

# Branding NEW ZEALAND

## Competing in the global attention economy

**Sue Warren, a senior managing consultant with Locum Destination Consulting, is the former chief executive of the New Zealand Way, a joint venture between Trade New Zealand and the New Zealand Tourism Board, tasked with building a powerful national brand for New Zealand in the international marketplace. Here, she examines the ongoing efforts being made to position Brand New Zealand, and how brand thinking continues to help the country in its bid to promote itself as a destination for tourism and investment.**

My friend Rick, who lives in London, says New Zealanders don't promote themselves very well. He says he was surprised when he visited New Zealand for the first time, because his experience of the country differed so markedly from his expectations of it. More so, in fact, than any other nation he has visited – and he has travelled extensively.

'I can see fjords in Norway, lie on the beach in Hawaii, sail in the Med and ride horses in Mongolia. But to be able to do all these things, often in one day because the country is small and things are so accessible and – here is the twist – have such sophistication in such extraordinary emptiness, this is really different. The attraction of New Zealand is its mix of adventure and rejuvenation on the edge of the world, combined with being able to drive on state of the art roads, stay in luxurious lodges, and have fantastic coffee anywhere.'

He goes on: 'The cities are jazzy and edgy and there is this wonderful cosmopolitan mix of Polynesian and Maori, Asian, European.



People are quirky and friendly and I love the fact that the country seems to be run by women – New Zealand women were the first to get the vote. They are provocative, intelligent, sexy ... the men are more often the Antipodean stereotype.'

### Promoting tourism and trade

Rick seemed to sum up a whole lot of challenges facing the country when it comes to promoting Brand New Zealand. Tourism and trade have different goals but they are inextricably linked. In recognition of this, New Zealand began a radical national brand campaign a decade ago, owned equally by Tourism New Zealand and Trade New Zealand. The logo of that campaign was a blue and green fern, which research had indicated encapsulated a contemporary statement about New Zealand. The objective was to give tourism and trade a flying start.

The campaign went into autopilot a few years ago. The silver fern took over as a more inclusive logo for the country. It already had a considerable cachet shared between a whole lot of fern users, the most famous being the New Zealand All Blacks, yachting's Team New Zealand, the fern of Anchor butter, and many others. The silver fern also resonated more with the tangata whenua. Today, a host of Government agencies carry

the fern as their logo with New Zealand as the descriptor: Trade New Zealand, Sport New Zealand, Industry New Zealand, and so on.

There is a strong emotional investment in the silver fern, which is coming to represent a set of values – hardy, honest, friendly, industrious. It is a symbol of what Kiwis think about themselves.

But as all good marketers know, the creative can't drive the brand proposition. It must be driven by commercial imperatives.

Right now, important questions are being raised about how to move forward the traditional perception of New Zealand as a clean and green country offering a great lifestyle, and how to ensure a contemporary positioning of the nation, which more accurately reflects its culture and economy.

The Brand New Zealand campaign is gathering momentum, mirroring smart countries who build their equity with the values that their brands come to represent, in the same way that commercial superbrands do.

### Product and positioning

Tourism New Zealand marketing manager, Ian MacFarlane, is about to embark on a PhD focusing on nation branding, because he's not convinced by this logic. He says there is no doubt that branding facilitates economic growth. But he believes people take a simplistic view of branding: 'It should be about products and intrinsics and then the magic should be woven around these. The nationalistic considerations add a flavour but finally it is all about what you *are* and not what you *say* you are.'

This, Ian says, is why the '100% Pure New Zealand' campaign – now in its third year – has been so successful. 'It is based on what

people said about what motivated them to come to New Zealand - words like "fresh", "outdoors", "invigorating experiences". And Ian MacFarlane says the latest research shows 'geothermal', 'Maori' and 'glaciers' at the top of the list.

He is a Toffler fan, who believes that innovation is incremental, and that you need critical mass to build value - through the positioning lines of 'Space to Breathe' and 'Space to Think', for example. He believes that concentrating on the inherent strengths demonstrated by the country will deliver much more impressive incremental returns: 'With the best will in the world, people are not going to wake up and see New Zealand as high end technology, even though we are highly innovative and on-trend in our research and development programmes. The real keys to our strengths are derived from our national income, and this is still derived from agriculture - the exquisite products that come from the couture like highly prestigious wine, fine wool products. New Zealand has taken primary products into another realm of sophistication.'

The way Ian MacFarlane regards a national brand is that it adds to the success factor in international competitiveness, noting that this must be based on attributes which have developed distinct competitiveness over time: 'It is priming the pump, if you like, to bring the process forward - but you must make sure it is based on identifying those things that have critical mass.'

However, Ian believes that you can use the national brand in niches as well, such as in super yachts, where New Zealand's expertise and reputation outstrip its size being the fifth largest constructor in the world. In the fraternity of yachting, then, combined with an event like the America's Cup, this distinctive competency is raised. To this end the Government is investing \$10 million over the next two years to leverage the high profile America's Cup and *Lord of the Rings* will bring to tourism - and industries such as film-making, food and beverage and technology.

Ian says leveraging the strengths on well-known, high-performing people and events are a potent tool: 'We don't fully understand the asset of the All Blacks or Team New Zealand, people who are at the pinnacle of their industries. They must be used in the right markets where they have relevance to promote the country image.'

Certainly the New Zealand Rugby Football Union is fiercely protective and knows the

value of the All Blacks' brand. They are always referred to as the 'New Zealand' All Blacks and the eight commercial partners currently signed up with the All Blacks, who undertake a lot of the brand's marketing, must align themselves with the brand values. The brand positioning always refers back to the All Black story, which is very much linked to the nation and therefore a powerful statement about New Zealand.

There is a strong belief that *Lord of the Rings* is a brilliant vehicle to showcase not just New Zealand as a film-making destination (and a destination on account of the scenery within the movies), but the associated creativity and technology epitomised by the special effects company Weta workshops. This view is held by Investment New Zealand, which manages inbound foreign investment. It is a part of Trade New Zealand, the Government's trade promotion agency, which supports the increase of foreign exchange earnings through export activity. Its sister agency, Industry New Zealand, is mandated to promote entrepreneurial activity within New Zealand, which includes facilitating economic growth, halting the outward migration of workers, and actively encouraging the Kiwi diaspora to return to New Zealand's shores.

### Living the brand

Rod Mackenzie was the first chief executive of The New Zealand Way campaign and has also been a senior trade commissioner, based in Los Angeles. He says that in the ten years since the inception of the Brand New Zealand campaign, the market for investment funds has become more competitive: 'We haven't evolved New Zealand's image in this market, because while clean and green is a good story, it is not enough where we are moving into high tech infrastructure. We need to move people's perceptions so they believe that this is an essential part of Brand New Zealand - and they must *live* it.'

Brand New Zealand, then, can be used as a catalyst to assist the whole environment of Government and the private sector to encourage entrepreneurialism and innovation: 'When I was in LA, I realised that everything New Zealand does overseas will be extremely niche, so we must be highly specialised and we must address specific target audiences. There is a clutter of brands





in the US and unless you have a huge amount of money it is going to be difficult. If we can all sing off the same song sheet then that would make a difference, because then all New Zealanders and New Zealand enterprises become ambassadors. We must have a strategy to take New Zealand into the international marketplace, hand in hand with our brand positioning.'

This time around, he says, with the rejuvenation of the Brand New Zealand campaign, there will be a three-way ownership - between the Government, the private sector and New Zealanders generally, so they are encouraged to know and live the country's positioning.

Rod McKenzie says private sector engagement is crucial because these companies understand branding the best: 'The campaign has always worked in partnership with industry, and where there is a quality product to assist in promoting this, then we can provide a bag of brand "tools", so that companies can go out and talk about their enterprise while singing a consistent brand song.'

## Continuing challenges

How to ensure the consistency of this approach over time? Rod says despite the obvious support of Government, it is fact of life that Governments change. 'From whom, then, does the incentive come to sing from the songsheet? There are infrastructure issues to manage - such as in agriculture farmers are not the direct recipients of the brand investment and therefore do not necessarily see its benefits. I believe a national brand should therefore be owned by a neutral party. That is likely to be the Government.'

The Prime Minister, Right Honourable Helen Clark says: 'The key to growth is speeding up the process of economic

transformation, which is already well underway, to take the economy up the value chain. Our future prosperity depends on being wired up, innovative and accepting no limits on our potential. It is educated, skilled, creative and enterprising people who are going to drive our future as a nation.'

The Prime Minister has set a goal of bringing New Zealand back into the top ten of OECD countries, as right now it has slipped in performance to position 21. Her Government is facilitating economic development to match current public debate about just how New Zealand can compete in the global attention economy. There is a recognition by many in the country that they could well be condemned to an ever decreasing quality of life if the country doesn't get moving.

There is no doubt that New Zealand has made significant advances since its programme of radical macroeconomic reform a decade ago. Businesses are more astute, scientists more commercial, educationalists more attuned to the real world, tourism in its third year of providing a solid environment for global promotion, Industry and Trade New Zealand galvanising businesses to recognise the imperatives of integrated and coordinated strategies to promote their goods, services and intellectual property internationally.

But there is still a way to go to bring about the sort of sea change that many are seeking. Within New Zealand, the 'Catching the Knowledge Wave' initiative and all the current talk around the 'Knowledge economy' - spearheaded by partnerships between Government, business and education - are part of the vision that New Zealanders, individually and collectively, are being asked to consider. How can the talent, products and services, and what New Zealanders fondly refer to as their 'number eight wire culture', which sums up Kiwis' 'can

do' attitude and practical ingenuity, be translated into a contemporary statement about New Zealand?

Meanwhile, the market-facing Tourism New Zealand campaign is presenting the Brand New Zealand story, based on what consumers say looking in from the outside, about what contemporary Zealand is.

My friend Rick doesn't seem to be too far off the mark. He is visualising an advertisement: people are thrown out of their comfort zone as they are whizzed in a jet boat up the remote Dart River in millimetres of water, before the creative cuts to the guests sitting in glorious luxury, sending a business e-mail to their home in the US while they sit in front of a roaring fire enjoying a glass of Sam Neill's Two Paddocks Pinot Noir ....

Perhaps the most important contribution of country branding may be in the provocative thinking that it inspires as people grapple with just what the attributes of the New Zealand brand are, and how these can be woven into a distinctive story. It must address how the diverse sub-brands that are the enterprise of the country - be they business-to-business brands or consumer brands - can be meshed into one overarching brand proposition when it comes to promoting the country globally.

Depending on your view, there seems to be agreement that a national brand campaign is an important part of driving the policy and infrastructure environment that underpins successful enterprise and tourism capability. But where it can really power up is with all these elements aligned, plus the creative flair of the stories that are relevant and evocative and images which make you stop and gasp. At home and on the world stage, the national brand can truly be the tipping point for new New Zealand.