



Web solution with a difference

By Margaret O'Brien

The Digital Enterprise Research Institute (DERI) at NUI Galway is home to a thoroughly multinational group of 130 researchers, making it the largest semantic web research institute in the world.

The semantic web is the evolving next generation of the world wide web (www), which will allow computers to understand the semantics of online information, rather than just pulling and pushing data.

DERI has established an enviable international reputation for its cutting-edge research, and one of its latest projects – to develop a new intelligent trip planner in collaboration with an Irish start-up – will further boost the institute's reputation for innovation.

DERI is to develop the new intelligent trip planner in collaboration with Irish start-up Tourist Republic. Dr John Breslin, group leader with DERI and founder of the popular online forum boards.ie, said: "The new internet tool 'TripPlanr' will allow travellers to plan more complex trips than existing technology allows, such as combining multiple destinations on a fixed budget and timeline.

"The cost of this initiative is €200,000 and it has received support funding under Enterprise Ireland's Innovation Partnership programme."

Dr Conor Hayes, senior project researcher, said: "TripPlanr will be aimed at the more adventurous traveller who wants more than a weekend for two in one of Paris's main hotels. The technology will combine Touristr.com's traveller recommendations with information from airlines and accommodation providers, suggesting the most perfectly attuned trip possible."

DERI's specialised expertise in information mining, the Semantic Web and Web 2.0 applications will allow TripPlanr to filter data and make recom-

mendations based on the preferences of the traveller and their social network.

Building on Touristr.com's existing destination review site, the new solution is expected to increase the probability of the traveller booking the targeted option suggested. Explaining



Dr John Breslin of DERI

the need for such a service, Hayes said that the pre-internet problem of information deficit has been replaced with the problem of information overload.

"We are faced with an overwhelming surfeit of similarly-sounding destination descriptions and offers. We hope to make online trip planning much more personalised, by enabling networked knowledge using the latest technologies developed here at DERI," he said.

Jan Blanchard, chief executive of Limerick-based Tourist Republic, sees huge benefits in the partnership. "We knew that, to build the intelligent trip planner which we have in mind, we needed a team to rival the in-house expertise at Google or Yahoo!. Through Enterprise Ireland, we have this opportunity to bring our vision to reality with DERI, which is the largest semantic web research institute in the world."

The TripPlanr project has a skilled team to research and develop the application. TripPlanr is expected to be in beta testing by the end of the year.