The IE Domain Registry (IEDR), the managed registry for Ireland's official internet address .ie, has launcheded OPTIMISE, a new e-commerce website development fund for Irish SMEs worth €100,000. The OPTIMISE fund is one of a number of initiatives to mark the tenth anniversary of the organisation which manages the .ie domain in the interests of the Irish internet community.

The OPTIMISE fund will enable ten Irish small and medium business owners to begin the process of transforming their existing online presence into a fully featured, transactional website custom-designed for their business' needs. The ten recipients will each receive €10,000 worth of professional technical and marketing support with which to plan and carry out a major e-commerce website upgrade. The upgrade will enable the ten successful SMEs to sell goods and services 24/7 to a global marketplace online.

The IEDR has established the OPTIMISE fund to raise awareness of the fact that Irish companies remain slow to harness the potential of the Internet. The Internet offers Irish SMEs a 24 hour channel through which to increase sales, profitability and market reach. Notwithstanding the rollout of broadband in Ireland and increasing PC ownership in the past decade, only 66% of Irish businesses had any kind of website by 2009, compared with 40% in 2000. Of those 66%, only 21% had e-commerce functionality on their website, a marginal increase of just 3% since 2000. These were among the key findings of IEDR's Domain Name Industry Report published in November 2010.

The IEDR's OPTIMISE fund is open to applications from any organisation classified as an SME or micro-enterprise, which has an existing website hosted online that is accessible to the public and registered with a .ie domain name. Further details and online application forms are available at www.why.ie/optimise . The closing date for receipt of entries is Friday, 3rd June 2011.

Commenting on the launch, Mr. David Curtin, Chief Executive of the IE Domain Registry, said "The .ie domain is highly respected both nationally and internationally and we want to see Irish businesses using it to make the most of the 24 hour sales channel that is the Internet. Our research shows that the next growth phase of the Internet in Ireland depends on the SME community here and their willingness to embrace new technologies to build better, fully featured e-commerce websites.

Too many Irish SMEs are still reluctant to make that transition. We know that great websites attract people online and encourage them to spend more time consuming advertising, products and services. Until such times as SMEs in Ireland grasp this, they continue to lose competitive advantage by missing out on lucrative sales opportunities online."

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