

InfoTech

Hibernia comes ashore

Gavin Walker talks with Fergus Innes, vice president of Sales in Europe for Hibernia Atlantic, about the telecommunications industry and the changes that are taking place in Northern Ireland.



Fergus Innes is what one might call an 'industry veteran'. He has spent most of his working life in telecoms, including senior executive positions at COLT Telecom, Cable & Wireless, Telia and Thus, before joining the Hibernia Atlantic team in July 2009.

Hibernia Atlantic is the only diverse transatlantic high bandwidth connectivity provider. It has a submarine and terrestrial cable network that offers over 100 redundant network Points of Presence (PoPs) throughout Canada, US, UK and mainland Europe.

So I wondered what Hibernia Atlantic, a global company with roots in New Jersey and Dublin, was doing in Northern Ireland.

"In January 2009, Hibernia Atlantic was awarded a €30 million contract, to deploy a new and historic cable network from North America to Northern Ireland and the border counties on behalf of the Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment and the Department of Communications, Environment and Natural Resources in the South.

"This is an EU project which is due for completion in the second quarter of 2010. This will mean, in under a months' time, Hibernia's Irish network will carry bandwidth with speed and accuracy directly to and from North America, avoiding the common and congested routes around London and New York waterways. It provides the only direct connection to North America from Northern Ireland.

"With this link, network costs will compare very favourably with costs in Dublin and major UK cities while increasing competition in the international telecommunications market. This makes Northern Ireland particularly ripe for foreign direct investment (FDI) for those companies who need to move around large amounts of data."

So it would seem businesses can now look favourably to placing part of their network in Northern Ireland.

"Yes but its just not about FDI, it's about Point to Point. If you are a company in Derry and you have several locations along the way where you want to move information or avail of the fibre optic cable in, say Armagh and Dublin, then that is possible. Equally this can be done between Belfast and New York or Belfast and Brussels.

"Hibernia's main focus has been the long haul wholesale capacity business, where we provide the infrastructure to the major wholesale telecoms companies. We connect these markets enabling service providers to places like London, New York, Chicago and Amsterdam.

"One part of our Company, which has grown exponentially in the past two years, is that of the Global Financial Network (GFN). The financial market demands a low latency circuit between trading centres and markets. Belfast could have its own international stock exchange or traders could be resident in Northern Ireland where they now have the capability to make millisecond transactions which is vital to their business.

"Indeed, the media industry in Northern Ireland has stepped into the same pool as the big leagues in America and London with the opening of the Belfast Paint Hall Studio in the Titanic Quarter.

"This along with companies like Zoogloo who are setting up in Northern Ireland because there is the infrastructure is only a taste of what is to come. Greg Maguire of Zoogloo, originally from County Down, has spent the last 16 years in California as a computer animator on projects like Star Wars: The Clone Wars, Happy Feet and Avatar. All he needs is a virtual studio and a secure network to send large amounts of data across the Atlantic and around the world.

"This is an exciting time for Northern Ireland and Hibernia Atlantic is preparing for the commercial growth to come."