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# Rubicon's award-winning startups are all set to conquer new frontiers

**Joe Dermody** reports on the bright future awaiting the graduates of the New Frontiers programme for business startups.



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Remote Signals is a startup destined for big things — in the past week alone, the company has won CIT/Rubicon's prestigious New Frontiers 2018 top Best Business Opportunity prize while it was also a category runner-up in Ireland's Best Young Entrepreneurs.

It has also been selected by the Local Enterprise Office (LEO) Cork City to represent it at the 2018 National Enterprise Awards in May.

The company connects business assets such as fridges, motors and pumps to the internet.

The data that Remote Signals collects is already helping retailers, fridge maintenance companies, pharmacies and others to make choices that are saving costs and informed decisions about new potential revenue models.

It is also working with Teagasc on a project that will see its low cost, robust monitors used to remotely gather data from farming land.

“Farmers get messages about their fields and they can use this data to know when best to spread fertiliser etc. Teagasc will use this data to inform their decisions about grass management,” said Joe Perrott, one of the three founders of Remote Signals, along with Dan Stapleton and Tony Garvey.

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All three were previously with PCH International, so they bring years of overseas experience, notably in China and Europe. They initially focusing on 'cold chain' monitoring of retail fridges. Pharmacies have also taken off for them, likewise their agri-tech monitoring.

Joe Perrott is the one who attended the Enterprise Ireland-funded New Frontiers programme in the Rubicon, CIT's incubator centre for startups.

"New Frontiers has been great for us," Joe Perrott said. "We had a business plan, but the programme taught us to sit down and think about our business, how to do market research, how to charge. You have to know your market. Without that knowledge, you won't sell, no matter how good your product is."

The level of prior industry experience among this year's 13 New Frontiers graduates is as varied as their businesses, which range from freight and oncology solutions to online services for childminders, wedding photography and postcards.



Monika Szykiewicz and Dr Marie Therese Shortt, Culture Pro

Kieran Gleeson of Freight Station won the New Frontiers award for Best Business Plan. He previously worked in logistics with Kuehne Nagel in Cork.

Freight Station is a software as a service (SaaS) platform for the road freight industry.

Its cloud-based platform gives clients digitalised information on the tracking and delivery of shipments. Like Remote Signals, it has also quickly hit the ground running.

"We arrived at New Frontiers with just the concept and we developed a prototype and tested it for our industry," said Kieran Gleeson. "For three or four weeks, we worked on a pilot project with companies to find out exactly what they wanted, adding things like digital signatures.

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"We've decided to go with recording milestones rather than using GPS. The driver will have different options en route.

"The real benefit of what we're doing is that there's proof of delivery. Plus, it's digital rather than paper-based."

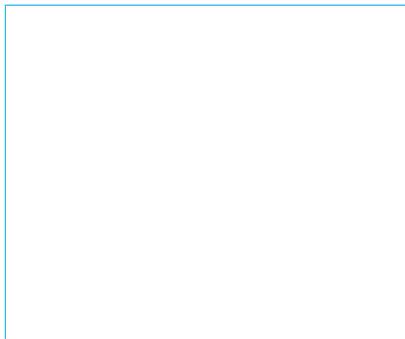
Freight Station anticipates seeing potential growth from Brexit, when customs clearance will add new layers and challenges for drivers across Ireland, the UK and the EU.

Assisted by New Frontiers, the company is currently talking to investors.

Representatives of banks and investment funds were in Cork City Hall earlier this week for the New Frontiers awards ceremony.

The event's panel discussion featured pharma entrepreneurs Pat O'Connor of Orthoxel and Pat O'Flynn of Solvotrin, along with Orla Rimmington, a partner with Kernel Capital, the Bank of Ireland venture capital fund.

"We have over 300 investments in the past 15 years," said Orla Rimmington. "There is no such thing as a perfect company. It's always a good idea to talk about your weaknesses as well as your strengths. We'll find out everything in any case when we do our due diligence.



"I'd also advise startups to talk to investors as early as possible. You can discuss your goals, then later on we'll be able to talk about the markers you've reached and your plans to reach the others. It's also a good idea to look to raise money long before you need it."



Sean O'Sullivan, Head of Enterprise Local Enterprise and Paul Healy, Centre Manager Rubicon

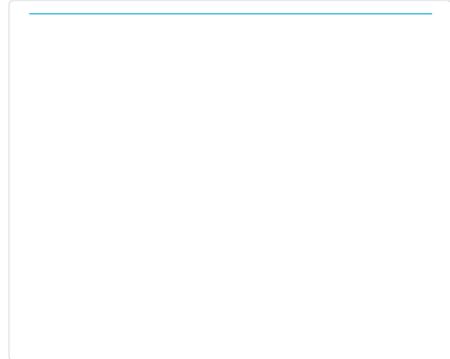
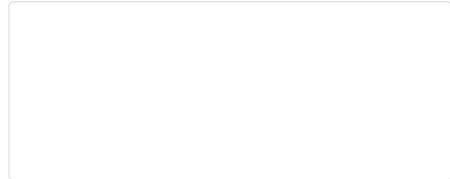
Both Pat O'Connor and Pat O'Flynn echoed that sentiment, highlighting the importance of coming across as "attractive rather than desperate".



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The two entrepreneurs also recounted their lean early years in business, particularly the pre-revenue years that are part and parcel of the healthcare and pharma sectors, with years of clinical trials etc. Invaluable advice for the New Frontiers graduates.

Previous participants in New Frontiers have a great track record. Last year's winner, Paul Glavin of Glavloc Build Systems (GBS) has since expanded and moved into larger premises.

Construction companies in Ireland and UK are using GBS's rapid build systems to deliver complete buildings within six weeks.

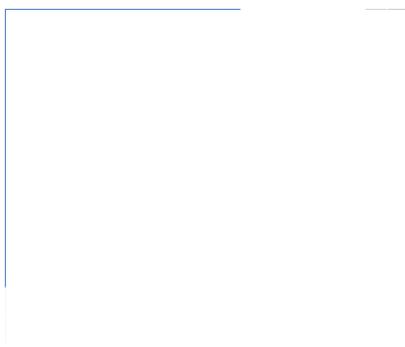
Other successful previous NF programme participants have included businesses such as Abtran, Aspira, Cully and Sully, Crest Solutions, Treemetrics and Radisens Diagnostics.

"New Frontiers is the best programme of its kind in Ireland, with no equity taken in participant businesses," says Liam Fitzgerald, the New Frontiers programme manager.

"It gives these businesses exposure to the full suite of supports available with Enterprise Ireland, including industry specialist mentors, market research resources, and international offices.

"It also acts as the most effective introduction into funding opportunities like the Competitive Start Fund and High Potential Start-up Funding. Participating on New Frontiers is likely to be the best strategic decision a business makes."

Maria Gavin, Enterprise Ireland's programme manager for New Frontiers, said the success of the programme is evidenced by the huge interest it has attracted since being rolled out nationwide. She congratulated this year's graduates on their bravery in launching a business. She also offered her best wishes to all those considering applying for next year's programme.



One potential participant will be recently retired Munster and Ireland rugby star Tomás O'Leary, who is at the outset of launching a new designer watch brand, TOLD & Co.



Feliks Szczublewski, CIT and Joseph Freyne, Swyft Energy

He was the guest speaker at this year's awards, where he spoke about how the professionalism of Munster rugby in particular has informed his determination to succeed in business. His modesty also won over a few new fans.

"I'm hoping to join New Frontiers this year," he said.

"It would be great to get an outsider to bring a new set of eyes and experience to help develop the business. My wife, Julie, is the brains behind the business. And to be honest, she's also the beauty behind it.

"I suggested that we get a male model to be photographed wearing the watches, but she insisted on putting my ugly mug out there as part of the brand."

The Rubicon is welcoming expressions of interest in its next programme.

New Frontiers is offered in three distinct phases to suit businesses at different stages of development.

For more information about the programmes and how to submit an expression of interest, visit the Rubicon's website.

## Participants in the New Frontiers incubation programme for startups, funded by Enterprise Ireland and hosted by the Rubicon Centre, Cork Institute of Technology's incubation hub

### Swyft Energy, Joseph Freyne

Winner of the New Frontiers Best Display award in its City Hall showcase, Swyft Energy is an online platform that streamlines boiler replacements for homeowners by connecting them with reputable boiler installers. "We've had 30% growth month on month on average since our launch," said Joseph Freyne.

"The big thing we learned with New Frontiers was our decision to pivot the business — we were going to be an online platform driving good value to the customer, but we weren't really offering anything to the tradespeople. When we went and met them, we learned that there was a value in taking the hassle out of applying for sustainability grants.

"The other big thing New Frontiers brought us was to get out there with the product. We could have just kept on researching. Instead, the product is something we've been constantly refining as the business keeps growing."

#### **Gasgon Medical, Vincent Forde**

Focused on protecting patients from unwanted dangerous air bubbles in IV tubes, Gasgon is the producer of a device that will reduce the exposure of hospitals, nurses and their patients to risks associated with IV infusions. The company is developing a technology to support clinical staff in hospitals and home care environments globally through effective management of gas in fluids can result in harm to patients.

#### **iLine Software Solutions, Kevin Corr**

iLine is a performance management software solution for production lines. It helps companies to save money by minimising downtime losses and inefficiencies.

"New Frontiers has made me more aware across all aspects of the business," said Kevin Corr. "It also really helps to be in an environment where people are doing something similar to you. The contacts have been great — from mentors, peers through to potential new customers."

Culture Pro, Marie Therese Shortt: Culture Pro is an interactive online B2B cross-cultural training platform. It helps improve communications across a culturally diverse workplace.

#### **ARQ Asset Solutions, Conor O'Sullivan**

ARQ gives owners of valuable assets like power generators, manufacturing and transport machinery to monitor the condition of elements such as the oil that keeps assets running.

#### **MySitter, Aaron Collins**

MySitter finds professional childminders for your home. It employs childcare professionals, conducts Garda vetting etc, and offers 22% higher rates than preschool roles.

#### **Freight Station, Kieran Gleeson**

Freight Station is a software as a service (SaaS) platform for the road freight industry. Its aim is to connect freight forwarders, hauliers and their drivers on a single cloud-based platform. This will digitalise all business processes between these stakeholders.

#### **PeakSoft, Martin O'Flynn**

PeakSoft is a mobile software package that helps people systematise their goal attainment. PeakSoft helps individuals to figure out what they want, why they want it, how to get it, with a personal planning platform to ensure they do what is necessary to achieve it.

**CyCa OncoSolutions, Nusrat JM Sanghamitra**

Winner of Best Innovative Product, CyCa is developing biomolecular nanomachines to deliver drugs; like a tiny molecular drilling machine. It has attracted significant capital investment.

**Remote Signals, Joe Perrott**

Overall winner of New Frontiers 2018, Remote Signals enables businesses to easily obtain operating data from remote assets using their Internet of Things (IoT) hardware and software platform. These assets vary, with current customers including retail, refrigeration stores and pharmacy clients who are using this platform to remotely monitor temperatures in fridges and other vital assets. The platform also has agri-tech applications, and Remote Signals is working on a project with Teagasc to remotely monitor farming land.

**Lumin House, David Casey**

This online photo storage system is a lifetime gallery for a photographer's clientele. Many wedding photographers have shown keen interest.

**Stamp Owl, James Gayle**

StampOwl is an app that allows you to send physical postcards from your smartphone. It is available on Google Play Store and Apple's App Store. Functioning since June 2017, it has 350 active users and has sent 1,500 postcards to date.

**MerchKitty, Darragh Enright**

Merch Kitty is a smartphone-friendly SaaS platform to empower musicians to boost sales of their merchandise. It allows musicians to simple and secure payments for sales and to build relationships with their fans.

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