

Faces of the Company: Anna Rakocinska

"Life's full of luck and funny twists. There I was last year, an intern sitting in the office, reading the company newsletter," says Anna Rakocinska, "and now I'm the Internship Coordinator."

Passionate. You couldn't describe her without saying so. Ms Rakocinska speaks like there's no tomorrow. With a mischievous light in her eye, she rattles answers out in her adopted language, English, at a rate that would humble most Wall Street traders.

"I'm an idealist...so I hate routine," she says, with barely an intake of breath, "I love to explore and find out new things. Here at Interconnection, one moment I'm a businesswoman, the next, I'm a counsellor. And before the day is out - a tour guide."

You can point to this ever ready-to-go spirit as motive alone for bringing Anna here. Yet, she always had her head turned to Europe's North Western corner, and its mascot island. Even in her early school days, she found herself doing the 'Ireland' projects.

"Bedzin City in Poland is home, and I love it... but I was always thinking that I wanted to see more. I could have stayed and had my life there, surrounded by my family and friends," she says. "It would have been too easy though."

"My fascination with Ireland wouldn't let me rest. I had to see it for myself," she says, whisking me back to the boom times of a few years ago, when she landed in Dublin with her best friend. With unbridled optimism, they took a punt that something would work out when they got there.

And it did. They took any job they could;



Anna Rakocinska
Internship Coordinator

quickly got their bearings; and acquired an international coterie of friends along the way. It was a rite of passage, and they were blazing their own trail through it.

"I kept looking for something more challenging though. And soon after I went for a sales job," she remembers. "And I got it. It was great! I was the only Polish person in the team, and I got to learn so much."

Perhaps its her academic background, or maybe just her natural inclination, but Anna is curiously oriented to unearthing her next steps; as if on a quest to see what she can do. She came here motivated by culture rather than economics,

and is now integral to Interconnection.

"When I returned home after my first couple of years overseas, it would have been comfortable to stay," she says. The way she phrases this episode suggests her family, like any, would have hoped her wanderlust had been sated.

They got little joy. "It was always in my heart to come back though," she says, "I was freelancing at home; doing a bit of teaching and photography. Yet Ireland was still on my mind."

Anna landed in a very different Ireland, on her second coming. Recession had reared its head. But somehow, she remained committed to finding her feet again. Unbowed she dug in for what would prove a longer more arduous haul.

"I took on a computer training course; from there, I got myself a fortnight-long work placement; and then through a word of mouth recommendation, I managed to present myself at Interconnection's door," she says, undeterred by the winding path.

"It was worth it. I just loved the buzzing environment in the office. I was given a chance - a couple of weeks of internship," she recalls. "And it just flew. The time passed so fast. I was just hoping that more could come of it."

"I remember going home for Christmas last year," she says, still hoping that Ireland would call her back."

"And then Natacha rang. She's got Polish connections, you know. She invited me to meet her in January, and now I'm here almost a year."

Interconnection for Business

Established in 2002, Interconnection is a Cork based Franco-Irish company which offers a range of services to Irish businesses.

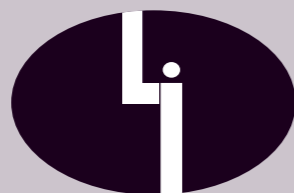
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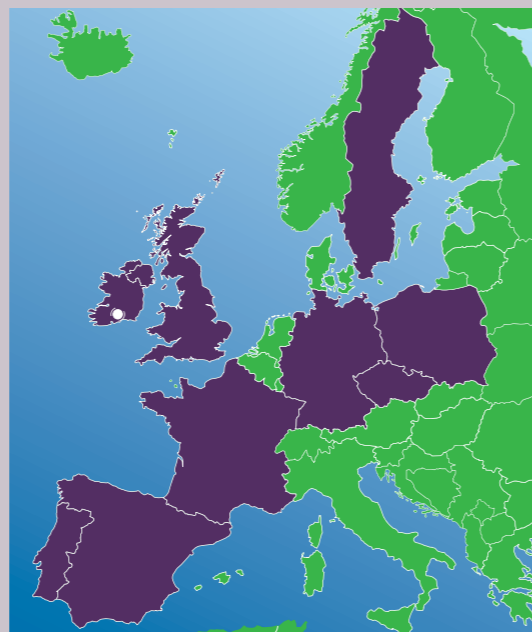


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Dear Readers,

Banks, markets and economies appear to be our only headlines these days. But there are other stories out there: personal narratives that remind us of what life's all about.

In this winter edition, you'll cross paths with people who've developed special ties with our home city of Cork, and of course, Ireland. They contribute to their communities in ways that don't ordinarily make the press.

Konstancja Szymura, who runs a partner agency in Poland, gives us an insight into how the innate familiarity of Irish culture connects so well with her own. The common ground between our two countries is now firmly (and warmly) established territory.

This is echoed through pages two and four, where Europe's East and West engage on many levels. You'll meet one of Interconnection's first interns, Jonas L'Hénolet, and his Polish wife Monika; you'll also encounter the Face of the Company, Anna Rakocinska, an adopted Pole. Their stories span Ireland's boom and bust.

You may notice how 'location' features so strongly. Julia Lynes and Katherine Gordon both have chosen to anchor themselves in the port of the 'real' capital. Julia's become the champion of getting visitors settled in - some for good! While Katherine shares her perspective on city and state: the aspect of a returned traveller, turned resident.

They all give an insight into what brings people together. And their stories all relay how integral embracing human potential is to success.

Enjoy the read.

Natacha Nowack,
Editor



TRANSNATIONAL
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NEAR NEIGHBOURS

"When I came to Ireland, I was struck by people's faces - the warmth - it really caught my eye," says Konstancja Szymura of Aviva Poland. Her enterprise is no ordinary company - it's a portal into a country that has developed incredible ties with Ireland.

"I had thought that northern European people would be, well, colder...more distant. But that wasn't what I saw," she says, trying to tiptoe around the stereotypes, and recall her trips to Dublin. "Everyone was so good-natured. And you have a special sense of humour."

"I think it's how you approach life. You don't separate work from the rest of what you do," she says. Theorising aloud, she draws you in: "For you, the atmosphere in the workplace is so important. But Polish people are not used to this. I like your way!"

And so the conversation flows. Personal anecdotes meet social theory in a whirlwind of contemplations laid bare. With alacrity, Konstancja muses on the different cultural approaches of east and west within Europe.

And she doesn't hesitate to admit to what she appreciates. "Irish people are very open. Very welcoming. In Poland it takes us a little time to do the same," she explains. "But once we do, we are very similar. And we too our proud of our culture. Proud to share."

"You Irish are more easygoing. You have a different outlook. But it works well with us," she says, aware of the critical mass of Polish immigrants in Ireland. She knows some are settled here for good; most will probably go home; but one thing will remain, the bond between the countries.

Before starting her own company, Aviva Poland, Konstancja gained years of experience facilitating the movement of students abroad, through the European Mobility programme. Yet, there was something lacking - she just wasn't encountering enough of the outside world.

"I was missing the contact with international students," she confesses. "It means so much to bring foreign students into Poland. To hear how they speak English; their accents; how they communicate; their appearance...how they do things."

"It's a wonderful thing. And I get to showcase Poland," she says. "But the language barrier is one we are still dealing with. Often employers...



Konstancja Szymura
General Manager
Aviva Poland

they worry about taking on interns because of their language ability."

"We have students from all over Europe coming here, and they're doing very well," she says. "They're really coming to terms with the language. They're learning in an interactive way, and that's best."

"We've got French students here in Wroclaw for the first time - thanks to Interconnection. I have to say I really love to hear them putting their Polish into use straight away," she confides. "And I just love having them around."

A believer in the benefits of trading skills, experience and expertise between nations, Konstancja sees first hand what this exchange is doing in her own city. And she rightly reminds me of Poland's influence: "You do know the solidarity movement started here."

It's this positivity that motivates her efforts to pursue European development. And acutely aware of Interconnection's ability to facilitate people's lifelong learning, she's looking to how Aviva Poland can open further another market for her Cork-based partner company.

"Don't you know, Nowack is one of the most popular names in Poland?" she asks, gleefully picking up on Natacha's surname. "It and Kowalski are probably the most common. You see, it really is a very natural connection."

Nothing gets past Konstancja Szymura.

HOME FROM HOME with Jonas L'Hénoret

"Interconnection got me my first job here...and helped me pick up a real Cork accent. You know what I mean, like?" Jonas L'Hénoret intones, proudly sporting the rising lilt of Ireland's second city, and 'real capital' to all outside Dublin.

The young Parisian only came for a six-month internship through Interconnection. Yet now, a whole six years later, he finds himself calling the place home. Married, and soon to be a father for the first time, Jonas' life is hurtling along.

"I met my wife here," he tells me, "I arrived in January that year, and she landed in June. So, I kind of knew my way around before she got here." Jonas smiles as he continues: "It was her first time away from home."

"And we met in the pub. Where else in Ireland?" he asks, with the irreverence of a native - the answer wrapped up inside his question. "Everything happens in the pub here." But what brought him to Cork?

"I had just got my diploma in sales, and there was a job offer at home, in France," he says. "But I was in two minds. I was thinking of going to London to improve my English and get some workplace experience."

"But I heard about the atmosphere in Ireland. You see, I've got a few Irish friends in France, and they helped me decide," he says. "And with the help of the Leonardo programme, I could take an internship in Cork."

It all fell into place then? "Not really," Jonas



Jonas L'Hénoret
Sales
@ Apple, Cork

admits, "I thought I would be fluent after half a year...but that didn't happen. So I decided to stay on to improve my English. And life was good here."

"I worked in a bar for a while; that was tough," he tells me with a grin, "watching everyone enjoying themselves, while I collected glasses. Ah! But some months after, I got a job in Starwood call centre. It was good, with the possibility of promotion."

Two years zipped by and hurried Jonas to the proverbial crossroads: stay put, for more of the same, or try something new. Together with his Polish partner, Monika, a move was decided upon. And France beckoned.

But after a year, thoughts of life in Cork surfaced. "We had our own place in France; we had started to settle," he says, "but it wasn't quite what we wanted. Life in Ireland was just...easier. And we had friends there."

Subconsciously, they began preparing for a return to familiar territory. "Monika had a job ready but I felt I would find something when I got there," Jonas says. "And thankfully things worked out."

"I took a job to pay the bills before I got what I really wanted - a post with Apple in Cork," he remembers. Cleverly biding his time, Jonas knew he would be able to sell himself as a valuable asset. The company would need his language.

"I'm now working for the French speaking countries," Jonas says, vindicated. Equipped with a most personable nature, he advises and discusses with clients the IT solutions that best suit them.

Are they here for good? "I can say we're settled for the foreseeable future," Jonas replies, without hedging, "Cork's home for us. We could go somewhere else, but Monika and I met here. It feels right that our family should start here."

Sweet.

Expert Input: Katherine Gordon

"Not in a million years would I swap Cork for Dublin or London...or anywhere for that matter," says Katherine Gordon, with an unusual freshness. "You have everything here at hand's reach. And the quality of life, I love it. It's beautiful..."

Ask her about her adopted city, and sit back. Katherine enters into a natural stream of consciousness, which runs untempered. Here fifteen years, she has anchored herself in a community where she feels most comfortable.

"People wonder about my accent," she explains, "you see, my mum's Cork, through and through. But she moved to London when she was a young lady. And I was born there. When I was nine, my folks moved to the West of Ireland."

Cork was merely a holiday destination en route. Yet after one visit, she was smitten. Like many heady relationships, she had to leave before realising just how she felt. And within months, Katherine came back to a city only too eager to welcome her home.

Her time working at the Arts Theatre prior to leaving had led to introductions - valuable ones that would provide passage into a new career.

With vigour, Katherine took on a PA job that morphed into a book-keeping role; and by evening class, she tackled accountancy.

"You meet people for a reason," she says, convinced of it. "You don't know it at the time. But it all works out in the end. Everyone I've met



Katherine Gordon & Company

has had some influence on where I've got to today."

July gone by, Katherine encountered Interconnection for the first time. And already, future relationships are being forged. She sees 2011 as the year when interns will walk through her door, as both companies link up fully.

"I think it would be a great opportunity," she says. "Every business has to look at its bottom line. Obviously, in recent years, people weren't watching budgets as closely as they should have. But now more than ever, you've got to be prudent with your 'spend'."

"We will get out of this mess," she says of the recession. "We have to focus on intellectual property instead of bricks and mortar. We need to develop our human potential. And what makes us competitive should be left in place. Corporation tax shouldn't waver from its 12.5% stand."

"If we are not very careful, we'll lose our 'foreign direct investment', and it's vital to our economy," she continues, "it's essential to stem the tide of disillusionment. It's hard to take, especially when we were financially independent, and in control of our own affairs."

"But now we've got to take this bailout. We don't have a choice...we just have to get on with it," she says, aware of how hard it is to swallow the pill. "We've got to be pragmatic about it." Yet, not for a moment does Katherine see us having past the point of redemption.

"There's too much depression out there; if we can overcome that negativity individually, then we can do so collectively," she rallies. "I believe there's so much energy created when businesses meet up, and establish networks... networks that work."

"People pulling together makes all the difference," she says. "It's how I work with my clients. I hold their hands through the tough times. And we get to where we have to go."

All that while smiling too, not a bad deal - it's an approach that's winning her kudos.



"It all began at my kitchen table," says Julia Lynes, of Eazy Cork. "And it just grew from there. Yeah, that was the start of it all...six years ago now." She pauses, as if to revisit and make sense of those blurry early days.

So much has happened since Julia launched the business alongside her co-director, Enrico Zoppi. With their own brand of alchemy, they've established themselves as the specialists in settling people into Cork life (quite like no other outfit).

"But my original plan was to travel..." she remembers. Well decorated by University College Cork in European Studies, Julia's horizon was vast. Yet somehow, fate conspired to tumble her headlong into an accommodation and employment enterprise instead.

"My folks, and Enrico's, all work for themselves," she reveals. "So, it was probably inevitable that we'd be oriented to doing the same kind of thing. Maybe it's

because we're used to being around people who work all hours. Don't get me wrong - I wouldn't trade it for a 9 to 5 job."

She chuckles, and it becomes ever more apparent how removed this young business operator is from a so-called quiet, easygoing, unfussed life. Within a few swift exchanges, you can tell Julia Lynes just likes the bustle of the international environment she's created - way too much.

"I love the buzz. All I really wanted to do was use my languages. And talk to the people coming through our doors," she says. "And it's the same still. I'm in the thick of things everyday - helping people get set up in a new city...and settle into a new culture."

"We assist people with a whole range of things, from CV translation and language classes to landing a job," she says. "Sorting

out accommodation is only one of our services. But it has really taken over. A mainstay."

"It's funny. When we started out we were really young, and the landlords in the city didn't really take us seriously," she recounts. "It took a while to build those relationships... and win them over. To show that we were to be reckoned with as trustworthy."

This has added another dimension to this overseas-looking company. "We're now looking after the Irish corporate market," she says. "Because the word is out - that we know what we're doing, and that gives customers confidence. And we give them breathing space."

One of the most important rewards for Eazy Cork is the very personal feedback of having made someone's experience work. It reminds

Julia of the very ethos of her company - to have you land on your feet, so you can get the most of your time.

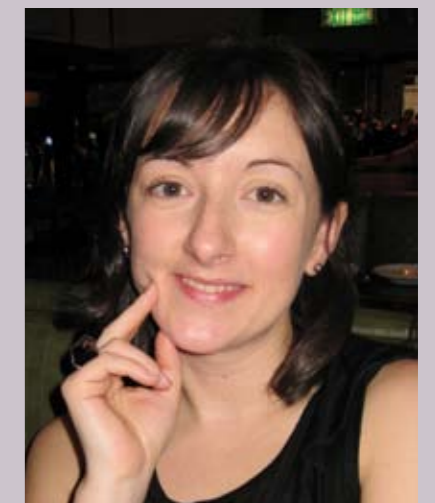
"When you meet people, even a few years later, who've started a new life in the city, and hear their kids chatting away, with Cork accents, you know things are working out," she says, with a smile.

A proud Corkonian, she adores contributing to a vibrant and cultured city.

"It's funny. It was word of mouth that brought Eazy Cork and Interconnection together," she says, "and ironic that it was a landlord."

"All I could say to Natacha Nowack was that she could try us and make her own judgement. And now look where we are."

All good things, eh.



Julia Lynes
Director
Eazy Cork