



Helen Arnold, owner, TVM
Picture: Clare Keogh

Irish firm runs Europe's largest mobile TV studio

BY ELAINE O'REGAN

A major contract to provide remote broadcasting services to US television network NBC, at the Winter Olympics in Russia earlier this year, marked an important turning point for Cork company TVM. The 50-strong firm, led by husband-and-wife team Bart and Helen Arnold, is now eyeing other potentially lucrative contracts overseas, having built the biggest outside broadcasting (OB) truck in Europe at a cost of €5 million. OB8 is one of seven trucks in TVM's outside broadcasting fleet, which operate out of the company's country hideaway headquarters in the north Cork village of Bartlemy, travelling around Ireland and beyond to broadcast events for television. Worth between €1.5 million and €5 million each, their OB trucks are mobile television studios, kitted out with all the camera, audio, editing, and graphics equipment needed to produce a programme on-site. OB8 also netted TVM a contract with Japan's TV Asahi to broadcast the British Open golf tournament earlier this year and, closer to home, the

company recently secured a three-year contract, valued at €1 million annually, to provide OB services to RTE. All of this is welcome news for Helen Arnold, who has built a successful company with her husband over the years, complementing his technical know-how with her canny head for business. On foot of the Winter Olympics contract, NBC has requested TVM's outside broadcasting services for the Rio Olympics in 2016, and Arnold is busy seeking out other opportunities beyond Ireland's modest shores. "We have a very small television industry here, so we feel that we need to move more into other markets outside Ireland," she said. "Our initial contact with NBC came about as a result of a strategic alliance we have with a company in the UK called Visions, which is US-owned. It's one of a few strategic alliances we have with operators over there, where we come in on a non-competitive basis when they need to outsource." While the OB market in the rest of Britain is fairly well-served, Arnold sees an immediate opportunity for TVM in Scotland. "For some reason, OB companies based in London seem to think that Scotland is the

other end of the world, whereas we don't consider getting over there a big challenge. "You drive to Belfast, get a short ferry across and you're there. There are also a lot of similarities with the terrain in Scotland. "If you're used to working out of London all the time and travelling on motorways, Scotland's like another planet, whereas Scotland is actually very like Ireland. We feel that we fit in very well there, culturally and in terms of our approach to work," she said. It is this pioneering approach to business that gave the Arnolds their start in business in the late 1970s. "As a youngster, my husband always had a small PA system going around with him and, in 1977, he got the opportunity to start working on the racecourses," said Arnold. "He covered the racecourses in the southern half of Ireland, providing public address services. As soon as he got in there, he was looking to see what are they doing in England?" "They had cameras in England so he got a black-and-white camera in 1978. That meant that, in the bar by the racecourse, you could watch the racing on a couple of TVs, but racing didn't look great in black-and-white so, within a year, he had invested in a

colour camera." After marrying in 1984, the Arnolds took the business to the next stage, kitting out their first OB van so they could more efficiently record racing events around the country. "There really wasn't an independent television outside broadcasting industry at that time. The only people who had proper OB units were the broadcasters like BBC, UTV and RTE," said Arnold. "When we built our OB truck in 1986, we didn't have a market for it, but we felt that the opening would come, so we were trying to push the door to be first in line when it did." The Arnolds worked directly with racecourses around the country, initially, broadcasting up to 100 race meetings a year, and eventually struck a deal with Satellite Information Systems (SIS), which supplied video footage of horse-racing events to betting shops. "We provided the facilities, the racecourse provided the racing and SIS made a contribution to all parties for racing events to be broadcast out of Ireland into the betting shops in Ireland, but mostly in the UK," said Arnold. "As people in the broadcasting industry saw what we were doing in racing, they realised what we could achieve as an independent company.

"There were people who were training up-and-coming staff out of RTE looking for a career change or maybe retiring and a lot of them came into our crews in the early days, so we were coming in with experienced people and, slowly, we were accepted." TVM now employs 50 people full-time and has twice as many contractors on its books. "Our 50 core people are based out of Bartlemy," said Arnold, who topped the woman-led business category at the recent Ulster Bank Business Achiever Awards. "We've built at the end of the farm where my husband was reared, so we haven't stirred far from home and it's very important to us that we stay here. "While people might think that you have to be in Dublin to be a part of this kind of industry, there really is nothing we don't have where we are. "It might be a little more expensive on some levels - for example, we're never going to get fibre broadband in Bartlemy - we're seven miles from the nearest town - so we use a satellite company for our connectivity. "On the other hand, we're only ten minutes from the motorway and, once you miss the M8, you're wherever you need to be in the country very easily".

Opensky goes overseas

BY ELAINE O'REGAN

Taking the plunge and learning to sell overseas is paying off for Kildare-based managed software firm Opensky Data Systems, which was named High Potential Exporter of the Year at last month's Irish Export Industry Awards. As co-founder and chief executive Michael Cronin sees it, the company's export potential lies in its ability to adapt to the specific data management needs of different sectors, including healthcare, transport and waste. "Our five-year vision is to become one of the most successful indigenous Irish software firms to compete in Europe," said Cronin, who co-founded Opensky in 2004 with the company's chief technology officer William Flanagan. Opensky sells managed software services, including software design, development and support, to big companies and government bodies. Clients include Ireland's National Transport Authority and Essex County Council in Britain. The company has developed a Pathway Accommodation

Support System (PASS) for Dublin City Council, and will shortly roll out a mobile inventory stock management system, developed a few years ago for the Lloyds Pharmacy chain in Britain, to the chemist's Irish branches. Opensky began expanding outside Ireland five years ago, and sold initially to Britain's waste disposal sector, after securing a contract to develop a waste data management system for Lincolnshire County Council. "At that point, we had developed a range of bespoke applications for various clients in Ireland, but not within specific sectors," said Cronin. In the years since, the Opensky offering has evolved in response to the specific needs of a core group of data-dependent industries - namely, healthcare, waste, transport and the public sector. "We operate in areas of huge potential when it comes to investing in software," said Cronin. "European governments need, and demand, extensive reforms in how health services are delivered across Europe in a bid to reduce costs, increase quality and accountability and decentralise health services. When it started to sell to



William Flanagan and Micheal Cronin, co-founders, Opensky

"Waste became a valuable resource like never before, so much so that it needs to be managed by government authorities in order to realise its inherent value," he said. "Transport authorities too have amassed huge amounts of data that require careful analysis and management." "We have developed software for just about anything you can think of - from generating huge waste reports for compliance reporting in the UK, to tracking trainee doctors throughout their hospital placements to monitoring the stock of lipstick on the shelves in your local pharmacy," said Cronin. "In the UK, we maintain re-

lationships from Ireland while also providing onsite project management for clients." Cronin's plans for the company from here include diversification into more sectors in the French market over the next two years, and further expansion into the European healthcare sector. Based on his own experience, he has this advice for other Irish companies keen to establish or increase overseas sales: ■ Commit to fully researching, analysing and assessing the market potential ■ Know what you want out of the market you want to export to ■ Work backwards to achieve it ■ Lead with innovation ■ Follow through with expertise and service quality ■ Manage with tight controls on costs ■ Never underestimate what a challenge language can be ■ Leave more time than you think you will need for translation ■ Find a solid industry-specific and reliable translation partner ■ Always get face-to-face time with a prospective customer ■ Make sure they understand that you are only ever a flight away.



David Van Dessel, partner, Deloitte's Restructuring Services division

Thumbnail guide to insolvency

BY DAVID VAN DESSEL

Insolvency practitioners have been busier than ever in the last few years. More corporate appointments have occurred in the last four years, for example, than in the 12 years prior to 2009. Probably the most striking increase in appointments has been in the area of personal asset receiverships. While the exact numbers are not publicly available, it is likely that personal asset and personal residential investment property appointments have been the most common insolvency appointments of the last four years. At a time of declining corporate insolvency numbers, this type of appointment appears to be increasing as property values recover. Although times have improved, personal debt issues still continue to bring uncertainty to Ireland's banks and the wider economy. It remains difficult to see how and when the residual financial difficulties arising from the days of the Celtic Tiger will finally come to an end. Insolvency levels remain high, the outcome of new legislation remains unclear and we have begun life again outside of the EU and IMF bailout mechanisms. To help you get your head around the process, here is a list of some of the most frequently asked questions about insolvency:

Q) Who is responsible for preparing the declaration of solvency?

A) The directors are responsible. It is the responsibility of the directors to ensure that the statement of assets and liabilities is true and accurate. In certain circumstances, the directors may be deemed personally liable for the obligations of the company.

Q) When is a declaration of solvency considered ineffective?

A) If the declaration of solvency is not made and delivered to the CRO in accordance with section 256 CA1963 as substituted by section 128 of the Companies Act 1990 (CA 1990). If the declaration of solvency has a technical error; for example, the name and address of each director stated on the declaration must match the contact details held by the CRO for each director, otherwise the declaration will be returned. It may be necessary to file a Form B10 (Notice of Change in Directors or Secretaries or in their Particulars) prior to filing the declaration.

Q) What are the consequences if a declaration of solvency is considered ineffective?

A) The resolution to wind up the company will remain valid and the winding up becomes a creditors' voluntary winding up. Section 266 CA 1963 then applies. The liquidator will be obliged to report to the new liquidator if so appointed. In either case, the liquidator must report to the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement pursuant to section 56 of the Company Law Enforcement Act 2001 (CLEA 2001).

Q) What is required if a declaration of solvency is made outside the Irish jurisdiction?

A) A declaration of solvency sworn in a foreign jurisdiction that is party to the Hague Convention before a person entitled to administer oaths for that jurisdiction must be accompanied by a certificate of

legalisation called an apostile. This confirms the capacity in which the person signing the document has acted and that the signature, seal or stamp of the person which the document bears are certified. The apostile can be obtained from the designated authority for that jurisdiction. A listing of countries that are party to the Hague Convention abolishing the Requirement of Legalisation for Foreign Public Documents can be obtained from the Hague Convention website, www.hcch.net. No legalisation is required for a declaration of solvency sworn in countries that are party to the EC Convention abolishing the legalisation of documents in member states of the European Communities of May 25, 1987. However, only Belgium, France, Denmark, Italy and Ireland are party to the EC Convention.

Q) What happens if the company wants to reverse the members' voluntary liquidation?

A) A company that is dissolved can be restored to its original status within two years of the dissolution (section 310 CA 1963). The liquidator, or any interested party, will need to make an application to the High Court to have the resolution of winding up annulled. The liquidator, or the interested party, in their court application must justify their grounds for restoring the company and demonstrate why restoration will be beneficial to the company.

A simple change of mind, perhaps due to a change in circumstances or change in opinion on tax treatment, may not be sufficient to convince the court of the benefits. Before the resolution is passed, the directors and shareholders should ensure that this is the appropriate course of action. The person on whose application the order was made must file an official copy of the order with the CRO within 14 days after making the order, or within such further time as the court will allow. If a company is still in liquidation, a liquidator or interested party on behalf of the company that is in liquidation can petition a court to defer the date at which the dissolution of the company is to take effect for such time as the court thinks fit.

The person on whose application an order of the court is made must file an official copy of the order for registration with the CRO.

Q) Does the phrase 'in voluntary liquidation' mean that all creditors will be paid in full?

A) In the context of a members' voluntary liquidation, all admitted creditors will be paid in full. However, the phrase 'in voluntary liquidation' is also used to describe creditors' voluntary liquidations where, due to the company's insolvency, creditors are unlikely to be paid in full.

Q) Do the directors retain their powers after the appointment of a liquidator?

A) All of the directors' powers cease, unless the members in a general meeting or the liquidator give permission to the directors to retain some of their power.

Movers & Shakers

Michael Page

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Westboro Partners has appointed a new partner. Annemarie Quin has been manager of Westboro's Business Advisory Services for the past seven years. She joined the company five years before that as a trainee accountant.



Mark Doyle is Firebird Heating Solutions' new general manager. Doyle joins from Cognex Ireland, where he was director for eight years. He was also formerly director of Transistor Devices for seven years.

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