

A Day In The Life Of... Mark Henry, Central Marketing Director at Tourism Ireland

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The Marketing Institute: What does a Central Marketing Director do?

Mark Henry: Tourism Ireland is the organisation that has the wonderful job of promoting the island of Ireland as a tourist destination around the world. We have 150 staff of whom about 90 are based overseas and the remainder are located between our offices in Dublin and Coleraine.

I look after the marketing teams based here on the island. That involves consumer research, strategy development, brand management, content and advertising creation, digital marketing, customer service, and working with the tourism industry here to plug them into our marketing programmes overseas.

MII: What were your key career moves to get to your current role?

M.H: I graduated from UCD with a Research Masters in Psychology and worked in various research and consultancy roles for around 10 years. I ended up in the e-business sector at an exciting time but the "dot com" bubble eventually burst and I found myself unemployed.

Tourism Ireland was being established at the time and it advertised for a whole host of positions. One of the vacancies was the Head of Research and Planning - a job title that I had recently held – so I successfully applied for that. My e-business background stood me in good stead as I was later promoted to Central Marketing Director to look after the division's new digital unit as well.

MII: What is the biggest challenge you face in your role?

M.H: Not having enough resources to talk to the world! There is so much opportunity for Irish tourism but we can only afford to do so much. Given the understandable cutbacks in government expenditure since the financial crash, our marketing budgets are significantly lower than what they were back in 2008. A clear segment focus and maximising return on investment have therefore been vital.

Given that the number of tourists visiting our island has never been greater, I feel that we are doing a good job in managing the challenge.

MII: What key skills do you need to be effective in your role?

M.H: A consumer-centric perspective is vital. For me, that means you must see Ireland from the perspective of the overseas visitor and not assume that they know about the place like those of us who live here do. Research literacy is important in that respect.

The marketing landscape evolves rapidly so keeping up to date is important and identifying which changes to invest behind. Digital literacy and strategic thinking are therefore critical.

Finally, Tourism Ireland promotes the destination on behalf of thousands of businesses the length and breadth of the island and it is those businesses that actually make the sale. Working with all these stakeholders, and finding ways to maximise opportunities for them, is therefore central to our success.

MII: Describe a typical working day.

M.H: Truly there is no "typical day" for me. Last week I presented to our board on my team's work programme for the year. The following day we had a Brexit seminar with key members of the tourism sector to share market intelligence. I spent the following day with my team in our Coleraine office and we had a meeting with Tourism Northern Ireland to discuss new product initiatives under development.

Yesterday we reviewed the initial ideas from our advertising agency for this year's Game of Thrones campaign for Northern Ireland. I also attended a business tourism working group meeting with Fáilte Ireland and sectoral representatives to discuss the 2017 promotional programme.

This evening I will meet tourism industry members at the launch of the Saint Patrick's Festival programme. And tomorrow I fly to Brussels for a board meeting of the European Travel Commission (the body that comprises of Europe's national tourism organisations) of which I am currently a Vice President. There's always a lot going on!

MII: What do you love most about your role?

M.H: Nothing is more satisfying than knowing that your work is meaningful. Every day in this job I get an opportunity to make a contribution to shaping the image of Ireland abroad; to help to generate economic growth and jobs at home; and, as a north-south body, to help play a part in sustaining the peace process in Northern Ireland.

In addition, we get to do some great work. Our Game of Thrones campaign last year picked up over 20 awards for creativity (including the Grand Prix at the Kinsale Sharks), and we've been honoured with five All Ireland Marketing Awards over the past six years.

MII: Looking ahead, where might your career path lead to next?

M.H: That's a tough one. I stumbled into working in tourism and it has proved to be very personally rewarding. I would be quite happy to continue to work in this fantastic sector or instead to go back into working in strategy development or digital services as I did before. Whatever path I follow, it has to be one where I am confident that I can make a tangible contribution.

MII: To whom do you look for professional inspiration in your role?

M.H: I love the valuable work that Les Binet and Peter Field are doing on advertising effectiveness with the [IPA](#). I find Scott Brinker ([Chiefmartec](#)) excellent on developments in marketing technology. And I consider both Simon Anholt ([The Good Country](#)) and our very own John Fanning to be gurus on destination branding.

There are lots and lots of great thinkers whose insight has never been more accessible to us all – read it, reflect on it, and apply it!

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