



## Major venture capital firms to bring €10 billion to 'tech tour'

By Gavin Daly

Ireland's technology entrepreneurs are hoping for a boost when 60 professional investors with €10 billion at their disposal arrive in Dublin later this month.

The investors, including representatives of some of the biggest venture capital (VC) firms in the world, will visit Ireland as part of a three-day 'Tech Tour' covering Ireland and Britain. Executives from the investment arms of large multinational firms will also attend.

The funders will hear investment pitches from 30 Irish and British companies, which were selected last week after a process that attracted applications from about 250 companies. The identity of the chosen companies remains a closely-guarded secret, but Irish companies will make up a decent proportion of the final 30, according to John O'Sullivan, a general partner in ACT Venture Capital in Dublin and

member of the selection committee.

"Relative to the size of the economies, the Irish companies are punching well above their weight," said O'Sullivan, who was impressed with the applications received. "We haven't seen any difference in quality between the companies in Ireland and Britain. Companies that secure VC investment have to do it against a global peer group."

O'Sullivan said that the Tech Tour, which will come to Dublin on April 28 and 29, was a well-established model to bring together venture capitalists, entrepreneurs and other interested parties.

"It is a very effective way for the international VCs to meet companies and familiarise themselves with the market. Deals will be done out of this," he said.

While the economic uncertainty globally has taken its toll, O'Sullivan said funders were keen to find high-growth firms. "Everything has been

affected by what has happened. There is a sense of caution, but that doesn't mean there are no opportunities," he said.

Following the last Irish Tech Tour in 2004, several companies received investment, and a number have since been acquired by foreign buyers. While that event focused heavily on early-stage companies, O'Sullivan said that the firms chosen this year were at varying stages of development and were working on a wider range of technologies.

"There is a very broad range of companies – everything from seed-stage companies to very well-developed companies on expansion [funding] rounds," he said. "People will be surprised to see the number of companies out there that are quietly doing €15 to €20 million [in revenues] a year."

"The breadth of areas that the companies are coming from is also far wider. There has been a rise in what you could loosely call internet ser-

vices businesses," said O'Sullivan, who noted a "blurring" between sectors, including the application of new technologies to more traditional industries. "Out of that blurring there are big opportunities," he said.

The older generation of Irish technology firms have mainly focused on corporate customers, through the development of semiconductor products or software for banks and telecoms companies. However O'Sullivan said there was "a swing towards consumer propositions", where the end product was being sold directly to the public.

Another trend shows an increasing number of companies emerging from research backgrounds, he said. "There is sometimes a scepticism about university innovation, but I don't share it. We are beginning to see the results of research coming through into companies," he said.