.IE announces €1 million fund to enable a nation of 'digital towns'

To be delivered over four years the .IE Digital Town programme comprises three elements - the .IE Digital Town Awards; a new digital town 'blueprint' and a big data project.

- **.IE Digital Town Awards to recognise local community projects and everyday champions that demonstrate digital thinking and innovation for the betterment of local people, services and society**
- **.IE CEO: "We seek to empower local communities, help them make better use of digital and celebrate the towns and people that integrate digital into social and commercial life."**

.IE, the company that manages and maintains Ireland's country domain name, has today announced a new €1 million fund, to be delivered over the next four years, that fosters digital enhancement and adoption in Ireland's towns as part of its .IE Digital Town programme.

The first phase of the programme is the **.IE Digital Town Awards**, which recognises local community initiatives that demonstrate an awareness, knowledge, use, and understanding of digital in local and urban towns in Ireland for the betterment of citizens, services, and communities.

Open for entries from 22 March, the .IE Digital Town Awards has a total prize fund of €100,000 a year across 14 categories to honour local town projects and people that have shown how digital projects have contributed to enhancements in areas such as health, tourism, education, public services, employment opportunities, citizen empowerment, and social entrepreneurship.

Comment from David Curtin, Chief Executive of .IE: "'Shining a Light' on local successes

David Curtin, Chief Executive of .IE, said the .IE Digital Town programme will help Ireland's towns and communities adapt to the realities of post-Covid digitalisation, particularly as the country emerges from the pandemic.

"Covid has pushed us all to adapt and change how we interact with each other, organise our societies, and provide goods and services. Many economic and societal changes, particularly those that have brought about greater efficiencies or improved our overall wellbeing, such as remote working and use of digital tools, are here to stay.

"Over the past 12 months, local community groups and individuals have stepped up and used digital tools, such as WhatsApp and Messenger to keep communities connected and moving forward. Local communities showed solidarity with local businesses by buying from them online. While we have all been challenged, these local groups have quickly adapted to the new reality and the impact of their work in the community has been positively felt by all.

The .IE Digital Town Awards want to recognise the good work and achievements that have been made, and, no doubt, will continue in the days, weeks, and months ahead. We are proud to be 'shining a light' on these local success stories and encourage as many community groups and projects as possible to take part."

Coming soon

Another important element of the .IE Digital Town programme is a significant and European-first research project that sets out a blueprint for digital towns. Developed in partnership with the DCU Irish Institute of Business, this blueprint report will be launched imminently.

The final component of the .IE Digital Town programme will address the lack of town-level data. There is an urgent need for empirical data to inform, measure, and benchmark a town's current digital readiness and future digital plans. While currently in the early phase of development, the ambition for this element of the programme is to work with partners to provide local data and metrics which will inform decision-making by policymakers and implementors.

David Curtin, Chief Executive of .IE: "You can't improve what you can't measure. Researchers are showing that years of digital transformation have been accelerated into 12 short months. Policy makers and town leaders need information on what has happened.

"Towns that prioritise connectivity, e-commerce, e-health, and other digital initiatives will recover faster and become more competitive as we begin to emerge from the Covid-19 pandemic, attracting investment of capital, funding, expertise, and people. This will be especially important for towns that have been impacted by job losses and business closures.

"Through each of the three elements of the .IE Digital Town programme and our €1 million investment, we seek to empower town leaders and local communities, help them make better use of digital, and celebrate the towns that successfully integrate digital into social and commercial life so that others will be inspired and motivated to follow."

ENDS

Note to editors

▪ Learn more about applying for the Digital Town Awards, which opens for entries on 22 March.

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About .IE

.IE is the national registry for .ie domain names and the trusted and progressive guardian of Ireland's unique online .ie address. Our purpose is to enable and empower people, communities and businesses across Ireland to thrive online.

We operate the domain name system (DNS) for the .ie namespace, facilitate an independent dispute resolution service, and operate a public WHOIS lookup service for .ie domains.

In cooperation with our Registrars, technical partners and stakeholders, we help advance Ireland's internet ecosystem. Good governance is evidenced in our policy development process for the .ie namespace, which follows a bottom-up, consensus-driven approach through a multi-stakeholder Policy Advisory Committee.

At .IE we are committed to digital advocacy for SMEs and for local communities. Through stakeholder engagement initiatives such as .IE Digital Town, we work with and support SMEs organisations to improve their members' online presence and e-commerce capabilities so they can unlock the power of the internet to boost sales to local consumers.

We also produce fact-based research for the business community and policymakers, such as the .IE Domain Profile Report and the .IE Tipping Point Report, charting the attitudes to digital of Irish SMEs and consumers during the Covid-19 pandemic.

There are over 315,000 .ie domain names registered. Since March 2018, it is easier and faster to register a .ie domain. As part of the domain registration process, every applicant must provide tangible evidence of a connection to Ireland.

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