



Laurence O'Rourke addresses the opening day of National Digital Week.



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And it is believed the model could be replicated elsewhere in the country.

The claim was made by Leonard Donnelly of the Ludgate group, who opened Ireland's first ever National Digital Week in Skibbereen.

The four-day event has attracted 60 speakers, with 3,000 people due to attend. While much discussion on day one centred on distant space and the farm of the future, the impact of digital technology was also promoted as a way of regenerating Ireland.

Ludgate — named after Percy Ludgate born in Skibbereen in 1883 and the inventor of one of the first mobile computing devices — is a not-for-profit initiative. It aims to attract digital entrepreneurs to the area through the opening of five buildings over the next five years, alongside other initiatives.



At the event were Chloe Maguire, Ellen McCarthy, and Niamh O'Driscoll from Mercy Heights.

Leonard Donnelly of Ludgate said Skibbereen's high-end connectivity could be married to schemes that would create a digital hub which would attract the Irish diaspora and top level graduates from other countries to West Cork.

National Digital Week, which will be an annual event, is part of the initiative and Mr Donnelly said: "I think we are something unique and different."

He expects the event to double in size next year, while the first Ludgate building will open in 2016 as part of the plan to develop 2,000 jobs over the next five years.



Laurence O'Rourke addresses the opening day of National Digital Week.

"This was part of the formula that we thought was important. Rural Ireland has to be rebranded. The real problem is a massive diaspora living abroad but it is amplified in rural areas," he said.

He said that in addition to attracting these people home, Ludgate was looking at partnerships with an international foundation or large multinationals that would allow graduates from overseas keen on developing an entrepreneurial venture to relocate to Skibbereen for up to 18 months.

He said there had already been expressions of interest in utilising the first Ludgate building from a Danish tech firm. An Irishman working on research for a US multinational had pitched moving his development team from Barcelona to Skibbereen.

He said a modelling exercise indicated, after five years, the local GDP could be increased by up to €37m.

Speakers at National Digital Week include senior management in Microsoft Ireland and Discovery Networks, and representatives from Google, among others.

Yesterday's launch began with a video message from film producer and specially appointed digital champion for David Puttnam, who said: "I would argue the digital revolution has changed everything about education. Ireland has a chance to be not just the land of saints and scholars but the land of scholars. I am not prepared to take second place from anybody."

It is estimated that National Digital Week, which continues to Saturday, is worth €2m to the local economy.

Today's events focus on women and social entrepreneurship, with Friday's line-up including speakers on the digital retail and services and Saturday's programme looking at the Internet of Things and how it can create employer