

Connected Art Show Raises Irish Economic Prospects



Dublin exhibition deploys RocTel and Cisco wireless solution to enhance experience and put city on global culture map

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Customer Name: Dublin Contemporary 2011

Industry: Arts and Culture

Location: Dublin, Ireland

Number of Employees: 42

Challenge

- Contribute to Ireland's excellent international reputation on the contemporary arts scene
- Boost city income during tough economic times with boom in overseas visitors
- Revive outstanding historic city center building after decades of disuse

Solution

- Cisco wireless mobile network based on latest fast access 802.11n standard
- Cisco Aironet with optimum number of access points to protect building fabric
- Cisco Unified Communications for easy contact with worldwide exhibitors

Results

- Ticket sales exceeded target with resulting benefits to local economy
- International artists able to relay detailed instructions to gallery assistants remotely
- Visitors used personal devices to engage with art in exciting, innovative ways

Challenge

Dublin Contemporary 2011 was one of Ireland's largest ever international art exhibitions. These high-profile events are wonderful chances to make a significant contribution to the global perception of Ireland as a prominent destination for arts and culture. By presenting the Irish capital as a vibrant, glamorous gathering point for worldwide artists and dealers, the Irish government hopes to raise the city's cultural credentials to the status of established shows like the Venice Biennale, and thereby become a magnet for affluent overseas visitors.

The first show was the opening gambit in a 25-year strategy. The event will be repeated every five years to become, in time, The Dublin Quinquennial. A central part of the image of a switched-on, future-friendly event was to use advanced communications technologies to add new dimensions of experience for art lovers, and draw younger people into the immersive thrill of an exciting, always-on environment. Officials anticipated 150,000 visitors over a six-week period with more than two-fifths of them from abroad. The expected gain to the local economy was €31 million.

The organizers made art images and artists' biographies viewable on smart phones and tablets, including Apple and Android devices, and created a special DC11 app with a navigation map and an accessible audio guide in place of the clunky traditional gallery guide. Visitors could use their own devices for on-the-spot Google or YouTube research, and could access social networking sites to spread word of the exhibition. Visually-impaired visitors were able to use their own devices to read out text from the custom-made app.

To bring these ideas to fruition, the show required a reliable, high-capacity wireless network, and the organizers turned to Cisco for advice on the best ways to achieve their innovative service aims. Cisco highly recommended systems integration partner, RocTel, for the project.

The venue for this ambitious mixture of cultural entrepreneurship was a listed nineteenth-century building in Earlsfort Terrace. Constructed in 1864 to house the Anglo-Irish sequel to London's historic Great Exhibition of 1851, it is now owned by the Irish state. Architecturally outstanding, with a fine classical portico adorning

the frontage and spacious main halls rising up behind it, the structure presented significant challenges in its new role. Last used as a campus by University College Dublin, it had been left empty, in parts for decades, as staff and students decamped to new premises.



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Production Manager
Dublin Contemporary Art Show



The building contains about 120 high-ceilinged rooms and two 350 square-meter concert halls, including Ireland’s National Concert Hall. More than 110 international artists were invited, of whom 80 or so were from overseas. Most had a room to themselves on the top floor. One concert hall displayed work by four artists in a larger group. Another was home to outsized works, such as a Chinese artist’s gigantic rocking bed. Measuring 14 meters by 10 meters, its silk sheets were printed with news texts, while overhead TV sets were tuned to 24-hour news channels. Four-fifths of the available space was used, amounting to some 6000 square meters.

Gordon Ryan, Production Manager for Dublin Contemporary 2011, explains: “As an architecture and design consultant, I acted as the link between the artistic demands of the curators and the practicalities of building use, identifying nearly 100 rooms suitable for showing exhibitors’ work.” Protected status and thick, traditionally-built walls, lead-lined in parts due to previous usage for radiology, added extra challenges to the potential difficulties of providing the innovative services desired.

Solution

The key communications requirement was a secure wireless infrastructure, built on the fast 802.11n standard, while the building had to be electrically rewired from top to bottom in eight weeks. “I coordinated between RocTel and the contract electricians to cost effectively position power sockets next to Cisco wireless access points and to share ducting for base-station LAN connectivity,” recalls Ryan. Four weeks remained to map and test the building’s topography for optimal locations, deploying the least number of points required for full coverage to minimize wall damage. Only two weeks were left for the installation.

“The RocTel people were great. They had a fantastic can-do approach from the beginning, and followed through with an admirable project management system that kept me up-to-date with all their actions,” says Ryan. “Lots of companies gave us a point-blank refusal unless we signed a year’s contract with them, which was no use because we were only going to be there for two months.” RocTel continued to play a key role by hosting the show’s applications on its own servers via its Cisco-based RocSolid managed service.

Wi-Fi access was free, backed up with 3G in case of technical issues on the main network. Capacity was a generous 155Mbps, offering ample speeds for large crowds of visitors, who could download the DC11 app simply by scanning 2D data-matrix barcodes in the entrance hall with their mobile devices. Each room bore a numeric code giving access to short, interactive artist biographies, downloadable in text. A venue tab gave opening times, with weekly postings on upcoming events, and news and blog channels with video content.

“From the outset, we said to ourselves we couldn’t possibly host such an event without free access Wi-Fi and plenty of bandwidth to play with. That’s exactly what the Cisco solution gave us,” says Ryan. “When we had 300 people or so in the lobby—all downloading the app at the same time while others Twittered, emailed, and browsed—they didn’t experience any slowdown in connection speed.”

Cisco® Unified Communications also played a significant role. A secure intranet was essential to link the planning office, across the road from the exhibition center, with a new communications room set up in the gallery a month before opening. The network needed ample bandwidth to support worldwide liaison and negotiation with artists, agents, collectors, other galleries, and specialist shipping firms. It helped the artists remotely to see the spaces allotted to them, choose what work to show, and issue detailed instructions to on-site teams.

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Results

The government spent €4 million of public money on the show, with an aim to recoup half that in direct revenue sales. The clearest sign of the project’s popularity was in exceeding its visitor targets by more than 10,000. The focus was on providing a world-class event that would be of significant benefit to the local economy, from higher hotel occupancy to increased bar and restaurant takings, souvenir buying, and so on. In all regards, Dublin Contemporary 2011 was a tremendous success.

The next Dublin Contemporary show, scheduled for 2016, may not happen in the same place, but the new Cisco wireless network at Earlsfort Terrace is robust enough to make it a realistic option. The installation will also enable the Government’s Department of Arts, Sport and Tourism to offer the elegant surroundings of a classical building for hire to a wider range of potential customers, a key consideration as Ireland’s economy gets on the road to recovery.

The Cisco network proved its value from the start. In numerous instances, high-caliber international artists had sent over technical teams to inspect their allotted spaces. “Assistants would stand in the middle of a room, switch on a videophone, turn round slowly to capture a 360° view, and send off the recording over the wireless network,” Ryan describes.

The free Skype IP phone service, which avoided mobile roaming charges, became critical to further interchanges between assistant and artist once the latter had viewed the space remotely. Such exchanges were often quite long and intensive, as the artist relayed detailed instructions to their assistants. It was often an upfront condition, laid down by private owners for the loan of a costly artwork, to have it handled only by nominated specialists.

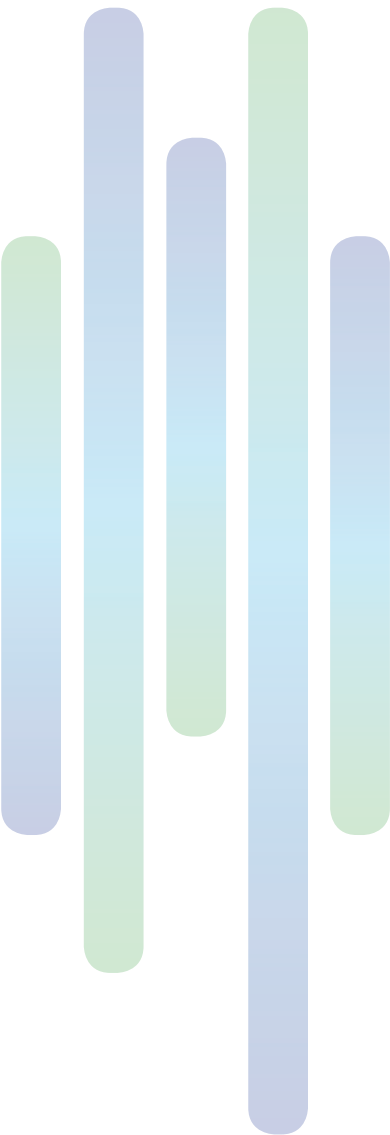
“During the technical set-up, it was crucial to have top-class Wi-Fi,” Ryan says. “It would have been dreadful for people to arrive and find that this or that corner didn’t have reception, and have to say ‘run down that corridor and you’ll get it.’ When infrastructure is seamless, you hardly notice it. In hindsight, it’s such a godsend that there were no blind spots.”

The bring-your-own-device (BYOD) environment created for visitors was a huge success. Not a single visitor came to reception complaining that they couldn’t get onto the network, and users with special needs were well catered for. “People with sight impairments are used to reading bus timetables or newspapers via the text-read function on their phones,” says Ryan. “Of course, it’s our civic and statutory duty to be doing such things, but I really don’t think there’s been another art show in Europe which has gone to such lengths to make people with disabilities feel so welcome.”

Crucially, Dublin Contemporary 2011 was conscious of the need to entice the younger generation into galleries, thereby engendering a lasting enthusiasm for art and culture. “We had lots of rest areas dotted around, and we found that the public were using their devices to browse and research whenever they felt inspired to learn more,” recalls Ryan. “We saw younger and older people using their devices in much the same way, texting and Twittering away to their heart’s content, with all the freedom they’re used to at work and home. Free Wi-Fi should be a default service, even for temporary events.”

One of the show’s quirkier coups came out of a series of debates mounted in an old lecture theatre, dubbed The Office of Non-Compliance. Lively evening discussions were held here on artistic and social issues. An Irish youth forum, Spun Out, invited candidates for the Irish presidency to debate and be grilled by an audience of under-25s. Five of the seven hopefuls turned up. The event was streamed onto the Spun Out website, and thence to other online access points. It was widely viewed across Ireland and internationally.





“In quite a few ways, we wanted to be seen as a benchmark for European art exhibitions. In my view, these things needn’t be over-obvious; they’re best being well done and considerate, without heavy publicity,” concludes Ryan. “What really mattered to the whole team was to create a genuinely welcoming and humble environment. I think it’s a lovely thing to give people free Wi-Fi access and, conversely, it feels rather cheap to charge for it.”

For More Information

To learn more about Cisco wireless technology and Cisco Unified Communications please click on the following links.

Wireless Access Points: www.cisco.com/en/US/prod/collateral/wireless/ps5678/ps11983/data_sheet_c78-686782.html

Wireless Controller: www.cisco.com/en/US/prod/collateral/wireless/ps6302/ps8322/ps10315/data_sheet_c78-521631.html

Cisco Unified Communications: www.cisco.com/en/US/netsol/ns151/networking_solutions_unified_communications_home.html

For more information about RocTel, please visit: www.RocTel.net

Product List

Wireless

- Cisco 2100 Series Wireless LAN Controller
- Cisco Aironet 1260 Series Access Points

Unified Communications

- Cisco Unified Communications 540
- Cisco SPA 500 Series IP Phones

Routing and Switching

- Cisco SPA 500 Series IP Phones
- Cisco 887G Integrated Services Router



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