



# Entrepreneurship in Ireland 2008

Global Entrepreneurship Monitor (GEM)

The Annual Report for Ireland

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## MARCO GIANNANTONIO

It was a love of Ireland that brought Marco Giannantonio back again and again to Ireland after his first visit in 2001, when he came for a few months to learn English having finished a degree in law in the University of Rome.

In 2004, having qualified as a solicitor, it was decision time. He was just 25 with excellent qualifications and an expectation on everyone's part that he would go on to make a brilliant lawyer like his brother. But his heart was not in it.

*I loved studying law but I did not particularly like practising it. I did not like the system. It seemed to me that people could not be themselves; it was as if they were wearing masks. I wanted a career in which I could put all my passion and my heart and be true to myself. I then did something quite mad – I decided to base myself in Ireland and to turn from the law to the world of food and wine! To say that everyone at home was very surprised by my decision is putting it mildly.*

Before he left Italy in 2005, Marco had discovered a person who shared his sense of mission to bring the best of Italy through its food and wine to people in other countries. Maurizio Mastrangelo was to become Marco's business partner and the two first set up a company in Italy, where Maurizio would continue to be based. The idea was that they would source produce from a network of small organic producers and try to sell these initially to the restaurateurs that Marco had worked with previously on his many earlier visits to Ireland. Then Marco moved to Ireland.

*I started with nothing, just my mobile phone. I didn't even have a computer or a landline.*

Marco explains that like many others starting a new business the initial results were not good, due to the fact that the new business was no different to many other longer established businesses. *We were full of passion but did not pause to plan the best way forward. There was big competition facing the new business. I knew that we had to be offering something different and that a more original approach was needed.*

Marco realised that when he could get talking to people, when they could taste the wine and the food that they were much more open to ordering the products. With this in mind,

he rented a very small space in Rathgar into which he would invite people to sample what was on offer. A chef friend of his joined him at this stage. At the beginning they invited those in the food business to come and sample a taste of Italy. This went very well and built their confidence. Within a month they decided to try to attract in the general public. They would do this by starting an Italian cookery school.

Initially the main focus was on building up the cookery school and the food and wine being imported were primarily being used as ingredients for the school. A leaflet promotion combined with free trails sparked initial interest and the web site proved very useful as a means of attracting customers. Within three months, people were booking classes.

With the increasing interest among those attending classes in all things Italian, Marco and his partner decided to organise tours to bring people to Italy where they could see at first hand where the food was produced and the wine made. This was a great success.

Marco is a great believer in the power of networks and has worked at building up a network since the day he arrived. He now had a rapidly growing network of satisfied customers for his cookery school and for the tours. *These were like my PR officers.*

With the business growing there was a need to find a bigger place to house the cookery school. A suitable place was located within Rathgar and, working 18 hours a day, an empty space was turned into an Italian cookery school within a month. *We called on all our friends and a good friend of mine, who is an interior designer, came over from Italy.*

At this stage it was also necessary to approach a bank as they needed to get some money to put into the growing business. *Our bank was AIB in Dame Street and there we dealt with Nicky Heaney. We explained our ideas to him. He liked our business plan and was prepared to back us.*

With larger premises much more was possible. Two employees were taken on to complement Marco and the chef, Marco Roccasalvo, who was to become the third partner. Committed to innovation, Marco tried out different ways of fully utilising the premises. Not only was the school in demand in the ordinary way but cookery parties proved very popular with families celebrating special occasions, cooking

er, then eating together. The same  
ach proved attractive for corporate team  
ng and groups came from all over the  
y to participate in competitions and  
ial occasions centred around Italian  
wine and hospitality.

ther areas began to open up for  
usiness – demand for cookery  
onstrations outside the cookery school  
r catering services. The need for a larger  
n for catering became apparent. Marco  
s partners rented an industrial kitchen  
catering business in Kimmage. But  
oon realised that ideally all the aspects  
business should be together, otherwise  
was duplication and inefficiency.

est phase of the business sees them  
out a large unit in City Link Business  
ld Naas Road, Dublin 12 which has a  
ore room, a specialist kitchen for the  
g, a dedicated school of cookery and a  
hop for direct sales. Six people together  
e three partners are now employed  
ull time.

wine bar, Pinocchio's in Ranelagh  
en added to the stable of related  
ises. *Who can say in five years there*

*may be six or ten Pinocchio's around Ireland?*

Besides his bank, Marco mentions the valuable support he has received from the Emerge Skillsnet – *We have sent our people to do courses there. They give more than training, however, as they have the same philosophy as ourselves and believe in the positive power of making networks.*

Underlying Marco's approach to his business is a philosophy which guides his life. *Our lives are relatively short and we have only a short time in which to make a difference. It is therefore very important to always give of your best. At the end of every day I want to be able to say with truthfulness – Marco you have done well today.*

Marco's advice to others, thinking about becoming an entrepreneur, is not to get caught in hesitation: *Starting is hard. But once you start the business it gathers momentum and it is as if you have a positive wind behind your back. The key is to start. Then things happen which otherwise might not.*

**For more information on Marco Giannantonio's new business go to [www.flavourofitaly.net](http://www.flavourofitaly.net)**

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