



Innovation Partnerships: Case Study – Connaught Electronics



A technology supplier to the automotive industry, Connaught Electronics is committed to continuous technological innovation. Through detailed analysis of its market and innovative research conducted in association with NUI Galway and with the help of the Innovation Partnership Programme, this indigenous company has managed to remain at the forefront of its field.

Based in Galway for over 25 years, Connaught Electronics employs around 260 people, 40 of which work in the firm's large research and development department. The company is a leading supplier to the automotive industry, dealing directly with top tier car manufacturers such as BMW, Jaguar Land Rover and Volvo.

Technology has become an increasingly integral part of the automotive industry in recent years, with many manufacturers realising its importance in improving and promoting driver safety. It is in this burgeoning market that Connaught Electronics is making such an impact, and its objective is to be recognised as a leader in this field through ongoing innovation and long-term vision.

An ideal working relationship

A casual acquaintance between a manager in Connaught Electronics and an NUI Galway staff member, Martin Glavin, led to discussions about research. The Innovation Partnerships emerged as the perfect means by which a mutually beneficial relationship could be developed.

Since 2000 Connaught Electronics and NUI Galway have collaborated on three Innovation Partnership projects, the most recent of which has been extremely successful with a patent application currently in preparation.

The R&D team at Connaught Electronics have developed a next-generation vision system for vehicles. This takes the form of a multi-camera system with up to five cameras fitted on the outside of the car. The technology is aimed at assisting drivers to perform various manoeuvres such as reversing and parking, for example.

“What we particularly focused on with NUI Galway was some of the science behind the technology,” explained Peter Reilly, research and development manager with Connaught Electronics. “The science and algorithms investigated by NUI Galway contributed to the successful delivery of this technology.”

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Peter Reilly,
Connaught Electronics

Connaught had a long term approach to the Innovation Partnership Programme, an approach that is now bearing fruit for the company, according to Reilly. One of the company’s aims is to be in a position to recruit researchers from NUI Galway who have worked with Connaught over the years and have built up experience in the company’s field.

“We have the utmost respect for the academics at NUI Galway who are very commercially aware and are doing top-class work. It’s great to work with people that have such an interest in our market,” said Reilly.

Reilly outlines a number of other advantages of the collaborative project:

- It afforded Connaught Electronics the opportunity to carry out background research with the potential to develop intellectual property
- The company was able to develop local expertise in technical areas of strategic interest
- It presented them with the opportunity to explore higher risk and emerging technologies that may not otherwise be considered
- The firm was also able to take a longer term view that’s not always possible in industry due to more immediate pressures

Mutual benefit for researchers and company

For NUI Galway’s electronic engineering department, collaborating with Connaught Electronics provided them with a source of real-world focus and inspiration for research projects according to Martin Glavin and Edward Jones, lecturers at NUI Galway.

“It was a window to the commercial world really in that we had access to people who understand the automotive market and the expectations of the market,” Glavin explained.

He also explained how the link up helped NUI Galway gain increased credibility and respect through collaboration with a highly regarded company like Connaught Electronics.

Jones also praised the team at Connaught Electronics for their energy and enthusiasm. *“There was great trust between the two parties and we had some fantastic interaction during the project.”*

Both Reilly and the NUI Galway team agreed that the working relationship that’s been developed between Connaught Electronics and NUI Galway over the past few years will continue to be productive in the years to come.



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