

The US-to-Dublin research bridge



The headquarters of Media Lab Europe at the old Guinness Hop store in Dublin.

Photograph: Joe St Leger

– and above left: iCom in action – a live link between MIT Media Lab in Boston and Dublin’s Media Lab Europe – and, above right, researchers at work in Media Lab Europe in the Hopstore

The legendary zest of MIT for innovation and discovery has set up its European home in Dublin

Media Lab Europe is a hybrid education centre uniting the best features of the US and European approaches to research and innovation.

The US is famous for the high levels of innovation and creativity within its research community, exemplified by the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Media Lab. The willingness to take risks and to learn from mistakes made is one of the best features of good US research activity.

In Europe, research is often characterised by a combination of intense

technical expertise and a much deeper appreciation of cultural and societal influences and impact.

Media Lab Europe is a university-level research and education centre located in Dublin, Ireland. It first opened its doors on 24th July 2000 on the top floor of the 19th-century hopstore, part of the Guinness Brewery.

The entire building and the adjacent properties are being made available by the Government to form a Media Lab Europe campus in the heart of a new digital media district, the Digital Hub.

The campus aims to marry the best of both worlds in a unique, interdisciplinary environment which brings together some of the world’s best scientists, researchers and inventors to tackle some really challenging technology issues.

The newest senior research scientist is Dr Piotr Cofta who is working to enable, build and sustain trust between humans and technology.

Cofta graduated and received his PhD in computer science from the University of

Gdansk, Poland. For several years he taught and conducted research at the university before moving to Finland to join a start-up company specialising in mobile communication.

He then moved to Nokia, working both in Finland and in the US as a “principal scientist” focusing his research on trust and security.

The lab’s key initiative is a new programme of research called “Intimate Interfaces”. It brings together inter-modal interfaces, biometric sensing and rich representations to create intimate and personal connections with and through new technologies.

Ultimately, the programme should transform the way we interact with and through human-made objects. They will become continually and immediately present, naturally functional and supportive, and consistently comfortable and satisfying.

They will connect people with technology, their environment and each other in ways that augment human abilities and enrich individual

and collective experience.

These “intimate interfaces” will reside in our clothing, our furniture, our jewellery, and in and on our bodies, as well as in the gadgets we carry and use.

As the European Research Partner of MIT Media Lab, the Dublin centre has unparalleled access to the people, resources and accumulated intellectual property of the US facility. Now three years old, Media Lab Europe is increasingly expanding its reach and influence across Europe.

The lab is bringing together corporate partners from both continents, including AIB, Intel, BT, Ericsson and AOL. It is developing new models to provide organisations with access to its approach to research and creativity.

In addition to its many corporate partners, it’s now developing relationships with European regional development agencies. And with the expansion of the EU, new member states are looking to Media Lab Europe to provide them with access to a unique transatlantic experience.