



Intel Lands at Shannon

An inside look at the magic of Ireland

By Peter MacNamara

Introducing Peter MacNamara, who helped Intel land in Shannon, Ireland and served as Managing Director of Intel Communications LTD, as well as the Director of Software Alliances for EMEA. Enjoy this inside glimpse of Shannon, authored by Peter who was there from the beginning.



Peter MacNamara

The History

Shannon Airport lies just 15 miles from Limerick City and has had many firsts in its history. With the ending of WW II, air traffic across the north Atlantic grew rapidly due to increased demand for people and the availability of better commercial aircraft, many of which were converted from military use. What these aircraft had in common was a limitation in range, making it unsafe or impossible to fly a full transatlantic route from North America to European destinations. Interestingly, in the pre-war period, the transatlantic service used flying boats including the stately PanAm clipper which flew from Foynes on the Shannon estuary to Gander in Newfoundland. However with changes in technology and a need to fly “city to city”, land-based aircraft became the norm.



Shannon Airport - circa 1960

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Shannon received its first transatlantic flight on September 16, 1945 – a Pan American DC4 having flown from New York City. Due to a bi-lateral agreement between Ireland and the USA, Shannon was designated as the refuelling stop-over for all Europe bound flights originating in the USA and vice versa. With dozens of international flights arriving and departing each day, Shannon soon became an important airport and the surrounding region began to benefit from this early tourism boom. Great hotels, golf courses, exquisite dining and the availability of incredible natural scenery soon became a magnet attracting the rich and famous, celebrities and film stars travelling on to Europe. Shannon proudly looked after all its guests and developed a reputation for friendly excellence which lasts to this day.



The Burren is a karst-landscape region or alvar in northwest County Clare, in Ireland. It is one of the largest karst landscapes in Europe



To cater for the demands of the passengers, and as a way to market Irish products, a duty free area was set up at the airport. This allowed goods to be purchased without any tax by passengers flying in or out of Shannon. This duty free concept (the first of its kind for air travellers), soon became very popular and was the model for all other duty free shops worldwide. The duty free status was soon expanded to businesses setting up around the airport zone. This resulted in the arrival of many US and European technology firms, keen to avail themselves of the tax benefits by setting up bases within the Shannon free zone as it became known. With corporations such as General Electric, DeBeers, TellLabs and a host of others, the Shannon free zone soon became a huge success and was instrumental in establishing Ireland as a favoured destination for foreign direct investment (FDI), mainly from the USA. Interestingly, one of the leading “low cost” airlines in Europe, Ryanair, owes its start to Shannon. Its founder Tony Ryan worked for many years in the aviation business and was based there.

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Fast Forward to 1999

I was contracted to find a suitable European base for a US technology start-up from the bay area, Basis Communications Corporation. The brief was to find a location in or close to an international airport, with access to university graduates and a pool of highly qualified professional staff skilled in software and IC design for the rapidly expanding communications industry. Basis saw the need for micro based, embedded service specific network processors for use as routers and set top devices to fulfil the burgeoning demand from the Comms industry, just then gearing up to satisfy the explosive growth in internet communications.



Ennis is a stronghold of traditional music with many musicians in residence and regularly playing locally. In September 1997, Ennis became Ireland's first and only Information Age Town.

By Feb 2000, we were up and running, had twice moved offices and recruited almost 40 staff, the majority highly trained software engineers. Our first European customers were placing orders and we had planned a third move for the fall of that year. Conditions were cramped in these early years with engineers often sharing a desk and test equipment set up in corridors. Administration, HR and finance were in the hands of a team of three people, where working weekends and long hours was considered the norm.

Over dinner in a charming hotel in Ennis, Co. Clare with the three founders of Basis, the mission was unveiled and by the time we got to dessert I had accepted the role of Managing Director. Basis Communications Europe Limited started in July of that year with five people, beginning a rapid expansion, moving from the local town (Ennis) to the Shannon free zone.



Our 1st office on the Shannon free estate – we moved twice more so the clutter you can see was typical!

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Late one evening in March, I got a call from Lloyd Atkinson, Basis COO. "I hope you're sitting down Peter" he said straight away, "I've got some majorly exciting news". During the 45 minute phone call Lloyd told me that following a whirlwind courtship, Intel had made an offer for Basis of approx \$450 million which he and fellow directors had accepted. He advised me to get ready to welcome an advance team from Intel's new acquisitions group, who would be arriving at Shannon within the next few days. Sure enough, three visitors arrived the following Monday and began an exhaustive round of consultations, delving into every aspect of our work and processes. Having grown so rapidly over the past six months, this was a challenge in itself but the team rose to it and were soon impressing the visiting team with the quality and inventiveness of our work. During this "quiet period" as our visitors referred to it, work continued as usual, new recruits joined up and plans finalised for our third move to a brand new 80K square foot facility nearby.

We Become Intel

On May 12th we officially became Intel and, during a short ceremony in the one and only conference room, were welcomed into the worldwide family as part of NPG, then led by Tom Franz. Our visitor count rose significantly as we began the exciting (and exhausting) process of assimilation. Daily we learned new processes, adopted new working methods and beefed up our IT and communications systems. This necessitated even longer days and nights working through all the new material while simultaneously "looking after" our guests.

Mostly being first time visitors to Ireland and to an area they knew little about, we were hard pressed to fit in tours to the cliffs of Moher, golf outings, traditional Irish food and entertainment and visits to the many local historical monuments on weekend and evenings. Family genealogy tours were often requested and many were able to discover their Irish roots - an unexpected benefit to this acquisition!



The Cliffs of Moher are Ireland's most visited natural attraction with a magical vista that captures the hearts of up to one million visitors every year.

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As the month wore on, we also received visitors from Intel sites all over Europe and of course from senior management at Leixlip, Intel's FAB in Ireland since 1989. As the first R&D facility for Intel Communications Group's business outside of the US, we quickly became a sort of poster child, taking in press visits and plenty of enquiries from 3rd level colleges and government officials across Ireland.



Intel's main building

Finally with the offices bursting at the seams, we moved into the purpose fitted out facility at Dromore House on September 9, 2000 with almost 60 staff. This facility was specifically designed to house all of our IT needs, including a secure state of the art lab, the software, silicon design and admin teams. The fit out, using local contractors, came in on time and under budget, a tribute to all involved. In the new facility and co-habiting with these was a new entity, the

Shannon Business Centre (SBC). I was asked to set up and manage this for ICG in order to provide a single point of contact for all sales and marketing issues with our European customer base. The SBC also provided "factory level" support for all EMEA field staff in over 30 countries. The official opening of Intel Communications Europe Ltd was attended by the GM Intel Leixlip, (Jim O'Hara), ICG GM, (Tom Franz) and by the president of the university of Limerick (Dr. Roger Downer).

The first product, a network processor named the IXP 425, designed at Shannon and manufactured in Leixlip was released in 2002 and formed part of a family of programmable network processors.



Intel's iXP425

Speaking at the product launch, the Executive VP and GM of Intel Communications Group, Sean Maloney, paid tribute to the work done on this design at Shannon saying, "This is a major achievement by our Shannon based team and marks a significant step forward for Intel. These new NP devices will quickly replace the ASIC's currently in use across the industry and remove a lot of design complexity for engineers when building internet devices such as set top boxes, routers and IP gateways."

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Innovation Continues



Today, some 15 years after first joining Intel, the operation at Shannon goes from strength to strength. It has grown to almost 300 staff spread across several buildings at Shannon and enjoys one of the highest ratings in the country as a great place to work. It proudly upholds the reputation earned by the Shannon region and airport for innovation all the way back to the 40's and continued until the present day. As the only Intel site west of the river Shannon, in an area formerly known better for its agricultural products rather than high tech industry, Intel Shannon Limited now successfully competes with sites across the globe and offers its staff the opportunity to work and enjoy life in this beautiful, unspoiled, green and tranquil corner of our world.



Dromoland Castle

About the Author:



Peter MacNamara retired in 2011 as CEO & Chairman of ResourceKraft but continues to offer management consulting & mentoring through SkillsNet which he founded in 1993. His background includes 10 years with Intel Corporation where he was Managing Director of Intel Communications Ltd, (formerly Basis Communications Europe) and then Director of Software Alliances for EMEA. He left Intel in 2009 and was involved in launching several start-up technology companies.

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Previous roles included Vice President, General Management, marketing, sales and operational roles in several European based Information Technology companies including, Data General, Philips, Compagnie Bull, Neodata, ZZSoftware and British Telecom. A native of Limerick, he has lived and worked in several European countries and spent lengthy periods on assignment in the US – mainly in California, Massachusetts and Utah.

Peter was educated in Ireland and in the UK where he studied electronic engineering at the University of Westminster in London. Peter lives in Limerick and his leisure interests include oratorio as a member of the Limerick Choral Union, historical & cultural travel, writing and yacht racing. He has two sons and one daughter and at the most recent count, five grandchildren!

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