

## FACTFILE

### Deirdre Johnston

**Job:** Founder, managing director and owner of Fruition.ie; consultant to Design Shannon; manager of the Unlocking Innovation Skillnet

**Brought up in:** Listowel, County Kerry

**Now living in:** Quin

**Education & training:** BA in Art History and History; postgraduate diploma in Arts Administration

**Leisure interests:** walking; reading; attending the theatre, art galleries, arts events and exhibitions in general

**Website:** [www.fruition.ie](http://www.fruition.ie) (scheduled to go live at the end of this month)



Right: Deirdre Johnston, founder, managing director and owner of Fruition.ie, consultant to Design Shannon and manager of the Unlocking Innovation Skillnet.  
Eamon Ward

## The art of design

Managing the Unlocking Innovation Skillnet is another way for Deirdre Johnston to foster creativity. Anna Nolan reports.

“DESIGN can be a huge differentiator for a business, and design management principles can inform every aspect of a company.” So says Deirdre Johnston, founder, managing director and owner of Fruition.ie.

“Companies need to understand how and when to use design,” she told *The Clare People*. “Clearly it is used at the marketing end and in product design, but it also plays a role in internal processes and in company identity.”

She strongly champions the use of good design to unlock innovation. As part of her overall portfolio work, she is a consultant to Design Shannon, and manages its new Unlocking Innovation Skillnet.

Given the potential for the judicious use of design to unlock innovation, Ms Johnston is keenly looking forward to a series of sector-specific seminars and workshops for companies beginning in Limerick city on October 8. The venue in all cases is the Strand Hotel (formerly the

Hilton).

“I conceived and focused this series of events for business people to support the Design Shannon network,” she explained. “They are intended for companies in the midwest, or indeed anywhere else in Ireland.

“The seminars are all free, and private session workshops are also available for €100.”

The October 8 seminar is entitled ‘Knowledge Rush’. The second is ‘Selling without Pitching’ and is to run on November 5. ‘Research and Gut’ is scheduled for November 12, and finally ‘Communicating without Clutter’ will run on December 1.

She stresses the interlinking of design, innovation and creativity, and their importance for business.

“If Ireland is to be a knowledge economy, we have to support creativity.”

Deirdre Johnston’s entire career has been related to creativity, design and the arts. “Growing up in Listowel I was drawn to amateur drama, art

and writing and I was also a bit of a singer,” she said.

Not surprisingly, after taking her Leaving Cert in the Presentation Convent in Listowel, she went to Trinity College Dublin for a Bachelor of Arts degree in Art History and History.

On graduation she worked in St John’s Arts Centre in Listowel, and then took a one-year postgraduate diploma in Arts Administration at University College Dublin.

She then remained in Dublin as Youth Arts Officer with the Catholic Youth Council. After three years there she moved Wicklow County Council as its first County Arts Officer.

Two years on, she became Executive Director at the Triskel Arts Centre in Cork, working on the financial and management side of the operation. And two years into that job, she decided to become self-employed.

“I set up the business in Cork city, and when I moved to Clare in 2002

I was still working for myself and I became a project manager for Design Shannon.”

One of the crucial developments for Design Shannon was the setting up of the Design Shannon Skillnet, a network for companies in the region. This August, Ms Johnston took on the task of managing a new, associated, sister network called ‘Unlocking Design Innovation’.

The forthcoming series of seminars and workshops mentioned at the start of this article will also be an introduction to the new Skillnet for many local companies.

Meanwhile, Ms Johnston has also been rebranding and refocusing her own business. “Fruition.ie has two main activities: events management, of which my work for Design Shannon is a good example, and business mentoring, where I work with owner-managers to improve their business.” Her clients are in the design sector, with food retail now a major focus.

One of the key aspects of her men-

toring work is the assessment and improvement of the morale within a business.

“I believe strongly that people make the organisation,” she explained. “Their morale is important, because morale affects motivation, motivation affects creativity, and creativity affects innovation.

“A company can move mountains if the morale is good, and I don’t say that lightly.”

Her mentoring begins with talking to everyone in the operation in question, looking at job descriptions, communications, operating systems, branding, best practices and more. The morale of each individual is scored on a series of grids.

“This gives the owner-manager real insight into untapped abilities and helps to grow the business.”

She then moves on to improve the customer experience. “I like to think that I stand in the shoes of the owner-manager, seeing how they think, and as part of their team.”