
MICHAEL CAWLEY

Chairman of Failte Ireland and former Chief Operating Officer of Ryanair, Europe's largest airline

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Topics

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Michael Cawley served as Deputy Chief Executive and Chief Operating Officer of Ryanair, Europe's largest airline from 2002-14.

He originally joined the airline in 1997 as CFO before the company's IPO and was centrally involved in securing listings on the Dublin, London and Nasdaq stock exchanges. When Cawley joined Ryanair it had 9 aircraft, flew 8 routes and carried less than 3 million passengers annually. In the year prior to his retirement in 2014, the airline had grown to 300 aircraft, operated 1600 routes and carried 82 million passengers. During his time at Ryanair the market value of the airline grew from E400 million to over E10 billion.

Cawley played a central role in the planning and execution of this growth. As second in command he was centrally involved in all major strategic decisions taken from 1997 to 2014, during which the face of air travel in Europe was changed forever. He developed the commercial side of the business, identifying and negotiating with suitable airport candidates, designing and operating the most profitable route network in Europe and developing the world's number one performer in ancillary revenue.

Cawley previously worked in the motor distribution business with Gowan Group, one of Ireland's largest private companies and prior to that led a management buy-out in Athlone Extrusions, a plastics manufacturer. He is a chartered accountant and a commerce graduate of University College Cork, where he lectured in accounting.

He has spoken widely in Europe, Africa and the U.S. on the travel and airline business, management, strategy and finance. Since stepping down from a full time role in Ryanair Michael has been appointed Chairman of Failte Ireland, the Irish national tourism development authority and is a non executive director of several companies including Ryanair and Paddy Power plc.