Specsavers, Tesco, Toyota, Vodafone

^v 'Irish in Business', TNS mrbi; 2006 & 2007.

^{vi} Cf. www.menterabusnes.com.