



Self-starters

Ready to reinvent yourself? Then prepare to be inspired ... **MEG WALKER** speaks with four start-up entrepreneurs who know exactly how to get great ideas off the ground.

Photographs by **AL HIGGINS**.

“Being an entrepreneur is a hard slog. There are difficult days, but I’ve become more comfortable with the unknown, and with challenging myself.”



ÁINE BEHAN

CEO and co-founder, Cortechs

THE IDEA Empowering people with brain fitness tools for a more resilient mind. I’m passionate about creating drug-free, alternative solutions for issues like ADHD. Cortechs has created a 2D runner game for an android platform, with a brainwave headset, called “Zip and the Misty Mountain”. It’s targeted at six to twelve-year-olds, and can help them relax and improve their focus. Those who will benefit most will be children with ADHD.

GETTING STARTED The contacts I’ve accumulated over the last year-and-a-half have been vital to getting Cortechs to where it is today. I love connecting with people. The Irish community is phenomenal for giving a handout or referring you.

BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR Running your own business is a hard slog, and there are difficult days, but I’ve become more comfortable with the unknown, and with challenging myself. Starting Strong’s Going for Growth programme [an initiative designed to support women growing their businesses] was a great support. I still have fears, but I’m not as risk averse anymore. I don’t quiver when somebody says, “I need five million euro investment”. I think big.

BEING A WOMAN IN BUSINESS I’m passionate about seeing more women in the areas of science and maths reach senior positions. I’ve heard stories from women who were told in university not to study maths or science. But I think now women are becoming more assertive and saying, “No, I can do that.” We need more of that confidence.

cortechs.ie



ANDREEA WADE

CEO and co-founder, Opening.io

THE IDEA At Opening.io, we use artificial intelligence to automatically match candidates with job postings. It's a service that makes sure the right people find each other. For now, we're working in the IT and tech space.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED Technology is in everything, and through learning how to code language, you're empowering yourself to become a maker – to create things. There are people out there with great ideas, but they aren't techies, so although they know what something should look like, they don't know how to put it together. Coding allows an idea to become a reality. When I go and speak at schools, I tell kids, "It's not a boys' thing, it's not a maths thing, it's a mechanism for you to become a creator and a maker."

MOVING FORWARD We want to move fast. Right now, the technology is 92 per cent accurate in matching candidates with skills, so the next step is to tackle cultural fit, ie how an individual matches up to the values and ethos of a given company.

BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR Networking is crucial. If you see someone doing something interesting and you want to be a part of it, or you see people in a space that you want to be in, go and ask if you can help. Taking this approach has put me in touch with amazing people and given me all sorts of opportunities. Also, do things for other people – you'll learn a lot and build relationships.

RHONA TOGHER

CEO and co-founder, Restored Hearing

THE IDEA A sound therapy that can get rid of tinnitus (ringing in the ears) 99 per cent of the time.

GETTING STARTED My co-founder, Eimear O'Carroll, and I both had tinnitus in school, and there was nothing available to ease the condition. We entered the idea for Restored Hearing therapy in the BT Young Scientist project in Fifth Year and came second, receiving an award for innovation in health research. By the time we'd sat our leaving certificate, the local enterprise office in Sligo had given us a grant to set up our own business and continue our research.

THE NEXT STAGE We're ready to launch a Restored Hearing app, and we're launching our second product, Sound Bounce – a retrofit insert for noise protection headsets that offers eight times more protection – this month. It'll benefit people who work in heavy industries, such as construction and aviation. Hopefully, we're changing how the world deals with noise pollution.

BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR We were young when we started six years ago, so no one took us seriously. We still struggle with that, but we're getting on with it. Fears and doubts are normal. There are organisations like Enterprise Ireland that can help, but no one can tell you what to do. If people see your passion, they'll get on board. I've started working with the BT Young Scientist Business Bootcamp, where budding scientists can learn about entrepreneurship, and it's one of the most satisfying parts of my job – to mentor and inspire others. I wish I could have met me when I was 18.

restoredhearing.com

“One of the most inspiring parts of my job now is mentoring aspiring entrepreneurs. I wish I could have met me when I was 18.”





TARA VAN ZYL

CEO and founder, Seamless

THE IDEA Seamless is a real time approval and notification system that allows film crews to share private production information in one secure place. It's going to launch in 2016.

HOW IT STARTED I was working as the wardrobe supervisor on *Game of Thrones* in Croatia. We had three production units going at the same time: Belfast, Iceland and Croatia, so all the continuity notes had to be shared among all teams daily and it was all done manually, with pen, paper, digital cameras and email. I always had an interest in tech, and thought about how life-changing it would be if I had an app to log everything. Apple have a programme called One to One, where they train you on their new products, so I registered and said, "I want to make an app", and I did! I worked on series three of *Moone Boy* and got everyone on my crew to use my app. Then that team went on to do *Love/Hate*, and word spread.

BUILDING A BUSINESS Starting Strong's Going for Growth programme was my support system. Every week, we'd share our news. Sometimes the news was great, sometimes it wasn't, but both are really important to hear. You learn from it.

BEING AN ENTREPRENEUR I meet people constantly. A coffee can open a door to an investment or help me find a business partner – whatever happens, I'll always come away knowing more. Talk to as many people as you can. And don't hold back, thinking you can't do it because you don't know enough. It's amazing how much my attitude has changed. Being an entrepreneur has made me braver. Now is the right time, just jump in and do it.

🐦 @weare_seamless

TARA WEARS NAVY BELTED JUMPSUIT, €29.99 AT H&M. PHOTOGRAPHED BY AL HIGGINS, ASSISTED BY KYLE TUNNEY, SHOOT CO-ORDINATED AND STYLED BY JO LINEHAN, ASSISTED BY LORNA LANE. MAKE-UP FOR AINE BY CIARA ALLEN AT MORGAN THE AGENCY USING LANCOME. MAKE-UP BY SARAH KEARY, SARAH KEARY.IE. SHOT ON LOCATION AT DLR LEXICON, DUN LAOGHAIRE. FOR A FULL PROGRAMME OF EVENTS AT THE LEXICON THIS SEPTEMBER, SEE LIBRARIES.DLR.CO.IE.