

Interview: Ronan Quinn - CEO, Ardmac, Ireland



"Life sciences - biopharma, medtech and a bit of healthcare - represent around 50 percent of our overall business."

09.01.2017

Tags: [Ireland](#), [Ardmac](#), [Healthcare](#), [Pharma](#), [Biopharma](#), [Medtech](#)

Ronan Quinn, CEO of Ardmac, an international provider of high-tech cleanroom facilities to the life sciences sector, tells us the inspiring story of Ardmac's continued growth through the recent economic recession, the second-generation cleanroom technologies they are bringing to the market, and his positive outlook for Ardmac in the next few years.

Ronan, can you first provide an overview of Ardmac to our international audience?

Ardmac is an award winning international specialist construction contractor with almost 40 years' experience in setting the standard in delivering architectural, workspace and turnkey solutions to cleanroom and controlled environments in the biopharma, micro-electronics, medtech and healthcare sectors.

We have been committed to providing with clean environments for over 35 years, continuously developing our products, partnerships and procedures to deliver the best technical and value engineered solutions.

Ardmac also provide commercial and retail fit-out services. This is part of our risk management strategy - not having all our eggs in one basket. This dual competence - on the interior and on the technology side - gives Ardmac agility in combination with a strong, balanced foundation.

We employ over 190 staff, providing in-house global capabilities to deliver projects to the highest standards.

We work with our clients collaboratively throughout the life of a project, integrating seamlessly with our clients' teams to provide solutions that fulfil their business needs and give certainty that the project objectives will be delivered. Our process-driven approach, implemented by our in-house design and engineering team, ensures compliance throughout the build.

We saw that Ardmac was one of the 21 Irish companies within the top 1000 most inspiring companies across Europe. What makes Ardmac such an inspiring company?

[Featured_in]

Ardmac were delighted to be included in the London Stock Exchange Group's 'Inspiring Companies Across Europe' list as this highlighted our growth and job creation. It is a testament to our team's hard work and dedication to client delivery.

The recent recession was a tough experience for everyone in the construction sector. It became evident very quickly that we had to navigate the business towards different geographies. That was the key strategic decision for the company - focus on the niche sectors that we were experts in - outside of Ireland. We expanded business into other countries in Europe like Belgium and Netherlands, looking at larger projects over a longer period. We became stronger and more agile as a result.

Also, we have always sought to employ the best people and strive, through our processes and industry know-how, to deliver the best result for our customers. That is what we have always done, and what we continue to do today.

In 2015, along with a number of other directors, you engaged in a management buy-out (MBO) of Ardmac. What was the rationale for this?

The company began in 1977. In 2015, the former owners sought to steer the company into its next phase.

Personally, I have been with the company since 1999. I have dedicated a substantial part of my career to the company and developed along with it, to the extent that I felt I was part owner even before I had any equity in the company!

The management team, which includes myself, Roy Millar, Alan Coakley, Colm Casey, Donal Gargan, and Cormac Smyth, have more than 100 years of combined management service in Ardmac. It was therefore a natural progression for the management to seamlessly lead the business over the coming years in its key markets of Ireland, the UK and the Benelux region.

How important would the life sciences be to Ardmac's overall operations?

[related_story]

Life sciences - biopharma, medtech and a bit of healthcare - represent around 50 percent of our overall business. We would work across the entire sector wherever there is a need for the sort of specialist, high-tech environments we can provide. In the medtech sector, this could mean the manufacturing space for a drug delivery device. In the pharma sector, it is the environment for manufacturing the drug or filling the final delivery device. On the hospital side, we would provide things like operating theatres, pharmacy dispensaries and even biosafety level 3 laboratories.

The needs of the different sectors differ as well, which we have to be conscious of, particularly when it comes to cost and attitudes to cost. For medtech companies, for instance, often they need to make a certain number of devices to ensure the facility's financial viability, and this is done by winning business in competition against other manufacturers. This business reality makes medtech companies more cost-conscious as they need to manage their capital spend based on that business model. In contrast, the pharma market is driven by validation and obtaining regulatory approval for products. The investment horizon is longer; the oft-quoted stat is that it takes an average of ten years and a billion dollars to launch a new product successfully on the market.

As a result, the way we work with these companies differs. Within the medtech sector, our customers tend to be the end users while within the pharma sector, we are typically employed and/or managed by the EPCM companies. Sometimes our contract may be with the pharma company but we would be managed by the engineering companies as a trade contractor. Therefore, adaptability is key.

These industries are very fast-paced and thrive on innovation. What sort of innovations are you bringing to the cleanroom space?

New trends and developments in the life sciences sector - particularly within the pharma and medtech manufacturing space, where our clients are - do affect our client needs and subsequently, their demand for the services and products we provide. For instance, with the rise of orphan drugs, which are produced in very small quantities for small patient populations, companies are increasingly looking to adapt their manufacturing environments for multi-product use. Having a facility dedicated to one orphan drug that can only be operational part time because production only goes on every four months is not very cost-effective. Clients increasingly want adaptable clean rooms.

We are therefore bringing in what we call second-generation cleanroom products to the market. The first-generation products, around for the past 25 years or so, would tend to be solid, monoblock wall or ceiling panels, which would have come from 'cold room-type' manufacturing processes, adapted to suit the GMP requirements. These would still be quite sophisticated products, but the drawback is that they are fairly limited in terms of their adaptability for future needs and capacity for the integration of mechanical and process services.

The second-generation products we are bringing, on the other hand, are very adaptable, and are based on interchangeable components that make remodelling very easy. For instance, the light fittings or air handling units or ceiling tiles are all exactly the same size, so you can move one component to a different location and have the room up and running very quickly. It is like a Lego concept - a multi-use design focus with process flexibility!

Building Information Modelling (BIM) is another area where we have been investing for the future. It is the means by which all stakeholders can understand the project through the use of an intelligent 3-D digital model that communicates key project decisions throughout the project lifecycle.

As a first-line adopter of BIM, Ardmac have engineered a strategic (as opposed to reactive) approach, with the aim of successfully and sustainably structuring and integrating the products and services into the information needs of our owners, clients, designers, contractors and manufacturers.

Can you tell us about a flagship project that showcases Ardmac's capabilities?

Our depth of knowledge of our client's processes gives us a unique ability to interpret our clients' requirements and provide the best technical and value engineered solution to meet their needs.

Across all sectors, we have built up a strong international customer base by exceeding in the project critical areas of safety, design, quality, cost, scheduling and co-ordination, giving our clients that certainty and reassurance that they can meet their market commitments.

Our recent project for West Pharmaceutical Services in Dublin is a perfect example of the symbiotic relationship we foster with clients. Ardmac have worked with West Pharmaceutical Services for a number of years. We started by working on relatively small projects with them; firstly on a design and build of a specific cleanroom, and gradually increasing the scope of our collaboration on the basis of how well we delivered.

Three years ago, we managed the extension of their first plant in Dublin, Ireland. They required additional cleanroom space in that facility, which meant adding an extension on either side of the

building. This would have a relatively new scope for us but the precision in the delivery led to West returning to us for their next major project; a second facility in Dublin.

Ardmac recently completed the design and build of West Pharmaceutical Services' new medical device facility in Dublin, providing the handover four weeks early. The 60,000 sq ft building includes new cleanrooms, production, warehousing, office support and canteen along with associated site facilities. The expansion is in response to customer demand for medical device manufacturing and represents West's most recent investment in Ireland, and indeed Ardmac.

Our entire relationship with West Pharmaceutical Services demonstrates not only the services and expertise we offer, but the fundamental commitment we show our clients - and the trust we build. This collaborative approach is the cornerstone of our success. We consistently deliver projects that achieve clients' specific goals, understanding the precision in its delivery is critical to the client's success.

What is Ardmac's current international footprint?

We are headquartered in Dublin, with offices in Northern Ireland, England in Manchester and Belgium. The Belgian office was set up initially to serve GSK but we have since broadened our clientele to companies like Janssen and Teva, as well as Merck in the Netherlands. We also have some ongoing data center projects in the Netherlands. It definitely helps to have a physical location; we find that we can usually generate more business once we anchor ourselves physically in a particular location.

In general, we like to travel with clients with whom we have developed longstanding relationships. This works because our clients tend to see the value that we can bring, and this has taken us to places like Singapore, the Philippines, Spain and France, where we are not necessarily set up. These initial projects then generate multiple strands that we could follow, i.e. additional business leads either from the client side or the engineering side. The life sciences sector does thrive on relationships, but that said, ultimately success depends on your competence and your ability to deliver. Once you build that trust by demonstrating that you can do the job, you win that word-of-mouth referral.

Looking forward, we are looking to continue our expansion in the pharma hubs within Europe, so extending our presence in Belgium and the Netherlands, and potentially also moving into the Nordics. The Benelux and Nordics are particularly promising markets for us because they tend to be very open to new entrants and especially companies with the expertise to provide, like Ardmac.

Looking forward, what would you like to achieve for Ardmac in the next few years?

We will certainly continue to operate at the upper end of the technology value chain, as it is now embedded in our DNA. Working for the life sciences sector requires dedication and attention to detail due to their high regulatory requirements and quality standards. They are always at the cutting edge of technology and innovation so, as a service provider to the industry, we need to be there as well. We have honed our expertise alongside our clients and now we provide superb management across all these aspects, which is recognized and valued by our clients.

I expect to see Ardmac continue its strong performance in the life sciences sector. We are also reinvesting in the commercial and retail fit-out side of our business as the sectors recover - it all goes back to future-proofing our business so that we are not reliant on just one sector. Perhaps we will also have entered some new markets - the sky is the limit! Ultimately, we strive to be the best at what we do.

[See more interviews](#)