

MARKETING, ADVERTISING & MEDIA

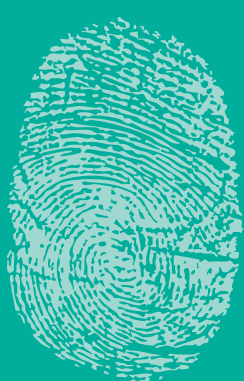
NEW ZEALAND

MARKETING

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Human touch

The art of connection in the age of AI



Let's go outside

The rise and rise of unscrollable media



Win in 2026

Trends and essential intel for the coming year



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Many hands

Thousands of decisions go into making a magazine. Not just obvious ones like which topics we include, the people we speak to or the pictures we'll use, but tiny ones too: that headline should go two clicks to the left and up one... yep, perfect.

We weigh each word and sweat over everything: the mix of content, the commas, the number of lists we put in consecutive paragraphs. There are many plates to spin.

It's a lot, but it's also thrilling. Following an idea from a spitballing session through interviews, writing, design – hurdling all the practical constraints and considerations along the way – to actually making it a physical product is incredibly cool. One of my favourite things about it is seeing how colleagues and collaborators interpret the brief, adding their own bit of sparkle on the way.

The cover for issue 85 is a great example: weeks out from deadline, design manager Karl Moss and I sat down to talk about illustrating the main story. (How do we choose that? Another set of decisions...)

It didn't turn out the way I thought. But that's because Karl is full of excellent surprises, and so are our cover story writers: Arie Hoeflak, Courtney Henderson and Noel Blackwell. Turn to page 24 to read their takes on why – even in this age of “digital everything” – human connection is the differentiator. And while you're there, enjoy designer Catherine Luong's exuberant illustrations.

It feels like AI has been the main topic of conversation this year: omnipresent and sometimes oppressive. We talk about it loads in this issue – it is at once an enormous opportunity (for brands) and a personal threat (are our jobs on the line?). A time saver (drudge delegator) and a time waster (workslop).

Whether you're into it or over it, we guarantee you won't have read these takes before. Why? Because our information is sourced directly from real experts, then written up by equally real (sometimes opinionated) people.

The magazine machine

We've often been asked this year how much we use AI to produce the magazine and its sister title StopPress. The answer is: not much. (Though it does transcribe our interview tapes – a godsend!)

Our mission is to bring you intel that hasn't been previously published. With luck, we also bring you something new that piques your interest. Colleen Ryan can tell you how much humans enjoy exploring on page 106.

There's loads to discover in these pages. Not least, Rachel Tsai goes behind the scenes to hear about how the 'Spark 1/4 car' advert was made – what really happened and what was fixed in post? Find out on page 108.



To everyone who's had a hand in making *NZ Marketing* magazine this year, and to all our readers, thank you. Can't wait to do it all again in 2026.

Ngā mihi,



Penny Murray

Penny Murray
Editor

On the cover: Fingerprints of *NZ Marketing's* editorial, design and print teams, captured in a pop art style. Scan the QR code to see how it came together.



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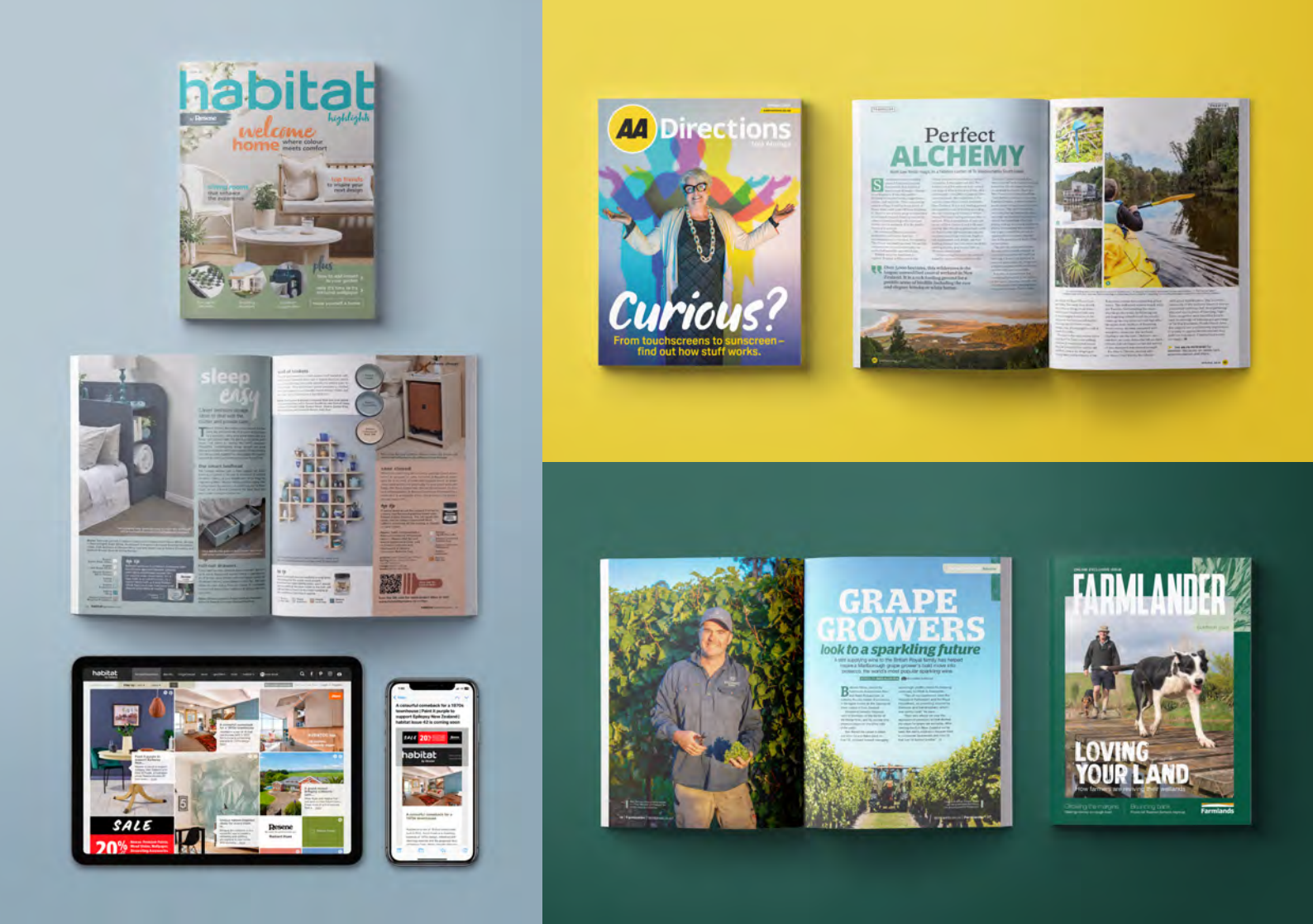
NZ Marketing magazine

Have an opinion you want to share?

Write for us and enhance your reputation as a marketing expert.

NZ Marketing provides strong opinions and insights into the core disciplines of marketing and communications. One of the ways we do this is through the voices of marketing professionals who have something meaningful to say about our industry.

If this sounds like you, pitch your idea to the editor at editor@nzmarketingmag.co.nz



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NEW ZEALAND
MARKETING

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Here are a few of the industry voices in this issue.

What did they say?



Hannah Bay

Brand experience chapter area
lead, Spark NZ: "We had gamers
who spoke about the importance
of Tetris on the way to work."



Frankie Coulter

Head of marketing, Goodman
Fielder: "New Zealand's
media sector is like the
Great Barrier Reef."



David Farrier

Journalist and film-maker:
"When I was studying at AUT,
I had no idea I picked such a
terrifying career path."



Arie Hoeflak

Creative human at Arie Hoeflak
Creative: "I've been a tech-
dependent marketing creative for
so long my CV is haunted."



Jordan Ikitule

Founder and CEO, Ausim Kids
Collective: "I often get stopped in
public, and parents approach me
with tears in their eyes."



Charlotte Lobo

Senior activation director,
Together: "We see GEO as a
test-and-learn environment,
not a quick instant win today."



Cassidy Meredith

General manager, Hearts and
Sciences Content: "Guests were
handed shopping baskets to
'shop the shelves' of the konbini."



Kate Nankivell

LinkedIn and social selling
specialist: "LinkedIn's not
a radio, it's more like
a telephone."



Sarah Page

Kindness Collective founder:
"Through the power of marketing
and our media partners, we've
been able to tell the stories."



Nina Richardson

Strategist, Special PR: "There's
a breadth of right answers, a
breadth of wrong answers – and
a whole lot in between."



Colleen Ryan

Partner at TRA: "We often prefer
having control – even when the
outcomes might be worse than if
we let others decide."



Fraser Shrimpton

Marketing manager, DB
Breweries: "I think maybe as an
industry we've got a little bit
worthy, a little bit safe."



Lee Sunter

Executive creative director,
Saatchi & Saatchi: "We simply
couldn't turn up in a traditionally
boring, banky way."



Sian Sutton

Enterprise Dunedin manager:
"You'll want to move here
after this – I can feel it
happening."



Nikki Wright

Founder, Wright Communications:
"Companies that avoid taking a
stand will increasingly be seen as
taking the wrong one."

Our thanks
go to

all

of the many
people
whose
insights
inform
NZ Marketing



Missing a magazine? We've got your back (issues).

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Rocky Horror exec spills the tea on midnight screenings



He didn't even like it, but ad manager Tim Deegan wasn't going to let a detail like that stand in his way.

Words: Zahra Shahtahmasebi

In issue 84 of *NZ Marketing*, we told the story of how *The Rocky Horror Picture Show* film changed its trajectory, going from flop to famous via clever marketing.

The pivotal moment was switching the film screenings to a midnight session. This started a cult following that no one expected – and now it has the longest theatrical release of any movie, ever.

But whose idea was it and why?

As we reported, Linus O'Brien, son of *Rocky Horror* writer Richard O'Brien and a documentarian in his own right, said the time flip was the brainchild of film producer Lou Adler and advertising executive Tim Deegan.

So, imagine our delight when, not long after publishing the article online, we got an email from Deegan. He's still based in LA and was keen to chat.

Coincidentally, he has just finished writing a book, *Saving Rocky Horror – from Orphan to Icon*, about his time working on the movie.

We talked for an hour about *Rocky Horror's* unlikely rise to the top – and why Deegan, who didn't even like the film – continually championed the picture.

"Adler said, 'What do you think of my movie?'" I said, 'I don't like it.' And he said, 'Can you be objective about selling it?' And I said, 'Yes, I'm a professional,'" recalls Deegan, who was in his early 20s at the time.

"And that's how I became the Lou Adler contact for the studio. He never came in for another meeting. Everything was channelled through me from that point forward."

It helped that nobody else wanted the movie and that many of his colleagues at Fox Studios were distracted by *Star Wars* – which was under scrutiny after a massive budget blowout.

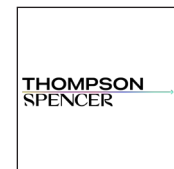
"So the more they pushed it away, it gave more real estate to me," says Deegan.

He was able to get an external agency to work on the film's publicity: "That's when I got my first glimmering that they were listening to me and I could get something that I wanted."

Head to nzmarketingmag.co.nz or scan the QR code to read the full interview with Tim Deegan.



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Social marketing works better when Māori lead it

Research by Dr Tim Antric and Te Awanui Reeder, from Hemisphere and Big River Creative, explain why campaigns that 'look Māori' – but operate on the standard behaviour change models – aren't effective.

Marketers have poured so much money into social marketing campaigns aimed at Māori communities. This industry has set out to impact diet, smoking, driving, immunisation, drug use, cancer screening... the list goes on. Yet the improvements in outcomes often don't match the investment. There's a reason. The frameworks don't fit. In October 2025, we published research in the *Journal of Social Marketing* that spells out the problem and offers a genuine alternative. We call it 'Tiriti-dynamic social marketing' – and no, it's not another cultural competency training exercise or a mandate to sprinkle te reo through your campaign. It's a fundamentally different approach.

Beware cultural adaptation Most social marketing in Aotearoa starts with Western behaviour change models. These models pretty much ignore nine out of 10 of the world's population (Henrich, et al. 2010). As marketers, we build the strategy. We design the message. Then we bring Māori in – usually at the end – to check the cultural bits and add some design elements. What we get are campaigns that look Māori but don't operate any differently underneath. We're pretty sure every marketer can name at least one campaign that did that. The real issue is power. In conventional approaches, non-Māori organisations make the big decisions. Communities get consulted (at best). This isn't partnership, it's tokenism with better intentions. When Māori communities lead their own social marketing, they

get better results. That's not ideology. That's what works. They understand their communities in ways external marketing experts never will. They know what resonates. They know the relationships and contexts that matter. **Being Tiriti-dynamic** Rather than layering Māori concepts onto Western models, our approach proposes starting from te ao Māori (the Māori worldview) entirely. The framework sits on five interconnected ideas:

- mauri (life force and energy in relationships)
- whanaungatanga (relationships and kinship as the foundation, not individuals)
- kaitiakitanga (responsibility to protect wellbeing for past, present and future generations)
- mana motuhake (communities leading their own priorities)

Tiriti-dynamic social marketing framework He awa whiria – the braided rivers approach

Tangata whenua knowledge
Tangata whenua bring:

- Cultural leadership
- Te ao Maori worldview
- Community connections
- Indigenous knowledge
- Whakapapa foundations

Te Pūtake Framework
Five interconnected concepts grounded in te ao Māori concepts

- Mauri
- Whanaungatanga
- Kaitiakitanga
- Mana motuhake
- Tūrangawaewae

Tangata tiriti knowledge
Tangata tiriti bring:

- Marketing systems knowledge
- Research methodologies
- Marketing strategy
- Evaluation frameworks
- Commitment to learning

tūrangawaewae (place-based approaches that respect specific contexts). Think of it as he awa whiria – the braided rivers metaphor (Macfarlane, et al. 2024). Māori knowledge and Western expertise flow alongside each other. Sometimes they converge. Sometimes they keep their own course. Neither dominates. Neither drowns out the other. **What it means for marketers** The framework reframes the fundamental question. Instead of: "How do we influence this

audience?" The work asks: "How do we fulfil our responsibilities as guardians?" Instead of targeting individuals, you strengthen relationships and collective identities. We're at an inflection point. Public interest in Te Tiriti has shifted dramatically – 72% of adults now feel informed about it, up from 58% two years ago (Horizon Research, 2024). But only 12% feel very well informed. There's appetite for genuine partnership, but also real hunger for approaches that actually work. The *Journal of Social Marketing* editor, professor Ann-Marie

Kennedy, recognised this. She called Tiriti-dynamic social marketing significant "not just for New Zealand, but in fact for the world". This framework isn't a prescription. It's a living system – it evolves through practice. For organisations serious about better work with Māori communities, it offers what cultural adaptation can't: a fundamentally different way of thinking about power, decision-making and what success really looks like. The question isn't whether you can afford to do this. It's whether you can afford not to. ☺

Campaigns for **good**
From behaviour change to pro bono work, read more on page 96



Te Awanui Reeder
Pae ārahi, Hemisphere and Big River Creative



Dr Tim Antric
Kaiaataki managing director, Hemisphere



The future of search: Why GEO matters

Search isn't dead. It's alive and more complex than ever. The question for marketers is this: will AI cite your brand in its answer?



Charlotte Lobo
Senior activation director, Together

If you've scrolled LinkedIn lately, you've probably seen bold claims that SEO is dead, Google is finished, or ChatGPT has become the new homepage. They make great headlines, but the reality is more nuanced. Search isn't dead. In fact, it's more alive and complex than ever. What is changing is how people search and how answers are delivered. With AI-powered generative engine optimisation (GEO) in play, SEO has outgrown its "10 blue links" roots. The new question for marketers is: will AI cite your brand in its answer?

At Together, we're seeing this shift in the data we track for New Zealand brands. Search queries are surging, up 74% year-on-year across our clients, with longer, more conversational queries rising 66%. At the same time, discovery platforms are fragmenting. Nearly 40% of Kiwis have already tried an AI chatbot for search (IAB NZ, 2024), while TikTok and Instagram are fast becoming starting points for product discovery and answers, especially among younger audiences. Today's consumer answer journey is now anything but linear. It's an interwoven web of Google, AI and social touchpoints.

The zero-click challenge

With Google's AI Overviews rolling out locally, behaviours are rapidly adapting. Early data suggests 58.5% of searches now end without a click, as AI serves the answer directly. For Kiwi brands, the battleground is no longer "are you on page one?" but "is your brand the answer AI is serving?"

At Together, we're helping clients prepare now. Waiting for traffic to fall isn't a strategy. Early movers can win by shaping their content so AI can trust, cite and recommend it.

Enter GEO: generative engine optimisation

GEO isn't just a buzzword. Think of it like the natural evolution of SEO for an AI-first world. The shift can be summarised in three ways:

- **From keywords to entities and topics.** Position your brand as an authority.
- **From backlinks to citations.** Secure visibility inside AI-generated answers.
- **From page rank to trust and trainability.** Prove your content is safe, accurate and authoritative.

Together's GEO audit framework is already helping client partners understand where

What marketers should do now

1. Audit your visibility. Do AI models find and cite your content?
2. Diversify discovery points. GEO draws from websites, socials and more.
3. Invest in authority. Consistency across platforms strengthens trust.
4. Optimise FAQs and schema. Make your content machine-readable.
5. Monitor and adapt. GEO is evolving quickly – constant visibility checks are essential.

they appear in AI-driven results, and how to adapt content, schema and authority signals to boost visibility in this fragmented but important space.

The bottom line

Generative search isn't killing SEO, but it's renewing and rewriting it. At Together, we see GEO as a test-and-learn environment, not a quick instant win today.

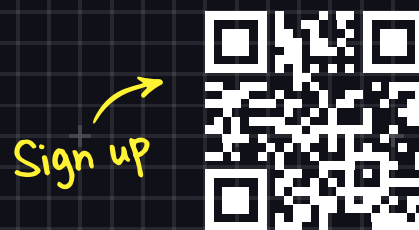
However, one thing is clear: the brands that prepare now will be best positioned to win tomorrow. 🏆

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Prepare to manage your

If you don't have a plan before an issue occurs, you're already several steps behind, says Louisa Kraitzick of Pead and Houston Issues Management.



Louisa Kraitzick
Partner at
Pead and
Houston Issues
Management
lead

PSA: "I'll just ring the agency" shouldn't be the extent of your plan when reputational risk comes knocking. Brands that perform the best are the ones that plan for impact before it lands.

The risk landscape is intensifying and optimism is scarce, thanks to the recession. Our collective doldrums are raising the stakes for brands and the cost of mismanaging an issue has never been greater.

'She'll be right' doesn't cut it in a world where every brand interaction can shape reputation in the speed of a post. One badly handled misstep can unravel trust, dent sales and fracture internal culture.

Whether it's a frustrated customer publicly airing their grievances, a cyber breach or product recalls, today's misinformation spreads faster than facts and generative AI is breathing life

into old news, ensuring nothing online is ever truly forgotten.

Stakeholders expect instant, authentic responses, and they're watching closely.

Complacency can kill

An Adobe Trust Survey revealed that 57% of Kiwis would stop buying from brands that break their trust. In other words, trust is the currency brands are built on today. Brands are battling for attention and customer loyalty in a market where the margin for error is razor thin.

Three actions to start your prep

1. Identify and assess your brand risks.

While it's hard to prioritise hypothetical 'what ifs', don't be the brand flying blind without a reputational risk register.

2. Be alert to risk. With so much noise around, it can be easy to tune out

intelligence even if you have access to it. Put steps in place, like clear responsibilities, to help you overcome complacency.

3. Who are you going to call?

Be clear about who your response team will be when an issue arises and what their jobs are. Will you need support beyond your organisation? Know where you'll get it.

brand reputation

While brands usually invest in building their reputation, many fail to protect it with the same intensity. That leaves a dangerous gap.

Reputation takes years to build and seconds to lose. And in a world where screenshots live forever, people don't forget.

Whether you're a household name or a two-person start-up, you can be thrust into the spotlight overnight. The brands that survive are the ones that stay alert, act fast and treat reputation like the business-critical priority it is.

Prepare to be one step ahead

Not all issues are catastrophic. A major crisis can have minimal impact, while a small issue can snowball into a full-blown disaster. It all comes down to how it's handled.

Regardless of size or sector, leading brands proactively map out potential issues and audiences, define and communicate operational protocols, assign roles and responsibilities and run live simulations with their teams.

A mix of planning and art

That's right, you need to plan, but there's an art in responding to a

genuine reputational threat in real time.

Well-meaning businesses can over-communicate, unintentionally spotlighting issues that to the outside world weren't problems.

Others end up owning issues that aren't theirs, or not owning what they should.

Strong internal comms capability is vital, but external advice adds a valuable perspective too.

An outside lens can spot nuance, challenge assumptions and shift the entire response strategy.

In a reputational crisis, the right move isn't always obvious. Understanding your blind spots, the range of skills and expertise needed in a room – and when to bring them in – can be the difference between responding with clarity, confidence and control or a panicked reaction.

Shit happens. And in this climate, brands must be prepared – because when the tide turns, it turns fast. ☹

The new key
metric for
businesses is
trust
Find out more
on page 64

hot dates

December 9

Rooftop End-of-Year Networking Event
166 Willis Street, Te Aro, Wellington
By NZ Marketing Association

December 10

What Makes a Gold Award-Winning Submission: Great Scott
Online
By PRINZ

February 12

The Keith Norris Charity Golf Cup 2026
Akarana Golf Club, Auckland
By NZ Marketing Association

February 18

Brainy Breakfast
The Maritime Room, Auckland
By NZ Marketing Association

March 3

Think Again
The Northern Club, Auckland
By NZ Marketing Association

March 5

The Worthies Conference & Awards
The Grand Hall, Wellington

“Stakeholders expect instant, authentic responses, and they’re watching closely.”

The ROI²™ effect

Creativity and commercial return should be inseparable, say top New Zealand independent creative agency Federation. CCO Brad Collett and managing director Olly Walker-Boden on why the brands that win in 2026 will use ROI² as their multiplier.



Olly Walker-Boden
Managing director,
Federation



Brad Collett
Chief creative officer,
Federation

What is ROI², and why is Federation putting so much weight behind it in 2026?

Olly Walker-Boden: We're calling ROI² 'creativity that delivers compound impact'. It's the idea that creativity has two roles: to multiply long-term demand while converting short-term behaviour. When you do both consistently, the returns add up to maximum impact.

After an economy like 2025's, it's too easy to see marketing as a sales dashboard. Instead marketing needs to be the driver of an exponential growth curve. A long game that's building memory, meaning and emotional weight, while using the short game to optimise impact. When they work together, the growth effect multiplies for exponential 'return

on ideas and investment'. That's what Federation is calling ROI².

What happens to creativity in a year of reduced budgets and ad spending?

Brad Collett: The challenge for clients trying to keep their brand and bottom line intact through a recession is very real. But no way should smaller budgets become an excuse for justifying smaller ideas. That's why I'm relentless about getting clients to a place of genuinely big ideas that earn 'interest upon interest', irrespective of the budget. Launching the 'Dash' creative platform for DoorDash – complete with Queen's *Flash Gordon* soundtrack – was an act of marketing bravery in a year like 2025, but it's already a huge example of ROI².

OWB: Seriously, if you pause the brand, you pause demand. 2025 understandably forced a lot of brands into "right now" thinking. The risk is the damage that might not have even been felt yet – but it's real when you see it. The marketing reality is that consumers lose memory, and over time when the buying moment arrives, brands find themselves back at zero.

So what should marketers be ambitious for in 2026?

BC: Short-term isn't the enemy, it's just incomplete on its own. The long game sets the stage, the short game performs on it. ROI² is creativity that compounds interest over time. (I'm no mathematician, but this makes a whole lot of sense.)

Our long-term behaviour-change work for Maritime New Zealand has done the most important job you can ever do as an agency: save lives. Meanwhile Auckland Transport's award-winning 'Mix your go' idea has changed how Aucklanders get around their city over time. And Massey University's 'Here for what's next' has created a chain reaction of growth from a new generation of students.

OWB: Yeah, it's not a battle between short and long, it's a partnership. The brands committing to multi-year emotional platforms in New Zealand are quietly outpacing the ones still chasing the next quarter's spike.

Our latest evolution of The Co-operative Bank's 'Bank better NZ' is another great example of this in action.



KIRI BANKS BETTER

The
Cooperative
Bank



When a brand invests in a bigger emotional idea, creative lands harder on the audience, your media spend works faster and conversion rates climb quicker. You're teaching the market to know you before they even need you.

BC: Love that. "Teach the market to know you before they need you" is going in the agency creds deck. And when you get that mix right, it's beautiful to watch. You see brands move from being a choice to being a default. That's when compounding really kicks in.

Which NZ sectors do you see having a creative bounceback in 2026?

OWB: Automotive feels like a sector that's ready to go off. And needs to after a quiet few years. In 2026, automotive brands need to make bold, category-defining moves that put them out in front. They need to combine long-term brand ideas with launches and experiences that get people talking and taking action.

Retail and ecommerce is another bounceback sector after being under siege for most of 2025. Competition is fierce and attention spans are short – creativity is the

absolute multiplier. As Brad said, it's not the size of the budget, it's about the scale of the idea. Big, smart creative ideas for retailers have the power to turn everyday transactions into memorable, emotional moments.

BC: I'd add tourism and government into the mix too. Travel is a category that's sustained interest even through the downturn but still has headroom to grow. People are curious, and New Zealand has stories, experiences and a culture the world craves for. The brands that tell those stories authentically and creatively – destinations, airlines, hotels and retail travel brands – will smash it.

2026 is a year for government brands to inspire and tell their promise better too. New Zealanders want to do more with their future. ROI² is exactly what government marketers should be aiming for from campaigns for health and whānau, workplaces, business and education.

OWB: Exactly. 2026 feels like a fresh start for brands ready to think bigger and if you get ROI² right, the payoff isn't just going to be local – it could be global too.

Define "creative compounding" in practice?

BC: It's knowing you shouldn't start again every time. Stick to the big, original strategic thought everyone fell in love with at the start – the "it's the one" moment. You might have lived it 24/7, but the public haven't yet had the chance to let it sink in.

OWB: That's spot on. Big ideas and the right ideas build compounding interest. There are times we need to trust the brand platform we already have by evolving it, not starting over. The best global brands do this relentlessly. Think about how Coke, Nike or Apple can say the same thing a hundred ways and it still feels new. That's not luck, that's discipline.

BC: And courage. It's also about knowing when to change gears. A strong brand platform should be elastic enough to move with culture, but solid enough not to get lost in it.

ROI² doesn't just sell now, it makes the brand more valuable every single time you use it.

OWB: Nice. We should put that on a T-shirt. ☺

federation.net.nz

Above left: The 'Dash' platform for DoorDash is already delivering ROI².

Above right: Multi-year emotional platforms – like Co-op Bank's 'Bank better NZ' – outpace quick hits.

Main image, opposite: Federation's work for Maritime New Zealand is actually saving lives.

Opposite: Between them, Federation's Brad Collett and Olly Walker-Boden, have done stints at BBDO, DDB, Saatchi, VMLY&R and dentsu.

in association with
Federation

“No way should smaller budgets be an excuse for smaller ideas.”

Rule change is a boost for indies

The Government's new procurement rules are a breakthrough for Aotearoa's independent advertising agencies, say Together's Annabelle Wilkinson and Georgia McNaught.



Georgia McNaught
Group planning director,
Together



Annabelle Wilkinson
Manager director,
Together

A quiet but meaningful shift has taken place in how the New Zealand Government awards contracts. Under the updated Procurement Rules, effective from December 1, 2025, all government agencies must evaluate the economic benefit to New Zealand when purchasing goods or services over \$100,000. This isn't just a token gesture. The criteria also carries a minimum 10% weighting in procurement decisions.

This is a game-changer, especially for independent, NZ-owned agencies.

For years, globally owned networks have held a structural edge in procurement, with scale, infrastructure and global rosters often counting for more than cultural relevance or local reinvestment. But Rule 8 'Economic benefit to New Zealand' in the Government Procurement Rules 5th edition begins to rebalance the equation. Now, agencies that hire local talent, build local capability, use New Zealand suppliers and keep profits circulating in the local economy will be recognised and rewarded in the government procurement process. And for smaller government contracts under \$100,000, the new rules go even further, with agencies expected to award work to capable New Zealand businesses by default, unless there's a compelling reason not to.

Local benefits to the economy

This formalises what many of us in the independent sector have always believed: local ownership matters. Not just in a symbolic way, but in how it materially benefits the economy, culture and capability of Aotearoa. When independent agencies

succeed, the benefits stay here, in jobs, in innovation and in the development of future talent.

At a time when many global holding companies are merging, offshoring and shrinking their New Zealand presence, independents are doing the opposite. Indies are growing. They're investing in people and technology. Independents are building for tomorrow, not the next earnings report.

A chance to rebuild

This change to government procurement rules comes at a great time for Wellington. With the local economy under pressure in recent times, this is a chance to rebuild. It gives public sector marketers the green light to partner with agencies that are truly committed to New Zealand's success, and to choose partners based not just on global scale, but on national impact. Allowing government agencies to choose independent agency partners like Together that truly care about Aotearoa, supporting our local suppliers and quality jobs for our people.

The new rules are not a silver bullet, but they are a clear signal that who you work with matters. That where your money goes matters. And that being proudly, unapologetically New Zealand owned is a great story. These new rules aren't just a shift in how value is defined, they're a statement of intent. Government agencies are now required to consider how their procurement decisions contribute to positive social and cultural outcomes in Aotearoa.

And now, for the first time, the rules reward that. Being New Zealand owned isn't just a point of difference – it's public value, and it's policy. 🇳🇿



Are's standout year

Lifestyle publisher records 7% growth.

Words: Niko Kloeten

Are Media New Zealand, the publisher behind *Woman's Day*, *NZ Woman's Weekly*, *The Australian Women's Weekly*, *The Listener*, *Kia Ora* and *Your Home & Garden*, has had a stellar 2025.

The company clocked up impressive gains across readership, digital engagement and advertising performance.

"This year, Are Media continued its transformation into the leading omnichannel lifestyle publisher in New Zealand, driven by a strategic blend of editorial excellence and digital innovation," said Stuart Dick, Are Media's general manager.

According to Nielsen's Q3 2025 figures, Are's portfolio now reaches 1,935,000 readers – up 128,000 on the previous year. This represents a 7% growth rate.

Flagship titles *NZ Woman's Weekly*, *Woman's Day* and *The Australian Women's Weekly NZ Edition* – with a combined readership of 1,163,000 – now reach almost half of all primary household shoppers in NZ. Meanwhile, *Kia Ora* soared to 469,000 readers, its highest ever.

Digital performance has also been a standout. Are Media's online platforms now attract over 1.5 million unique New Zealanders each month, delivering more than 37 million ad impressions to high-quality engaged audiences.

Are Media attributes this surge to high-quality local editorial content combined with global content from its new partnership with People Inc, the largest publisher in the US.

Ad spend surges

On the advertising front, the magazine channel has recorded a remarkable 47% increase in Standard Media Index (SMI) magazine advertising spend in 2025 for the year to date, a



growth rate outpacing all other media formats.

"This growth underscores advertisers' renewed confidence in the depth of engagement that trusted magazine brands can provide across both print and digital formats," says Dick.

The company also made big strides in the use of shoppable content. By integrating commerce directly into editorial and advertising experiences, Are Media readers can seamlessly purchase products featured in articles, boosting advertisers' return on investment.

In 2026, Are Media New Zealand is setting its sights on accelerating digital growth. Plans are under way to expand the company's digital footprint through new content formats and platform enhancements, while also deepening audience engagement.

The company is also preparing to launch a first-party data platform that will empower advertisers to connect with consumers across New Zealand's largest lifestyle network. It will employ rich audience insights to deliver personalised, measurable advertising experiences.

A major focus will be expanding programmatic advertising capabilities, introducing new audience segments for more precise targeting of key lifestyle categories and improved campaign performance. 📈

Above: Are Media's flagship titles now reach almost half of primary household shoppers in Aotearoa.

Below: Stuart Dick, Are Media's general manager and new MPA chair.



briefs

MPA has a new chair

The Magazine Publishers Association has appointed Stuart Dick as its new chair, after Nick Burrowes completed his term in the role.

Burrowes has been a driving force behind the MPA's strategic direction, bringing a deep understanding of the media landscape to his role.

The MPA acknowledged Burrowes' service and noted that he will continue to contribute as a member of the board.

Dick is general manager of Are Media, with more than 20 years of experience in publishing, marketing and digital innovation.

He says: "I'm honoured to take on the role of chair at such a pivotal moment for our industry.

"With over 2.5 million magazine readers in New Zealand, magazines continue to be a trusted and influential medium in New Zealand, and I'm excited to work with our members to champion their success – whether in print, online, or through emerging formats.

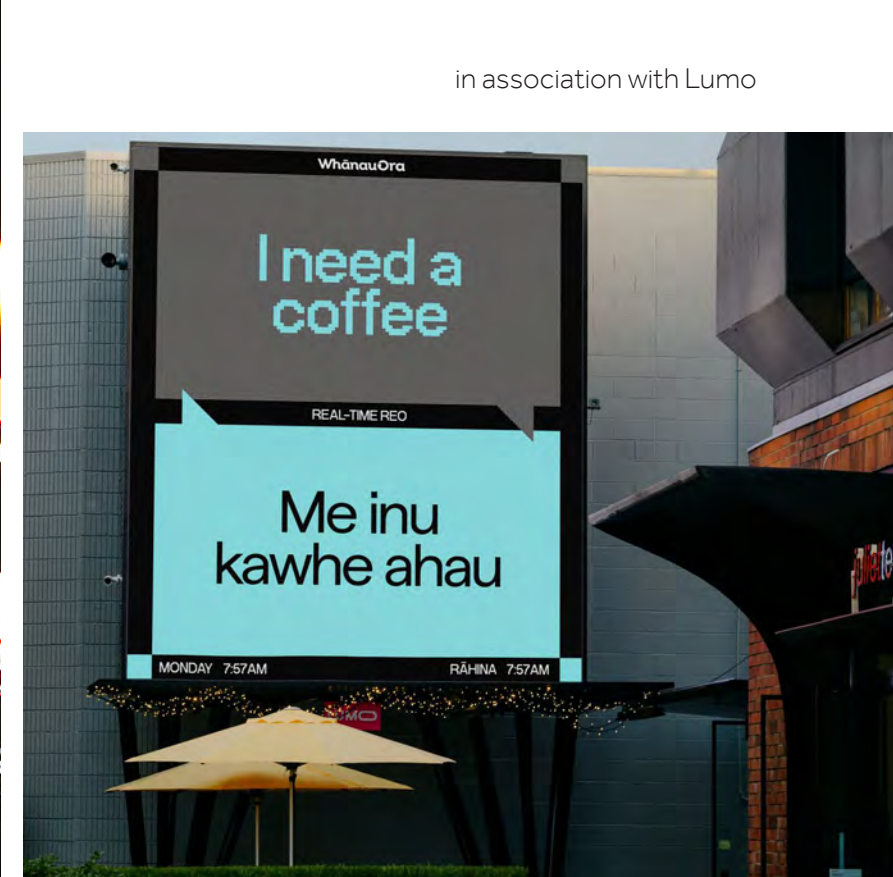
Together, we'll build on the strong foundations formed by Nick and the board to ensure magazine media remains vibrant, relevant and commercially strong."

Are is back in the MPA

Stuart Dick's appointment comes as Are Media rejoins the MPA. The publisher had been a member in its days as Bauer. The new chair said it "felt right" to return.

He pledged "to use our collective energy and resources to capitalise on some of the good news stories out there – readership growth, digital expansion, advertising success".

"The new rules are not a silver bullet, but they are a clear signal that who you work with matters."



in association with Lumo

Digital is in Lumo's DNA

AI tools and automation are set to change the face of out of home advertising in New Zealand, and Lumo Digital Outdoor is well prepared for the revolution.



Phil Clemas
Co-founder
and CEO, Lumo

Top, from left:
Lumo billboards
displayed live
data for Toyota
and McDonald's
campaigns.

Lumo was New Zealand's first fully digital outdoor company, built from the ground up for a programmatic, digitally creative and data-driven future – not adapted from existing static networks.

According to Lumo's CEO Phil Clemas, that means every site, system and workflow is optimised for agility, speed and precision.

"Lumo stands out because it's not just selling screens – it's reinventing how digital out of home works in New Zealand," he says.

"Lumo has invested heavily in data, automation and measurement – leading the way in programmatic DOOH, live data

integration and, increasingly, digital creative optimisation (DCO). It's one of the few OOH businesses treating technology as a creative enabler, not just a backend system."

Clemas and fellow industry stalwart Kent Harrison established Lumo as a start-up in 2016, achieving rapid growth spearheaded by quality coverage of Auckland, the country's largest market.

Strong metro presence

In early 2025 they took full ownership and control of the business by buying out their investor partners and augmented their strong main metropolitan presence by acquiring the assets

of Globox, a successful regional digital billboard business.

Clemas says out of home advertising is one of the few media channels that people can't scroll past, skip or block.

"It's part of the real world – big, public and unavoidable – and that's exactly why it cuts through," he says.

"It reaches people when they're out and about, in a mindset that's alert and receptive. Whether it's a digital screen in the CBD or a static billboard on the motorway, OOH earns attention simply by being where life happens. It is a brand channel and essentially the last bastion of broadcast media.

"There's also a credibility that comes with being on a

"It's reinventing how digital out of home works in New Zealand.

billboard. It signals scale and trustworthiness – that a brand is established and proud to show up in public."

Rethinking DOOH with AI

Despite massive growth in ad spend in OOH, driven primarily by the investment in digital OOH infrastructure, Clemas says traditional methods of planning and buying persist.

"When programmatic first arrived in markets like New Zealand, it promised to drag OOH into the future," he says.

"The tech landed here around 2018, but the mindset didn't. We've got the platforms, but behaviour hasn't caught up. Buyers and sellers are still waiting for each other to blink first."

Clemas says it's "telling" that the industry only recently agreed on a unified audience measure

and is only starting to talk in "impressions" while negotiating off rate cards.

"Automation and AI are the first real chance to break the cycle. This isn't about making old systems run faster – it's about rethinking how DOOH actually works," he says.

"From inventory and pricing to creative and reporting, everything is up for redesign. Automation clears out the grunt work. Unified ad-serving, programmatic trading and direct-to-supply integrations are already shifting control from weekly screen schedules to real-time decisions."

Meanwhile, Clemas says digital creative optimisation could be the technology spark that takes digital out of home from 'digital billboards' to truly digital media.

"For years, DOOH has been dynamic in format but static in

message – often the same creative looping all day, regardless of context. DCO changes that.

"It lets brands automatically adapt creative in real time based on data like weather, temperature, time, traffic density or live events. If there is a dataset to help trigger the artwork changes, a DCO solution is available. Suddenly, that 'always-on screen' becomes 'always-relevant'."

Clemas says Lumo is well positioned for these game-changing new technologies because it acts like a tech start-up, not a traditional media company.

"We question legacy norms, experiment fast and push the local industry to modernise – from automation and audience data to programmatic and creative innovation." ☺

lumodigital.nz



Kent Harrison
Co-founder
and CCO, Lumo

Top: For Māori Language Week, Whānau Ora launched the 'Real-time reo' campaign, which turned Lumo's digital billboards into live te reo Māori lessons.

Soup coup

Andy Warhol's work revolutionised culture. His paintings blurred the line between art and brand, craft and mass production, creativity and commerce. Six decades on, AI is disrupting, well, everything. But the human story behind Warhol's mechanically repeating pictures – *Campbell's Soup* Cans were familiar when first exhibited in 1962 – is what makes audiences stop and pay attention even now.



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Connect
the dots or
reject the
bots? How to
keep it real

You don't win hearts by posting more



Courtney Henderson
Director,
Think Folk

AI can help brands churn out more content, faster. But quantity isn't connection, says Think Folk's Courtney Henderson. Brand love comes from stories with meaning, context and human spark – which only people can bring.

No one has ever said: “I love that brand – they're so efficient at pumping out content.” So I'm going to ask you to humour me for a second. Take a breath, close your eyes and think about what brands you absolutely love.

Why do you love them? Chances are, it has something to do with their storytelling.

If you're a marketer in New Zealand, whether you're a one-person team, fresh in your career or a CMO, I'd hazard a guess you're under pressure. Pressure to create content. Pressure to respond with more content. Pressure to optimise by producing even more content.

We've been travelling down this path of “more, more, more” for some time, but it goes without saying that the intense and rapid rise of LLMs has accelerated it even further.

But this constant churn is a major problem for a number of reasons – one being the richness and authenticity of a brand's story. Because while ChatGPT, Claude or any of your other AI friends can churn out words, images and even broad campaign concepts in seconds, they can't create the lived experiences that make a story worth telling.

Maybe it's the journey the winemaker has taken to establish their own winery, the travel and culture that influenced a designer's new range or the humour, quirks and inside jokes that are built into a community. These stories are rooted in people and place. AI might be able to mimic the structure of a story, but it can't understand why it matters – in that moment, to your audience, across the right channels and with all the nuance that makes it land.

Subtleties and context

When it comes to creativity, the same rule applies. Truly good marketing ideas are built from knowing

your customer, understanding cultural shifts and picking up on the subtleties that shape how people might respond. It might be the difference between a reference that resonates in Auckland but misses in Hawke's Bay, or knowing when your hot take will land and when it risks falling flat. Those calls can only be made by people who understand context.

Without human perspective, storytelling quickly becomes bland, safe and interchangeable. Do you want your brand to feel bland, safe or interchangeable? Unless you're happy to be forgettable, probably not.

And we can't forget the spark – that hard-to-pin-down magic we've all felt. The late-night conversation that spirals into a knock-it-out-of-the-park idea, the offhand comment that turns into a tagline, the laughing out loud during a campaign brainstorm, or that moment when you're driving along in the car and the idea for this article pops into your head. These are human moments. And if you've been in the game for a while, you'll know they're where the best brand stories begin.

Use AI to protect creativity

Sure, AI can speed up repetitive work and free up time – an offer that's too good to refuse for an under-pressure marketer. But the real opportunity for brands isn't in using AI to replace creativity, it's in using it to protect it. The edge won't come from producing more content, faster. It will come from giving yourself space to choose quality over quantity, and telling stories with depth and originality, grounded in people, culture and experience.

AI can scale content. Only humans can create connection. And connection is what makes a brand loved.

throughout my adult life. Heck, in recent weeks I've discovered the joys of sweatily panting voice memos into my smart watch while out for a run. I've been a tech-dependent marketing creative for so long my CV is haunted.

And yet, despite its huge potential and meteoric rise to everywhere, AI has failed to spark the wonder and excitement I felt with past big tech developments. Allow me to explain.

Firstly, there's the mercenary, sometimes downright ugly, business side of the beast. Right now, the tech industry is in a frenzied AI goldrush: a high-stakes land grab for market dominance, with behemoth companies spending eye-watering sums on AI infrastructure and investments. As of late October, chief data farm chipmaker Nvidia was the world's first \$5 trillion company. That's roughly equivalent to Germany's 2024 GDP and comfortably exceeds that of Japan, India and the UK. Will the bubble burst? We'll just have to keep sipping our oat milk lattes and see.

Then there's the Gordian knot of ethical concerns. From data scraping and LLM training without compensating creators, to the massive amounts of energy required to power data centres (and the

equally vast volume of water needed to keep all those chips cool), to ewaste, biased outputs, security and privacy issues, cognitive offloading, the potential for weaponisation... The question marks are many, complex and deeply troubling.

Uncanny valley

And, yes, I have absolutely felt the looming threat of obsolescence as a creative. Though my anxiety is eased by the observation that, for now at least – and despite overhyped promises of the democratisation of creativity (I'm looking at you Canva) – AI seems mostly limited to helping non-creatives churn out polished turds, artificially buffed to an uncanny valley-high sheen.

And boy is it a handy, often hugely time saving, tool for professional creators! But ultimately, the output is still only as good as the human wielding the tool. The term ‘AI slop’ didn't come out of nowhere.

While AI entrepreneur Mikey Shulman may claim that AI-generated music is a good thing because “people don't really enjoy making music – it's difficult and it takes a long time to get good at it” (childhood piano lesson trauma, anyone?), Coca-Cola

seems happy to save a lot of money by using AI to produce its annual Christmas television commercial and AI ‘singer’ Xania Monet has a multimillion-dollar record deal, I predict the novelty will wear off.

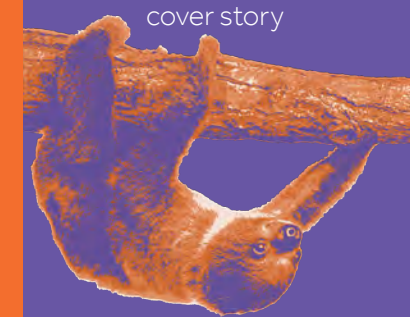
Creatives won't be out of a job any time soon. Why? Photography, painting, design, music, cinema, branding, marketing, advertising – they're about connection. And connection devoid of humanity just doesn't sit well with the ultimate audience: people.

Connection v ChatGPT

So where does this curious mix of huge potential, complexity and angst leave the average ChatGPT user? Are we doomed to a post-Orwellian existence soundtracked by AI-generated choons sung by AI-generated artists, while watching cutesy AI-generated animal videos on our AI-powered phones, interrupted with AI-generated summaries of the news on our AI-enabled smart speakers? No, actually.

As well as being rapacious sloths, we are also deeply social creatures. We crave connection. We need connection. Watch *Cast Away* again if you don't believe me – its depiction of the effects of contact deprivation were well researched. ▶

“Connection devoid of humanity just doesn't sit well with the ultimate audience.”



Chase the dream client



Noel Blackwell
Co-founder
and strategy
director,
Likeminds

Making powerful work isn't about household brands and hot categories, says Likeminds' Noel Blackwell. It's about genuine human connections.

What is most critical to our success? Conventional logic says you should chase your dream work – the brands everyone knows in the sexy categories that make all the noise. But there's a better answer.

You should chase your dream client. And by that I mean the actual person, the actual human... the relationship. Because the traits that make that relationship great will also make the work great. At Likeminds, we look at it as a partnership, working with and for the client problem or opportunity we're applying our creative skills to.

We can only do this together. The funny thing about doing brave and powerful creative work is that it requires trust and vulnerability, not only internally among the agency talent, but also – and more fundamentally – externally with our client partners. Creative ideas are fragile – easy to kill off or dilute in their early stages. Concepts need to be shared and developed with confidence if they are to ever become great. They need to be openly discussed and given room to grow without fear – a dynamic you can feel in the room if the agency/client relationship isn't as strong as it should be.

Creativity can't thrive in a climate of fear. Especially if you wear your heart on your sleeve, as so many of us creative partners do.

What do great client partners look like?

Firstly, they're incredibly smart. They know their category, but they also understand their business strategy. And they know exactly what they're trying to push along – so we can too. They know the value they bring to the table and can articulate the value they are looking for from us as external experts.

They're also firm on their side of the deal: clear objectives, timelines, deliverables, goals and the right process to get things done.

Great clients are ambitious people who understand the payoff from giving you the space. They allow time for the work to happen, and trust you to get it done. Not strangely sabotaging the very thing they are buying with unreasonable expectations or constantly shifting timeframe and process.

The handful of times I've had to pick up the phone to a client and say we will get there "but the work's not quite ready yet" were always telling moments. The really great clients said: "Thank you" and

"I understand." Then they said: "How much time do you need? (Don't make this a habit.)"

They get that if the work isn't great, there's no product. There's no point in having the meeting for the sake of timeline-box-ticking. It simply doesn't justify the investment of everyone's time and ultimately undermines the end result.

Effort and shared values

The really great clients are kind. They let you and the team know that your effort is appreciated. The funny thing about these relationship dynamics is they demonstrate shared values. Ambitious, smart, hardworking, energised, empathetic, collaborative and boldly creative people. Excited about what we all can and will do together.

Even in the best partnerships we have our quirks – unique characteristics that make us, well... us. But the common values at the relationship's core are what makes it all function that much better.

And that's the learning. You realise it's not really the category you're an expert in – it could be consumer, electronics, beer, cosmetics, agriculture. Instead you develop expertise in picking the kinds of humans you're going to do great work with, and nurturing those relationships across projects and roles.

You can do great work with likeminded people in enduring partnerships built on trust and good energy. I believe true collaboration gives as much as it takes to both sides.

Bridges to great work

Ultimately, we're all in the business of helping our clients succeed. We do that by designing meaningful connections within the work itself, but thinking about those same connection skills in the client/agency partnership can have massive impact. Real connection and understanding – around what we are here to do, how we like to work and aligning our hopes and ambitions as a team – build a bridge to the amazing work we can create together.

"Give me the freedom of a tight brief" goes the famous saying... and the answers do often lie in depths of a quality brief.

I'd like to add another layer: give me the freedom of a tight relationship – because the impact and fun that can result are both spectacular and long lasting.



cover story

“Our quest for the fingerprints of real thought, real feeling and real risk grows more passionate.”

AI can mimic tone, style and even empathy, but it lacks the messy, imperfect soul that gives human expression its resonance. The craving isn't just for originality, it's for meaning that feels earned rather than assembled. Authenticity can even become an act of rebellion: a signal that behind the words, sounds or images there's a real person who really meant it.

Life offline

Creativity loves a vacuum! We're increasingly seeking real-world experiences and authentic connections to counterbalance the pervasiveness of digital everything. A recent survey by US tech comparison site SellCell found that less than half of Apple and Samsung smartphone users have even tried their phones' AI capabilities, with over 75% of those who have had a fiddle saying the features add little or no value.

We recognise the need for 'digital detoxing' – a choice of words that speaks volumes. We're forming 'offline clubs': communities that meet and interact in person, no devices allowed. The Australian federal

government recently ruled out introducing a copyright exemption for artificial intelligence firms to train their models on Australian creative works. It stated that this protection is "fundamental to their [creatives'] right as people who are generating works to ensure that they are fairly remunerated for that and that there are fair terms of use".

There's a renewed focus on connecting with nature, critical thinking, problem-solving and honing people skills that AI cannot replicate. According to the World Economic Forum, the importance of soft skills has grown by 20% in jobs where they weren't valued in 2018.

As AI gains fluency and sophistication, our quest for the fingerprints of real thought, real feeling and real risk only grows more passionate and determined. AI can polish, automate and synthesise all it wants, but it can't replace our glorious, messy, wonderfully human chaos. Ultimately, the challenge isn't resisting or dodging AI, it's ensuring that, amid all the novelty, uncertainty and efficiency, the human spark keeps flickering – and maybe even sets the place on fire. 🔥

We've fooled around with AI, when do we find out? Turn to page

52
for a sitrep

Fame brings the receipts

As AI rewrites the rules of search, consistent brand meaning and credible proof points make earned media a genuine performance channel for marketers, says Thinkerbell's Jessica Allison.



Jessica Allison
General
manager,
Thinkerbell
Aotearoa

Earned media has long been treated as the awareness layer of marketing. For years, its primary purpose has been to get attention: landing headlines, sparking conversations, putting a brand into the cultural conversation. Useful for visibility, but harder to connect to commercial outcomes like consideration or choice.

Yet, earned has never just been about attention. Its real strength has come from trust – coverage in reputable outlets carries weight precisely because it isn't paid for. In the past, that trust was mostly used to spark awareness, to make a brand credible enough to be noticed. Today, those same signals are what both people and machines rely on to make choices.

AI: curiosity to commerce

Consumers are rapidly shifting their behaviour and using AI to guide purchasing decisions. Accenture's 2025 study found that 72% of people now frequently use generative AI, with half of those active users making purchases based on its recommendations.

In other words, AI has moved beyond being something people experiment with – out of curiosity – to become a tool that influences what they actually buy. And because

AI builds its answers from external sources, the credibility of earned media is directly shaping how people choose.

Why earned matters more than ever

AI isn't inventing answers, it's sourcing them. And the sources it privileges are the same ones humans

instinctively lean on – articles, reviews, expert voices and independent data.

Behavioural science explains why: when we're uncertain, we copy what others endorse (social proof), defer to recognised experts (authority bias) and prefer what feels familiar (mental availability). AI systems mirror those same instincts, which is why they cite what they consider authoritative.

And the data backs this up. According to Muck Rack's Generative Pulse 2025 report, 89% of the links cited by AI come from earned media, not advertising.

This means the stories, reviews and data seeded through earned are no longer just awareness drivers. They've become the evidence that determines which brands make it into the answer set.

Start with your brand meaning

So, what should brands do? If earned is to work as a performance channel, the starting point is brand meaning. What a brand stands for – and how it behaves – has to run consistently through everything it communicates. Earned is no exception.

For example: if a brand wants to be recognised as the most innovative tech player in its category, its earned efforts need to consistently reinforce that meaning: leaning into stories that highlight progress, expert perspectives that signal leadership and coverage that keeps the brand part of the wider innovation conversation.

This isn't just discipline; it's also how you get surfaced. Generative AI tools don't just look for authority, they weight recency, often favouring content published in the past 30 days. That makes an always-on approach to PR essential. By continuously seeding stories that align with your meaning, you're not only building long-term equity,



you're also improving the odds that your brand shows up whenever someone asks a question of the category.

Proof points are the currency of trust

But consistency alone isn't enough. Showing up often won't get you shortlisted if what you show up with lacks credibility. What makes earned perform is evidence. Independent testing, credible reviews, expert commentary and data-led insights are the kinds of proof that elevate a brand from being noticed to being trusted. They're the reason journalists cite you, reviewers include you and AI systems surface your brand when generating answers.

When those proof points are tied back to brand meaning, they work twice as hard. They reinforce positioning in the long term, while simultaneously supplying the justification people and machines look for in the short term. It's the combination of consistent presence and credible proof that ensures a brand isn't just visible, but actively chosen.

The new performance role of earned

If earned once lived primarily at the top of the funnel, today it runs through the very heart of it. In an era when algorithms and audiences are both filtering for credibility, the signals that matter most are the ones that can be independently verified and align with what a brand truly stands for.

This makes earned one of the defining levers of modern marketing. It builds equity over time, while simultaneously shaping the answer sets that drive immediate choice. The task for marketers is not to treat earned as noise or a 'nice to have', but to understand it as a channel of consequence, an engine of meaning and trust. 🗳️

“Generative AI tools don't just look for authority, they weight recency.”

Earned media: then vs now

Then

- Primarily top of the funnel activity
- Generated awareness through headlines and chatter
- Rarely linked to consideration or choice

Now

- Runs through the funnel
- Builds fame and cultural visibility
- Supplies the evidence that AI and people use to form shortlists
- Makes brands not just talked about, but chosen

Feel the fear and

If keeping up with AI feels impossible, here's how to start.



Andrea Long
Media
strategist,
36 Presents

This is the seventh... maybe eighth(!?) iteration of this article – because every time I rewrite it, the AI landscape has changed. FML. About 10 topics I was writing on have already shifted in the digital tides.

Honestly, the pace of AI is exhausting. And if I – “she who must stay up to speed” – feel overwhelmed, marketers around the country must be shitting themselves.

I haven't been to a BBQ or social event in months where AI hasn't been mentioned. I even got pinged by a school mum at pickup, telling me she whipped up her 7-year-old's birthday invite on Midjourney.

In all these conversations is an extreme mix of excitement, anger, curiosity, fear and shame. It's so confounding – and I too feel all of them at the same time. I agree with everyone and walk away confused.

So yeah: “It can do incredible things” “It's saving me so much time” “I'm terrified I'm going to be replaced” “We've got so much pressure from the top to adopt AI” “I'm worried about security” and last, but not least, “I don't want to look stupid.”

Welcome to marketing in 2025, people.

AI: what is it good for?

So, let's touch on the positives and not-so-positives of it all. Most of us know – through a bit of fiddling with these apps and engines – that AI can help speed up note-taking, research, insights and even creative thought-starters. For example, I pop a client brief into NotebookLM (Google) and it turns it into a podcast I can listen to on the drive into work. So

good while stuck in Auckland traffic, and I feel a lot more prepped and confident in the room.

But there's also a real anxiety. Because if you rely on the machine, you lose your own expertise.

Play around with Claude, Perplexity or Gemini and you'll soon realise they're interns who need their work checked, rather than your personal strategist. Copy-paste and you've got bland, repetitive answers with no human insight.

And let's not forget AI buggers it up too. A lot. Dare I mention the Deloitte fiasco?

That's just one part of the fear.

Jobs are changing. Production pipelines are shifting. Deep-fakes and voice replication are raising real security concerns. And let's not even dig into the environmental footprint.

Here's the truth: marketers are already at breaking point and are being asked to champion something that feels frightening. They spend most of their time in meetings being asked: “Why aren't we getting more sales?” “How are we reducing costs?” “What are we doing in AI?”

Budgets are shrinking, KPIs are higher and tighter than ever. And leadership expects quick wins, yesterday.

So, my marketing friends, where the hell do you fit “learn AI in detail” into your day?

There's so much pressure to not look clueless, but you are not alone. Most people are faking it til they're making it.

Repeat after me. You do not need to know everything. You just need to start with something.

damn well do it anyway

You're not trying to replace your trusted agency partners. As you have in the past, you pay for the years of experience, creativity and human insight they bring.

At 36 Presents, we use some pretty powerful AI tools to help make your media smarter. Every day we receive over one billion data points from our global proprietary Device ID technology, and that's just New Zealand audiences alone! Our tech analyses them in real time and automatically shifts your spend to the most valuable people, based on your KPIs.

In simple terms, it finds who is most likely to respond to your message and puts more of your budget in front of them. Less waste. More return.

When it comes to agency meetings, it's kinda nice to have a little AI knowledge, so you can confidently nod along or ask good questions and have productive chats. If you're scared, that's OK. Say so. That's the key to having a really good partnership with your agency. We love when a client asks what things mean or asks for a bite-sized upskilling session.

So, where do you start?

I'll give you three little actions to help get you in the game.

1. Try one tool for personal productivity. Pick something like NotebookLM or ChatGPT to help summarise long docs, organise your thinking, or prep for meetings. Start with stuff that genuinely makes your day easier.
2. Ask your partners how they already use AI and if you want to, book a chat (or long lunch?) on

upskilling. Creative teams like In Motion Post are using AI to speed up storyboard storytelling and retail graphics. We at 36 Presents are using AI to turn those squillions of human behaviours into real return on investment. You are already surrounded by expertise. Use it. (Call me.)

3. Test one new thing. It could be as simple as running a small budget digital test campaign to ask: “Which audience segment is engaging more?” You'll learn something valuable you can pass on to the higher-ups without the world ending.

There is no losing here. Only learning at a gentle pace that won't overwhelm the daily. Because we're all just trying to survive.

Have a play

This is not a race to replace. AI isn't yet the enemy – though I'm rewatching *Terminator* movies with a notepad now. The enemy is confusion, overwhelm and the procrastination it breeds. So get in there, tiger. Have a play, find out what helps and quit what doesn't. Be curious. Email me and ask me anything.

AI doesn't remove the need for clever, experienced marketers. It amplifies the ones willing to lean in. Surround yourself with trusted partners who can give you a friendly helping hand. Move one step. Then another. That's how you stay in the game.

And in the immortal words of Douglas Adams:
Don't panic. ☺

Email andrea.long@36presents.com

LinkedIn & lunchboxes

People with kids start the second shift when they get home. They constantly run two full-time campaigns (and the little clients literally can't tie their own shoelaces). Coping takes a village, a bit of AI and the parent tribe, says Rawinia Dolan.



Rawinia Dolan
Marketing manager,
Human Synergistics

Right: Creating systems and focusing on where you add the most value can help focus your energy.

I was lying in bed last night thinking about the juggle that comes with being a mum of four under seven – including twins – while managing a fulfilling (and busy!) marketing career. And I know I'm not alone. Many of my smart, talented friends are in the same boat.

It struck me that I'm running two full-time campaigns: one with deadlines and LinkedIn posts, and one with school drop-offs and lunchboxes.

I feel lucky to have a meaningful career with inspiring people and be present for my kids – this balance means a lot to me. Working part-time gives me the flexibility to show up for both. But the juggle is real. Workplaces are more parent-friendly than ever, yet school schedules still assume one parent is always at home (available for sports days, garden-to-table, school assemblies...). These moments are wonderful, but even with flexibility, keeping up can be a challenge.

I'm writing from a mum's perspective, but I know plenty of dads navigating the same reality. Just last week, while at my daughter's ballet class, I spotted two talented friends doing the juggle in real time. One, a marine ecologist and mum of three, catching up on emails. The other, a dad and IT exec, in his car with his laptop on a client call while his daughter practised pliés.

The truth is, working parents in marketing aren't balancing one role with another, they're running parallel full-time campaigns. Which is why I call our support network 'the modern marketer's village': part AI, part automation and part real-world allies at the school gate.

At work: automate output, reclaim energy

When you work part-time or compressed hours, there's no room for long lunches or casual chats – every minute counts. That's where smart systems (and a few AI teammates) make all the difference. Tools like ChatGPT and Grammarly have been game-changers for me, helping draft content, summarise meetings and reduce admin so there's more time and energy for strategic thinking and creativity.

Knowing your thinking patterns

drives your effectiveness is crucial. Those with a strong 'self-actualising' style know what matters and how to show up. They build strong support systems, ask for help and create space to thrive.

But those of us with 'approval' tendencies can fall into over-functioning. Our instinct is to say yes, do more, be everything to everyone. And while that can feel like being a team player, it can quickly tip into burnout.

Recognising that pattern was a turning point. It shifted my mindset: instead of trying to do everything and ending up feeling stretched and ineffective, I began asking: "Where can I add the most value?"

That helped me focus my energy where it counts and protect the capacity I need to show up fully.

At home: streamline the mental load

The second shift is real, when the workday ends, the home campaign kicks off. I lean on small, consistent systems to keep things running smoothly: Sunday meal prep, simple dinners, laundry rosters and a shared family calendar for school events and activities. I also have a great new family member, 'Robee' our robot vacuum, who cleans the floors while I do bedtime stories.

Where possible, I collaborate: online grocery orders, carpool swaps and playdates, which all help lighten the load. Getting the kids involved gives them independence and me one less thing to juggle.

These systems don't solve everything but they create a rhythm. And that helps to manage limited time and energy.

The parent tribe

Technology can't do emergency daycare pickups or lend you a costume for the Book Week parade tomorrow – that's where your mum squad or parent tribe comes in.

Especially in small towns – which is where I live – many don't have family nearby. So friends become the village: sharing lifts, swapping favours and offering support when it matters most. I've been so grateful for both the practical help and the emotional backup, the chats, the laughs, the sense that we're in it together.

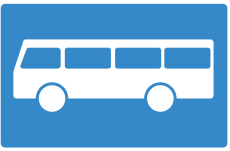
Mindset reset: super parent to strategist

You can't time manage your way to resilience. But you can shift how you think about the load you carry.

Many will relate to the invisible load Dr Libby Weaver describes: that constant mental checklist of planning, remembering and managing. Pairing self-awareness with systems isn't just about getting more done, it's about protecting what matters most.

The real flex

There's still an unspoken pressure to be all-in at work and all-in at home – as if both roles can run at full capacity, all the time. But working parents in marketing are rewriting that story. They're building hybrid support systems, part digital, part human that keep both campaigns going without burning out the person in the middle. The real flex? Not doing it all and knowing you don't have to. ☺



“You can't time-manage your way to resilience. But you can shift how you think about the load you carry.”



Fraser keeps it fizzy

Words:
Niko Kloeten

“We should be fun and topical and interesting.”

DB's Fraser Shrimpton is on a mission: to make beer ads exciting again.

Words:
Niko Kloeten

The marketing director at DB Breweries has led a host of memorable campaigns. He says his priority for 2026 is to bring back “legendary” creative.

“We’re a beer business, but I think as an industry we’ve got a little bit worthy, a little bit safe,” he says.

“We are part of those moments of connection and joy, so we should be fun and topical and interesting – and understand our role. My mission is to get back to more of the bold, creative work we might not have seen for a while.”

Shrimpton's recent marketing work can hardly be accused of lacking boldness. After reviving Tui's iconic ‘Yeah right’ billboards, DB launched the hugely successful ‘Export Ultra Cold Call Back Service’ featuring rapper Vanilla Ice.

The campaign picked up a long list of accolades, including four golds, three silvers and three bronzes at the Axis Awards, a silver and bronze at the Cannes Lions and Best B2C Marketing Campaign at the YouTube NZ Marketing Awards 2025 (Shrimpton was also nominated for Marketer of the Year).

He describes ‘Cold Call Back’ as a “massive highlight” of his career, and says it all started from a consumer insight: many Kiwis’ beers exploded after forgetting they’d put them in the freezer to chill.

“It’s very rare that you find something that both is so anchored in an insight but also creatively expressed in a way that is quite bold and out there, but engaging. Not offensive, just fun.”

Not a lawyer

Fun, or the lack of it, was why Shrimpton chose not to pursue his earlier ambition of becoming a lawyer.

“I remember going to an open day at university in my last year of school and went to a mock trial. They tried to make it really sexy and interesting and engaging and it was still batshit boring.”

However, he didn’t get into marketing straight away, completing a Communication Studies degree at Waikato University before working at British American Tobacco.

From there he “just fell into” marketing. He’s worked his way around the food groups: starting at British giant United Biscuits before spending three years at coffee company Cerebos Gregg’s and six years at Griffin’s, in a variety of roles. Prior to joining DB, he was head of marketing NZ for Nestlé.

“I really fell in love with the consumer space and building brands and innovation and figuring out those gnarly questions around consumer behaviour and how you adapt to tap into that.”

Having built his career in FMCG, Shrimpton says one of the biggest differences in beer marketing is the importance of what he calls the “consumption occasion”, compared to products like snack foods.

“I really love that it’s one of the few places left where you are very focused on that consumer experience: everything from the drink that they’re drinking to the moment they’re drinking it.”

Global and local

Shrimpton says DB benefits hugely from being owned by Heineken, which gives them not only one of the strongest beer brands in the world but “all of the best practice that you can ask for” from a marketing perspective.

DB’s marketing team of 20 is supported by an “agency village”. Inhabitants include Publicis Groupe and Saatchi & Saatchi as its global partners for Heineken and Tiger, and Special as its creative and PR partner for its local brands. DB also uses Multiplied for below the line marketing and dentsu as its media agency.

Shrimpton says DB’s brands are constantly evolving to keep up with trends, such as the move towards low-carb beers like Export Ultra and Heineken Silver. Marketing for these lines is more about the occasion itself than a specific audience.

“You need to have distinct spaces, which is why we think about both the consumer and the occasion

coming together to where we want to focus those brands,” he says.

“With Heineken, it’s about revitalising it within that low carb space for this shifting consumer need, and bringing premium occasions to that low-carb, easy drinking occasion,” Shrimpton says.

“Export is much more around those moments of bonding and coming together and fun and joy and connectedness. That’s where we have this great partnership with the Alternative Commentary Collective.”

Shrimpton says a key to his success has been getting broad exposure to different aspects of marketing early on in his career. It’s an opportunity he fears young Kiwi marketing talent might be missing out on these days as entry-level roles stay in Australia.

“We are losing those opportunities for young marketers to get exposure. To actual brand strategy for example, building brands, to the design to win phase of your positioning, your points of difference, your distinctiveness, what you stand for through to your brand architecture and how you show up and build iconic brand assets to your product,” he says.

“A lot of those things you don’t have control of nowadays.

“At DB, we have the full breadth of designing and executing, and I think it’s really fortunate.” ☺



Fraser Shrimpton
Marketing director,
DB Breweries

Above: Marketing low-carb brands such as Heineken Silver is more about occasion than target audience.

NZ Marketing Association gets behind students



As part of the Marketing Association's commitment to growing future talent in Aotearoa, they have developed a solid student engagement and support programme, which is going from strength to strength. In a recent announcement, MA CEO John Miles was named as a recipient of the 2025 University of Auckland Business School Supporters' Award for outstanding contribution in assisting students develop their marketing careers.

Above: The Top Talent Marketing School puts high-performing students through two bootcamps and offers valuable work experience.

A quick look at what the MA offers

- **Exclusive student events** where marketing students get to learn from and network with industry leaders. These events are held in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch in partnership with University of Auckland, AUT, Victoria University of Wellington and University of Canterbury.
- **Free MA membership** for full-time marketing students and discounted tickets for MA events. Get to know your industry body and learn how the MA supports you throughout your career.
- **Student brand ambassadors** – students get to experience one of MA's world-leading events, mixing and mingling with leading local and international marketing experts.
- **Student reps** for MA's special interest groups – giving students a year-long opportunity to not only connect with experienced marketers but also contribute actively by representing the view of 'future marketers'.
- **The Top Talent Marketing School**, in partnership with the University of Auckland, gives high-performing students an opportunity to upgrade their marketing skills by attending two advanced marketing bootcamps, and gain valuable work experience by being sponsored by one of New Zealand's top companies.

Apply for student membership, visit **marketing.org.nz/individual-memberships#student**

Practical details and eligibility

Dates:

- Session 1: February 26-27, 2026
- Session March 26-27, 2026

Cost:

- Members: \$1,850 + GST
- Non-members: \$3,850 + GST

Eligibility criteria

- Two to five years' marketing, media or advertising experience.
- Full-time employment (commitment for duration of programme).
- Manager nomination required.
- A strong commitment – the participant must attend all four days.
- You are highly ambitious to further your career in marketing.
- You have high emotional intelligence and a natural drive to succeed.

- **Networking and exposure:** Participants get opportunities to connect with speakers, mentors and their peer cohort, helping them build relationships that can influence their trajectory within the industry.

Why it matters

In an environment where marketing is evolving faster than ever – especially with AI, digital transformation and shifting consumer behaviours – early-career marketers often face a steep learning curve.

The Emerging Marketer Accelerator seeks to flatten that curve, providing structured exposure to strategic thinking, leadership frameworks and peer networks.

By blending high-calibre speakers, mentorship, rigorous workshops and real-world application, Emerging Marketer Accelerator aims to give participants not just tactics, but the mindset and confidence to lead in their organisations. The involvement of senior NZ marketing figures also ensures that insights are contextually grounded in the New Zealand business landscape.

Spaces are limited. For more information, scan this QR code. ☺



Introducing... Emerging Marketer Accelerator

A new programme to fast-track the next wave of marketing talent in Aotearoa.

The Emerging Marketer Accelerator is a newly launched initiative by the NZ Marketing Association aimed at marketers in the early stages of their careers (people with two to five years' experience in marketing, media or advertising).

"We're excited to launch the new Emerging Marketer Accelerator, created for New Zealand's next generation of marketing talent," says John Miles, CEO, Marketing Association.

"After seeing the impact of our Advanced Marketing Leadership Programme on over a hundred senior marketers, we've taken that proven format and adapted it for rising stars ready to grow their skills and their careers."

"The hottest topics. The best experts. A world-class programme built for marketers on the rise. If you've got future stars in your team, nominate them for the Emerging Marketer Accelerator."

Purpose and design

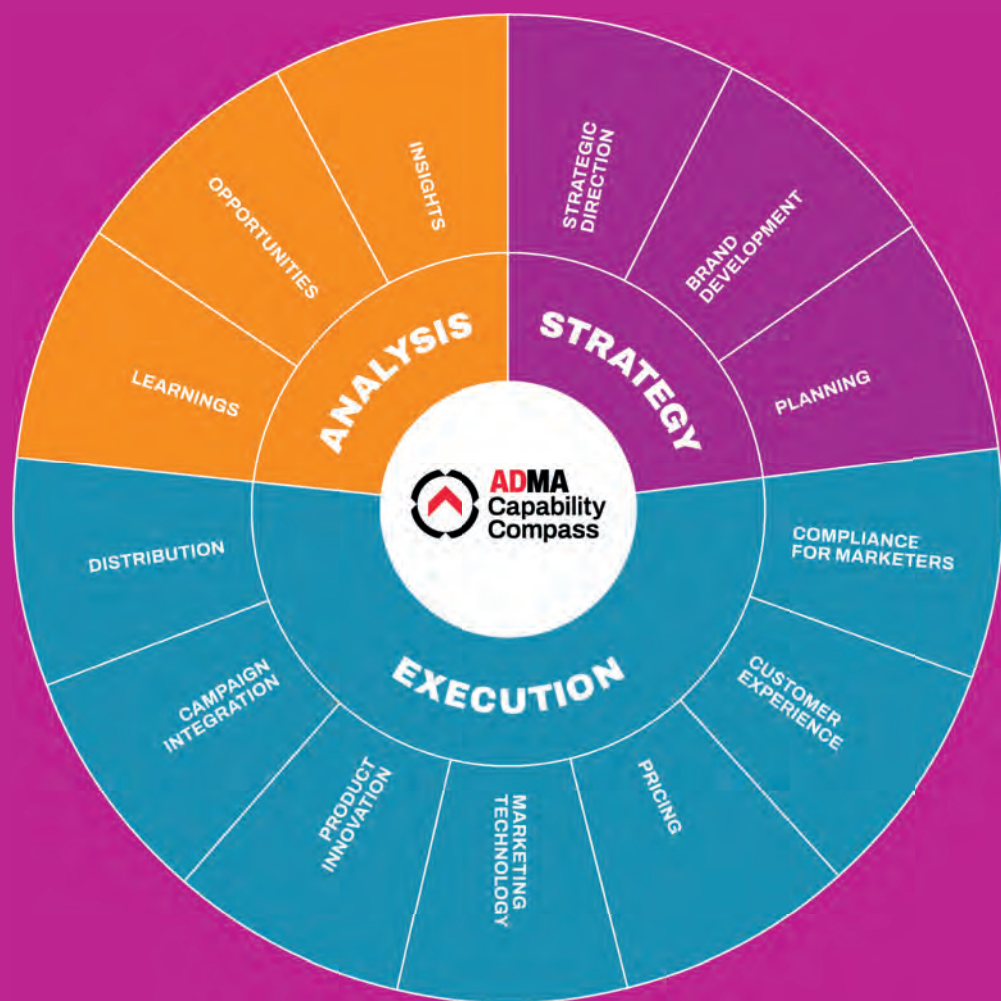
- The programme is designed to accelerate skills development and prepare emerging talent for leadership and growth roles in the marketing profession.

- It is co-designed with input from New Zealand CMOs and alumni of the Advanced Marketing Leadership Programme, ensuring relevance to both local market dynamics and global trends.
- Over four intensive days (split into two workshop blocks across February and March), participants dive into real-world challenges, workshops, panels and mentorship to sharpen their strategic, leadership and execution capabilities.

Format and key features

- **Workshops:** Two separate two-day sessions, led by both local and international experts, covering topics such as AI, multi-channel marketing, critical thinking, stakeholder management and problem solving.
- **Mentorship:** Each participant is matched with a one-on-one mentor from the alumni of the Advanced Marketing Leadership Programme – a significant differentiator, intended to turbo-charge growth and learning.
- **Speakers and panels:** The line-up includes senior practitioners and leaders from organisations such as ANZ, Fonterra, Goodman Fielder, One NZ (Jason Paris), Google (Caroline Rainsford) and Lion.

The NZ Marketing Association and ADMA brings you the ADMA Capability Compass™



A strategic skills assessment tool – built by industry, for industry.

The ADMA Capability Compass™ is your data-driven solution to uncover, understand, and elevate your marketing team’s skills – so you’re not just keeping up with change, but leading it.



In partnership with
ADMA
Capability
Compass

LEARN MORE



Special strategies

Strategist Nina Richardson loves that there are lots of different right answers... all grounded in truth.

Words: Rachel Tsai

Nina Richardson has always been a fan of advertising – the kind of person who “never skipped the ad breaks”. She was drawn to how creative work could speak directly to its audience.

But it wasn’t until she got hooked on the drama series *Mad Men* that the realisation struck: “Working in a creative agency would be so much fun.”

Luckily, not long after graduating university, Richardson came across a graduate programme at Special Group that got her foot in the door.

She rotated through a few roles, but the more she learned about brand strategy, the more she thought: “This is really what I want to be doing.”

Now a full-time strategist, no two days are the same.

“One moment I might be deep in desk research. The next, I’m mapping out strategic territories, writing brand manifestos or building mood boards.

“Some days I’m running focus groups or in-depth interviews. Other times, I’m co-leading client workshops or out in the field visiting retail stores,” says Richardson.

She likes how her boss Rory Gallery puts it: “A strategist is like the person standing on the ground, holding the kite. The kite is the creative idea that’s flying around – and you’re there to keep it grounded in truth, effectiveness and best practice.”

From insights to impact

It’s not quite been two years since Richardson joined Special, but she’s already contributed to several successful campaigns, including the award-winning ‘Export Ultra Cold Call Back Service’ for DB.

“One of the most rewarding things about the ‘Cold Call Back Service’ campaign was hearing people talk about using it on their summer holidays and seeing it become part of culture,” she says.

Richardson loves creating work that “feels like it can grow its own legs and walk off, live in the world and do its own thing”.

She also finds joy in connecting with people on the ground.



up and comer

“I love doing qualitative research with real people, trying to get under the hood of what their emotional drivers are and what makes them tick.

“Earlier this year, I visited Fiji to do ethnographic research for a couple of different Fiji beer brands. We got to talk to people about what the beer means to them – but also about their lives, who they are and what’s important to them. That felt like a real privilege – to have that kind of insight into people’s lives,” she says.

The art of strategy

When it comes to strategy, Richardson takes a former colleague’s nugget of “being a magpie” to heart.

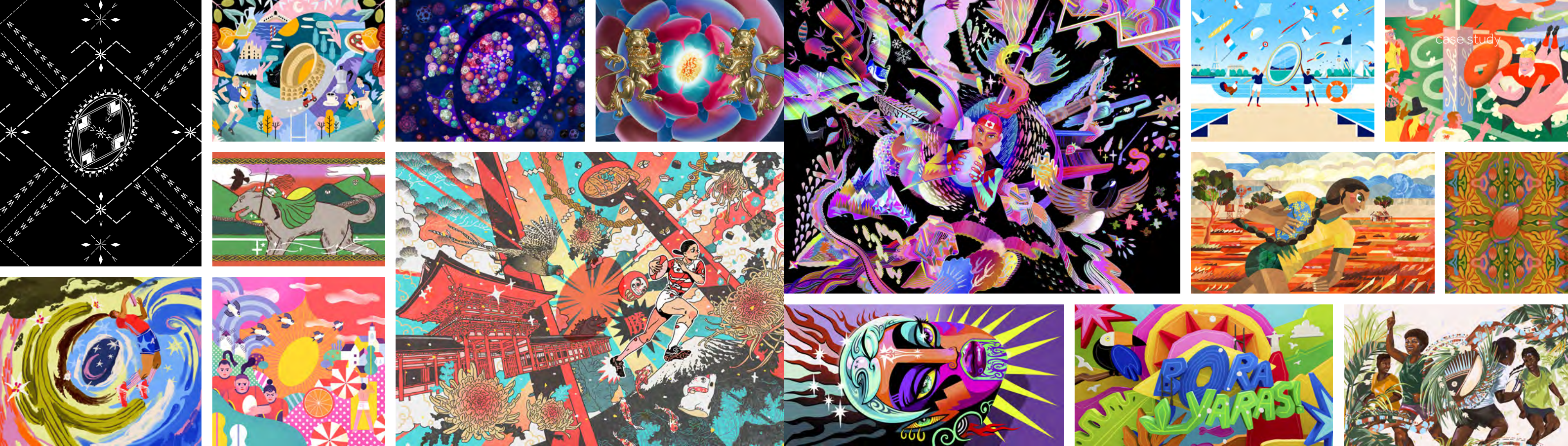
“Magpies tend to gather shiny things – bits of metal or jewellery – and bring them back to their nest. In the context of strategy, it’s so valuable to always be on the lookout for interesting insights, human truths or just things that surprise you... because you never know when they’ll come in handy.

“Strategy isn’t like maths, where there’s a really clear right answer. There’s a breadth of right answers, a breadth of wrong answers – and a whole lot in between.”

That’s why she reminds herself that being wrong isn’t failure – it’s part of figuring out what works.

“There’s a strategist I follow on LinkedIn, Joe Burns, who recently described it in a way I really liked. He said something like, ‘Strategy is the art of being temporarily wrong in pursuit of being eventually and surprisingly right’ – which I think perfectly sums it up.”

Above: Nina Richardson joined Special Group through a graduate programme and gravitated towards strategy.



Goals, goddesses and Godzilla

The opening sequence for the Women's Rugby World Cup needed something more powerful than girly graphics, so Ignite called on artists from all 16 competing nations.

Words: Zahra Shahtahmasebi

Bold was the byword. Graphics company Ignite wanted to create an opening sequence for the 2025 Women's Rugby World Cup that showed just how incredible the sport has become.

"With women's sport people like a feminine look, but we didn't want that," says senior creative manager Jeane Lundberg. "We wanted to showcase the different cultures, bring them together... It's a family event, everyone loves it."

So, they thought, why not ask female artists from each of the 16 competing nations to create a bespoke piece of work? "It was such a crazy idea," says Lundberg.

The team worked together, talking to agencies in each country to find illustrators and artists.

And they pulled it off – the resulting 30-second sequence is an empowering kaleidoscope of scenes from Aotearoa, Sāmoa, Fiji, Australia, Spain, Brazil, Italy, Canada, the US, Japan, France, South Africa, Scotland, Ireland, Wales and England.

Each artwork, shown for three seconds, acts as a tribute to the World Cup and the women competing, but also the respective nation's heritage.

"We told them, this is the vibe: a bespoke artwork, retain the rugby ball motif and then we would animate it – we wanted them to be dynamic to stand out," says Lundberg.

What came back was a mixture of styles from 3D designs to paintings.

Energy and pop culture

Japanese artist Lisa Kogawa's piece includes traditional symbols including koi and Mount Fuji along with pop culture elements including Godzilla and sushi.

She told Ignite: "The composition is intentionally layered and dynamic, reflecting the energy of both Japan and rugby itself."

Then it was Ignite's job to put the pieces in an order that felt cohesive but also let each one breathe.

"We mapped it out on the wall. Each one had to speak loudly, because it only had three seconds. We needed people to say, 'Wow, amazing! OK, next,'" says Lundberg.

She says many of the artists had been unsure how it would turn out, but were so happy and excited to see the finished product.

For Kiwi artist Xōe Hall (Kāi Tahu, Te Rakiamaoa, Ngāi Te Ruahikihiki), who knew how much hard work had gone into the project, seeing the completed title sequence for the first time was an amazing experience.

"So many hours, so much passion coming alive like that. All the artists are so talented, the animators did an amazing job."

Shining a light on wāhine

Hall, who is known for her large, hand-painted murals, was thrilled to represent her country by doing what she loves.

"I am all about shining a light on wāhine and their stories," she says.

"I didn't know a lot about rugby or our team, but I enjoyed learning more and finding new idols to be inspired by."

She says her piece was inspired by the haka the Black Ferns perform at the start of their games.

"The words within the haka of our team is where I found all I needed to get me started, alongside the bold colour scheme that I often work with."

"The atua wāhine [Māori goddesses] mentioned directed me to create something that speaks to the land, sea and stars and honours our ancestors."

Her favourite part? "The worldwide collaboration of talented women uplifting talented women, uniting in our power."

Heartbeat of the tournament

Lundberg says the team is thrilled that the sequence has since been nominated for a Broadcast Sport Award in the Short-Form Content of the Year category in the UK.

The project was quite "hefty" – every single person on the Ignite team worked on it. "It was such a passion project and we're all so proud of it."

Opening sequences, 30-second videos shown at the start of every match broadcast, are key to creating cohesion throughout the competition, says Lundberg.

The aim is to create something memorable that resonates with fans and also catches the eye of casual viewers, with a soundtrack that is a bit of an earworm.

"It's the heartbeat of the tournament, it sets the vibe, tone and energy and gets people excited. We are creating a portal into different worlds," Lundberg adds.

Ignite, part of the global AE Live Group, is no stranger to sporting briefs, having worked on India's Cricket Live 2024 and the French Open.

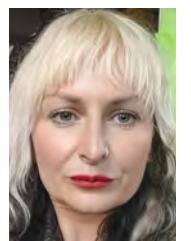
The agency has been working with World Rugby for a number of years, creating graphics packages for previous men's and women's World Cups, SVNS 2023 and the Pacific Nations Cup.

"We've been working with them for a long time, so they really trust us," says Lundberg. ☺

Above: All of the artworks featured in the opening 30-second sequence for Women's Rugby World Cup games 2025.



Jeane Lundberg
Senior creative manager, Ignite



Xōe Hall
Artist

trends 2026

Take note

From real staff members in adverts to AI (of course), local media to conscious consumerism, here's what's coming down the pipe.



46

Essential
intel for
the coming
year and
beyond

Staff announcements

Audiences crave authenticity. And who better to champion your brand than the people who rep it every day? No wonder we're seeing more employees in adverts.

Words:
Rachel Tsai

When your workforce turn into local celebrities after starring in a brand campaign, you know it's hit home, says Z Energy's Debbie Byrom.

That's exactly what happened with the staff in the recent 'Z is for' campaign – one that Byrom says “worked better than we imagined”.

The adverts present 11 everyday moments, each

ending with an employee delivering a “Z is for” line.

One sees Vincent use the last toilet roll and forget to restock. Cue a staff member with a fresh pack. “Z is for whoever used the last loo roll, Vincent,” says the staffer with a wink.

The ‘Z is for’ campaign is all about reminding Kiwis what the brand stands for, says Byrom, who is head of marketing.

“Z is for New Zealand” – that's been our line since we launched

15 years ago. And as we returned to our original brand premise, it just made sense to showcase the faces our customers see every day.”

With real Z staff in the ads, it wasn't long before they started getting recognised.

While customers didn't chase them down the street or call paparazzi, some screenshotted their photos, printed them out and even asked for autographs, she laughs.

Something no actor can fake

Patrick Usmar is a communications lecturer at AUT with a background in media buying and PR. He says the trend of using real staff in brand ads is sure to continue.

“It fits the New Zealand temperament of not taking yourself too seriously, while still delivering a sense of earnestness and trust.

“I think that slightly unpolished appearance brings across a degree of authenticity – and Kiwis pride themselves on being ‘no bullshit,’” he says.

Byrom agrees. Real employees might not have A-list acting skills, but they bring something no actor can fake.

“Our staff take real pride in working at Z and putting on their uniforms,” she says.

“They brought a lot of themselves to the shoots and acted the same way they would with actual customers.

“That's something you can't get from an actor who's just pretending to do this.”

Continuity is key

Authenticity strikes a chord with the Kiwi audience, but a consistent customer experience is key, says Usmar.

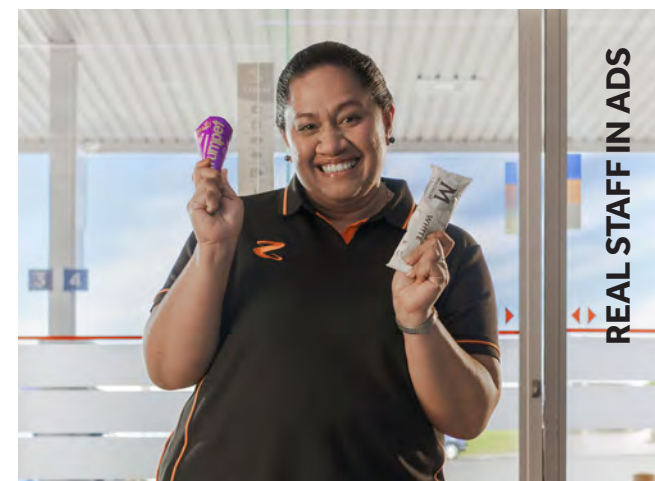
“Noel Leeming has been running an ad campaign recently featuring staff answering crazy questions from fantastical characters. It's designed to position the brand as one that can meet whatever personal needs you have.

“But there must be continuity. Let's say you've seen the ads – but then you walk into a Noel Leeming store and no one comes to speak to you, or if they do, they don't have the expertise you were expecting. That's where it can all fall over.”

So while a campaign features selected staff, all employees help it land.

“Advertising is really about promise, and that's the company's responsibility. If I'm promising something to you through the staff in my advertising, you'd better deliver on it,” he says. ▶

Right: Z staff “acted the same way they would with actual customers” while shooting the adverts.



REAL STAFF IN ADS



Walk the talk

Sometimes, whānau and even pets get in on the act.

Reece Congdon, head of marketing and corporate affairs at Mitsubishi Motors New Zealand, says using real staff members' kids in their 2025 Outlander campaign helps the business walk the talk.

Congdon says the medium SUV competes in a highly contested segment, which is especially popular with families.

While brainstorming ideas, the team realised they didn't have to look far for inspiration.

"When we spoke with our agency about how this vehicle was actually being used, many examples came straight from our own families," says Congdon.

"I've got two kids, and every one of the seven seats in that car is full all day, every day – going from football practice to gymnastics, to cheerleading, to birthday parties."

Those real-life anecdotes became the heart of the campaign. And featuring their Mitsubishi whānau – three staff members, 13 kids and one office dog – came naturally.

To bring that to life, the team mounted a camera on the centre console, hit play on the kids' favourite songs and drove laps around the office car park – letting the little moments of magic play out.

As Congdon puts it, Kiwi families loved it because "it's not

so much a car ad, but a family ad" – one they could all see themselves in.

Rep your own

Jayne Mayerhofler, chief marketing officer at AUT, says showcasing staff, alumni and current students in the recent 'Knowledge that works' campaign served the same purpose.

"We wanted our audiences to see themselves in our campaigns and at our university, and what made it feel so authentic was their love for AUT.

"During the casting process, we asked them to share their experiences. Once we heard their stories, we thought, 'This is going to be perfect.'"

And swift, too.

"It only took us one day to shoot both the video and statics – and that's saying something, because it usually takes time when you've got professionals coming in. There's a lot of work involved in getting them to sell or represent what the university is about. So having our own students do it just felt like a no-brainer," says Mayerhofler.

Keep it real

Beyond authenticity and relatability, Usmar says this storytelling approach also draws in audiences with transparency.

"In an ideal world, we want people to come to us. Advertising shouldn't be about begging.



"These ads resonate because they show what it's really like to buy the product or experience the service.

"We don't want to be saying, 'Please come here.' No one wants to be hard sold. And I think featuring real people in ads helps bridge that gap."

Congdon adds that advertising has to feel "organic, not forced".

"So look," he laughs, "if you've got the talent in-house, you'd be crazy not to use it." ☺

Top: Kids and the office dog helped Mitsubishi's Outlander campaign feel like a family ad.

Above: During casting for AUT's 'Knowledge that works' campaign students talked about their experiences.



Jules Lloyd-Jones
Chief marketing officer, Mitre 10

Above: Mitre 10 features team members "who are proud of who they are and what they do".

Real lives on on display

Mitre 10 employees have been the face of the brand for years. CMO Jules Lloyd-Jones tells NZ Marketing why it works.

Roughly how many staff members have been in your ads so far?

We've featured dozens of Mitre 10 team members in our brand advertising over the years, especially around key cultural moments like Te Wiki o Te Reo Māori, Matariki, Diwali, Father's Day and Mother's Day.

These campaigns aren't about selling products, they're about celebrating what these moments mean to our people and the communities they're part of.

How do you choose staff to be in your ads?

We look for team members who bring authenticity, warmth and a

genuine connection to their communities.

Our store teams reflect the diversity of their local communities, so it's easy to find people who represent the real faces of Mitre 10.

We don't go looking for polished performers, we look for people who are proud of who they are and what they do, and who are happy to share a bit of themselves with Aotearoa.

Bunnings also puts their staff in their ads – what makes Mitre 10 different?

Our approach is rooted in storytelling and connection.

We don't just feature 'staff' (we don't even use that term). We share our people's perspectives, their culture and their community ties. Whether it's a team member talking about how they celebrate

Matariki with their whānau, or helping out on a local Helping Hands project, our ads reflect the real lives of everyday Kiwis.

As a locally owned co-operative, our strength lies in our people and the knowledge, service and human connection they bring to our customers every day. That's what sets us apart.



"No one wants to be hard sold. And I think featuring real people in ads helps bridge that gap."

REAL STAFF IN ADS



Get amongst



Since the
iMedia
2025 Summit
98%
of participants have
connected with
another attendee

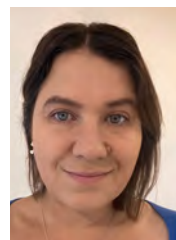
Source: iMedia Industry Pulse 2025, in partnership with Honeycomb

People love getting together, and events are a great environment to showcase your brand. But do you need a massive budget? And how can you show up to the party?

Words:
Rachel Tsai



Ella Stansfield
Business engagement specialist, Entegy



Mira Cossar
Head of brand and marketing ANZ, iMedia

Events are trending,” says Ella Stansfield of event tech company Entegy. As a business engagement specialist, her job is to connect event organisers to Entegy’s unified event tech tool – everything from registration to app – which is designed to make events easier to run.

She believes the best event tech is almost invisible, it creates space to connect.

“People talk constantly about how it’s a beautiful opportunity to come together, build communities and have that person to person interaction.”

From South by Southwest to Cannes and the Effies, marketers gather to network, learn and grow. But seats at the sponsors’ table can come with a hefty price tag.

While small businesses might struggle to keep up, Stansfield’s advice is simple: “Start your own, and start small.”

When she’s not out and about, she stays active on LinkedIn. Stansfield says it’s an “incredible resource” for promoting events. And for brands with fewer resources, it could be the best place to start.

“Communities have to start small – they don’t start large. What’s really great about LinkedIn now is that you can host a small, intimate gathering and create a FOMO effect, achieving almost the same reach as larger events,” she adds.

What events are for

Big events are useful for relationship building, but Stansfield says smaller occasions allow more personal, meaningful interactions.

“A lot of people would say that in a smaller setting, you’re more relaxed, which makes it easier to form stronger connections. People seem to have more time, they’re less rushed and it’s less hectic.”

Marketers Day, hosted by The Marketing Club in October, was a case in point. The grassroots festival was all about conversations and connections – the word “connect” was even projected on the walls in multiple languages.

“That kind of environment allows brands to be more vulnerable with attendees or consumers,” says Stansfield.

Running smaller events is also less risky for organisers. “They can test concepts, see what works, prove it, double down and then take it from there.”

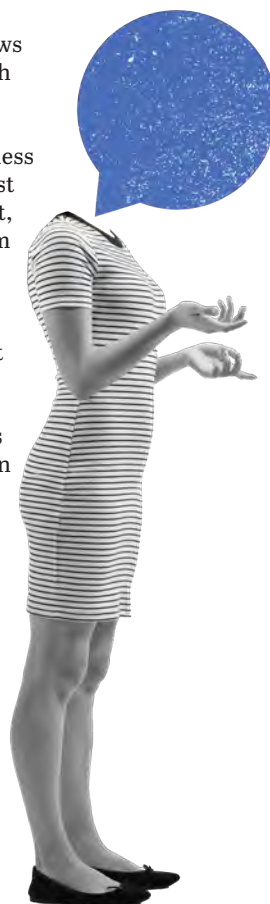
She stresses: “If you host an event for the sake of hosting an event, you’re wasting your time. It needs to be done with intention.”

Mira Cossar, head of brand and marketing ANZ, iMedia, also aims to build a sense of community – on a larger scale.

“Marketing leaders face constant pressure in an industry that never slows down. iMedia connects them in a setting designed for collaboration and honest conversation. This year, some even joked our summit felt like group therapy after a tough year.”

Why sponsorship matters

But taking part goes beyond community involvement or a sense of belonging.



“It’s about brand awareness and building relationships with potential clients,” says Cossar.

That’s where sponsorship really works, she adds. Sponsorship is no longer just about slapping a logo on a banner and paying a fee. At large events, like iMedia’s three-day Future of Marketing Summit, sponsors focus on creating memorable

moments that amplify their brand rather than simply seeking visibility.

“For this year’s Future of Marketing Summit, we collaborated closely with Sky to bring their ‘Unrivalled’ brand positioning to life. Together, we transformed the Summit’s Ultimate Networker competition into ‘Unrivalled’ Networker.”

Beyond that Sky hosted the Go-Karting experience where they were empowered to shape the atmosphere, storytelling and engagement. The result was a fully immersive activation that felt authentically Sky,” says Cossar.

Stansfield agrees that the attendee experience is key – and says events that run seamlessly are great for brands.

“I think if you focus on building your brand authentically in a real environment, where your priority is giving people a great experience rather than just selling, you’ll be surprised at what can happen.” ☺

Above and opposite:
iMedia Future of Marketing Summit in Ōtautahi Christchurch earlier this year.

What sponsors say

Q: How does sponsoring events, like iMedia, benefit your brand?



Reuben Wiremu
Head of marketing and creative, Sky Business

A: “I really value the opportunities that trade events like iMedia provide for us to connect directly with our highly valued clients. Sponsorship offers valuable brand visibility in a competitive landscape, while also allowing us to take part in meaningful conversations and build genuine relationships. In-person events give us the chance to listen, share insights and understand what matters most to our partners in an engaging environment. There’s real energy and value in bringing people together for a shared purpose.”

Q: Do you view event sponsorship more as a brand-building exercise or a sales opportunity?



Alex Lawson
Head of strategy and marketing, Market Media

A: “It’s a little bit of both, but not in a traditional manner. We view it as a relationship starter or strengthening opportunity. Sales may come from the event, but these are usually a long-term result, not immediate payback. For us, it’s a combination of getting our brand in front of marketers and agency groups in an engaging and interesting manner, hopefully without any hard sell. The relationships that we build at iMedia are designed to last for many years rather than fleeting encounters, and that’s what iMedia enables.”

Great expectations

We've fooled around with AI, is 2026 the year we find out?

Words:
Penny Murray

For a few years now, we've been told AI is the answer to pretty much everything. That its adoption and dominance in all areas of life is just a matter of time.

The tl;dr: Get on board or get left behind like the loser you'll become.

In Aotearoa, we haven't all drunk the Kool-Aid. As a nation, we've been slower to incorporate AI into our work processes than the tech bros might like. Many here have hesitated, waiting to see how the first wave overseas fares.

At first, it was just a funny wheeze to amuse your friends. ChatGPT wrote a song about me in a country style! Here's me as a superhero! What a cool trick!

Teething troubles

We knew (and perhaps didn't care) about the six-fingered photos and the 'hallucinations' – the euphemism for plausible-sounding yet made up elements found in AI-generated content. Teething troubles, we were told. Don't give them a second thought – the tech is getting better and better.

The amount of energy and water required to power AI is harder to dismiss. News emerged in late 2024 of a mothballed nuclear reactor in Three Mile Island, Pennsylvania, being pressed back in to service to feed Microsoft's data centres. Electricity prices rise and (sigh) culture wars rage over climate change, yet here we are, generating pictures of 'native' flamingos as the sun rises over Mt Taranaki.

It's useful though, right? Work up an extra six metres of background in an image, voice this script into seven languages, find a needle in this data haystack, transcribe and summarise our

meeting. In moments. Without doubt, these are useful tasks AI can take on – yet they're nothing a human can't do, given the time.

It's not magic, but we're thrilled by speed and love a shortcut.

I hear a 'but'...

Of course, in May 2025, when *The Chicago Sun-Times*' summer reading round-up included books that didn't exist, the doubters crowded. Writers despaired and redundant sub-editors sobbed into their cardigans.

In October, Deloitte Australia issued a partial refund to the federal government after finally admitting an error-strewn AU\$440,000 report (including typos, fake academic references and a made-up legal quote) had been written using AI. Oops.

As video slop proliferates and SEO company Graphite found more than half of internet content is AI generated, even the kids are suspicious. "That's AI," is – according to my socials – the Gen Alpha retort du jour. It means: "I don't believe you."

There is concern about how our industry is using AI. Are agencies "ChatGPT-ing it" yet still charging for human hours? Is it OK to like work that uses AI-generated people instead of real actors? Will AI testing mean ads all look the same?

Bubble trouble

Let's set aside those questions for now (and the disappearing job prospects for juniors).

Instead, consider the rumblings heard in Q3 2025: that AI is a bubble, destined to burst. In September, international finance giant Deutsche Bank warned AI

spending was propping up America – and that it can't keep increasing exponentially.

"AI machines – in quite a literal sense – appear to be saving the US economy right now," Deutsche Bank head of FX Research George Saravelos wrote to clients. "In the absence of tech-related spending, the US would be close to, or in, recession this year."

The Wall Street Journal has since run several stories asking whether spending on AI will ever pay off or if we're in for a rerun of the dot.com crash of 2000. A fair question, since the "magnificent seven" tech companies – Meta, Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Nvidia, Tesla and Apple – have seen share prices soar in the last couple of years, while collecting relatively little revenue in real life.

Journalist and author Cory Doctorow has a book about it – *The Reverse Centaur's Guide to AI* – coming out in 2026.

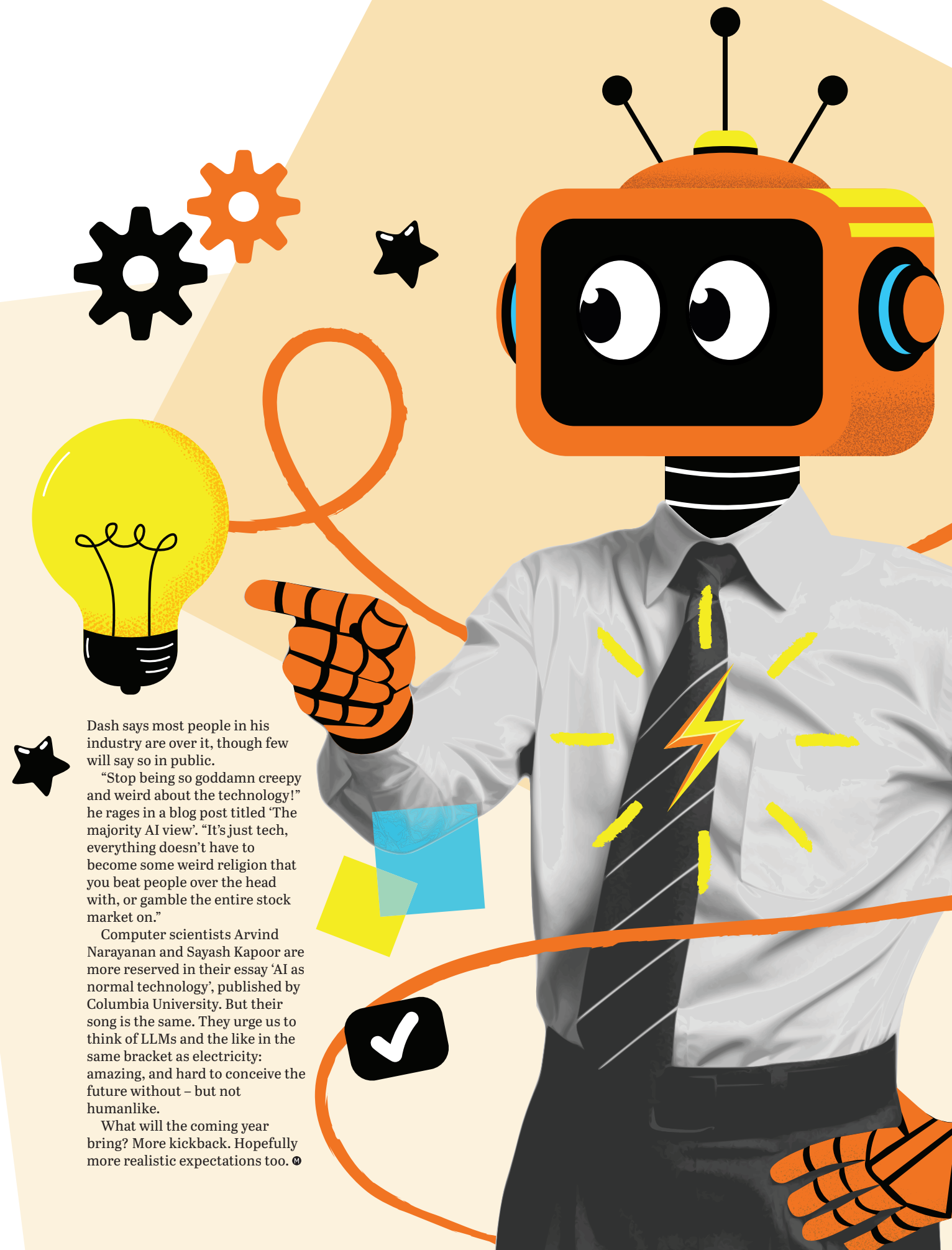
He says we're headed for "econocalypse". Oh goodie.

Meanwhile, the Harvard Business Review reports that 'AI-generated "workslop" is destroying productivity' – as workers produce polished-looking but substandard outputs their colleagues have to fix. It's enough to make you want to unplug from everything forever.

The future

TRA's 'The Future We Want' research, released in October, observed this unease. Given the option, respondents said they'd shut down AI completely. [Ed's note: Please no – I never want to transcribe interview tapes ever again!]

While the hype is omnipresent, tech entrepreneur and writer Anil



Dash says most people in his industry are over it, though few will say so in public.

"Stop being so goddamn creepy and weird about the technology!" he rages in a blog post titled 'The majority AI view'. "It's just tech, everything doesn't have to become some weird religion that you beat people over the head with, or gamble the entire stock market on."

Computer scientists Arvind Narayanan and Sayash Kapoor are more reserved in their essay 'AI as normal technology', published by Columbia University. But their song is the same. They urge us to think of LLMs and the like in the same bracket as electricity: amazing, and hard to conceive the future without – but not humanlike.

What will the coming year bring? More kickback. Hopefully more realistic expectations too. ☺

Not
anti-tech,
pro-human.
Turn to page

106

for TRA's
research on
the future
we want

Brands search for answers

AI chatbots and virtual assistants are rapidly changing the face of search. Tracksuit's Connor Archbold helps us unpack what this means for brands in 2026.

Words:
Niko Kloeten

Just when you think you know the answers, I change the questions." The quip from professional wrestler "Rowdy" Roddy Piper comes to mind when thinking about the fate of SEO specialists since November 30, 2022.

That was the day ChatGPT launched, changing how we use the internet forever, with one of the biggest shifts being how we search for information.

In the 'old days', 90% of us would open Google and type an often clumsily written query or even just a single word or name. Then a list of suggested websites would appear.

For years, companies have been trying to crack the arcane algorithms and climb the rankings with common SEO tactics like strategic keywords and backlinking. But AI searches require slightly different tactics.

Answer engine optimisation, or AEO, is the process of optimising your content to deliver answers through AI-powered interfaces such as chatbots. It's similar to GEO – generative engine optimisation – which is geared towards making your content appear in answers to user-generated questions on platforms such as ChatGPT, or Google's AI Overviews.

Brands play catch-up

So what does this mean for marketers? Connor Archbold, CEO and co-founder of brand tracking specialists Tracksuit, has seen a big shift towards AEO and GEO already, but says many businesses haven't kept pace.

"I think most companies are still doing SEO and starting to flirt with GEO – and it's a huge change. SEO has been one of the key



Turn
to page
13

where Together's
Charlotte Lobo asks:
Will AI cite your
brand in its
answer?

on

GEO



drivers of traffic for any business, but that is all starting to change. Gartner released a study that said traditional search is expected to lose 25% of its traffic by 2026, and there was also research that found 60% of Google searches now yield no clicks, which is fascinating."

Another factor working against traditional SEO is the amount of space taken up by Google's AI Overviews on the screen, even if you type in a traditional Google search, he says.

"If you Google something, 75% of a mobile screen is now usually covered with that AI response and it's 60-something percent of a desktop screen. So the blue links are just being pushed down and made more or less irrelevant, which is a complete change."

Good at SEO = good at AEO?

Archbold says companies that were good at SEO will probably also be good at AEO, as long as they apply the same amount of attention to their content strategy and where content is showing up.

However, he warns that the pace of change with AEO and GEO is likely to be faster than SEO.

"Every three to six months you'd have to adjust your SEO strategy,

but I think GEO might change every couple of weeks, just with all the new models.

"I don't think there's much clarity on how those models will continue to choose where to put brands. That could change fairly frequently, so you have to remain vigilant."

Dual strategies

What does GEO mean from a practical perspective?

Archbold says you can separate it into two distinct strategies: 'earned' and 'owned'.

The earned strategies are where your brand is appearing in AI answers, he explains.

"That's when you're securing brand mentions, because you're in trusted reviews and news sites and forums, and the answer engines are assuming that you're a trusted voice in the field.

"That helps you pop up when a customer asks, 'Who is the best at this thing?'"

On the other side is the owned strategy, which is being cited by AI answers. That's where creating your own unique content such as white papers comes in handy, and the more focused, the better, Archbold says.

"You want the title of your paper to align with the question that someone is asking: 'Compare this air conditioner to other heat pumps for a New Zealand house in 2026.'

"As long as you're a trusted source, it's more likely that your paper will get cited, because it's very specific to what the user is asking."

Building moats

Brand is Tracksuit's area of expertise, and Archbold says in the new AI-driven future, brand trust and credibility are likely to be some of the most important 'moats' for any business.

"What AI is doing is bringing down the barrier to entry on any category. It gets easier to produce, to manufacture, to code, it's easier to do all of that, so that means that there will be more options for consumers of any category.

"If consumers have more options, you need to have a solid brand that's trusted by lots of people and a strong community who are referring your brand to maintain credibility.

"When you maintain a strong brand, you hold onto customers and your revenue." 🗣️



Connor Archbold
CEO and
co-founder,
Tracksuit

"Every three to six months you'd have to adjust your SEO strategy, but I think GEO might change every couple of weeks."

Your next customer could be a machine



Omer Hazer
Founder and
managing
director,
Atlas Studios

LLM shopping companions are about to flip online purchasing habits. It's a huge opportunity for smaller brands, says Omer Hazer of Atlas Studios.

In 2025, AI became ingrained in many of our workflows. One area that lagged behind – but is a major focus for OpenAI, Visa and Shopify – is online shopping. AI agents can now lead shopping behaviour online – ChatGPT enabled native shopping in October 2025. It means AI agents can act on behalf of people: curating, filtering and buying without the human ever needing to visit the site themselves.

Marketing an ecommerce brand currently involves a mix of SEO, paid media, email and socials, all optimised to drive a click to your store. But in 2026, that dynamic is about to flip. Why? Because your next customer could be a machine.

Large language models are evolving from novelty tools into trusted shopping companions. These assistants don't just recommend a product, they can guide the entire buyer journey from discovery to checkout.

So what does that mean for brands who want to show up, get

discovered and win trust in this AI-first ecosystem?

Shopping is conversational
With tools like ChatGPT Shopping, consumers can now ask natural-language prompts like:

- “Which SPF is best for oily skin under \$50?”
- “Show me a carry-on suitcase that fits Jetstar specs and has four wheels.”

Rather than throwing up dozens of Google results or sponsored ads, the assistant delivers a curated shortlist, complete with reviews, specs, price points and – often – a “buy now” button.

That's a fundamentally different experience from the ad-saturated, SEO-optimised web we know. It's personalised. It's fast. And, most importantly, it's brand-agnostic.

As of right now, there's no pay-to-play barrier. That means, unless your brand deserves to be there, it won't be. It's a massive opportunity for smaller brands.

What's coming next?

We're already seeing consumers use AI models to do top of funnel research before buying.

Analysing Google Analytics data from 30 clients across APAC, we saw a 125% increase in an AI model being included along the customer's journey in August 2025, compared to January 2025.

Previously, a customer's journey might have looked like:

- Sees an Instagram ad > Google search > website > purchase

With AI in the mix, their journey might now look like:

- Sees an Instagram ad > researches with ChatGPT > Google search for the brand > website > purchase

On top of that, 2026 is shaping up to be the year of autonomous shopping agents.

Rather than simply asking ChatGPT for help, consumers might delegate entire tasks to personal AI agents using prompts

like: “Find me a wool coat under \$400, from a sustainable brand and buy it if there's a discount this weekend.”

With integrations like Shopify and Visa's Intelligent Commerce, these agents will handle everything from research to purchase without any human input.

So, a 2026 customer journey might look like:

- Sees an Instagram story and is inspired to make a purchase > tells an AI model what they're after > AI model searches and places an order on behalf of the customer

That removes nearly every traditional touchpoint a brand relies on to tell its story. It's a major shift from how merchants currently operate.

Step up, brand magnetism

So, how do brands stay relevant when discovery and purchase are handled by machines?

By leaning even harder into brand magnetism.

In this world, storytelling still matters, but it needs to happen earlier and deeper: on social, in community, through influencers and via user-generated content. Every piece of third-party trust you can generate will be indexed and weighted by LLMs.

Think of your marketing like compound interest: you're not just convincing a human today, you're also feeding the algorithm for tomorrow.

The big opportunity is here

Historically, merchants who seized new channels in their infancy captured

massive market share. (Think brands that capitalised on TikTok or captured affiliate marketing early.)

These marketing channels yielded strong upside for brands before becoming a normal part of the majority's marketing mix and becoming less effective.

If you're a brand in the \$1m-\$25m range, I believe there is a real opportunity to start focusing further up the funnel. ☺

Goodbye clicks, hello trust signals

In a world where AI agents lead a decent percentage of sales, how do you ensure your brand is recommended?

Most optimisations that help your website performance and SEO are still valid and will assist your generative engine optimisation, aka GEO.

So, keep (or start) delivering:

- **Rich, structured product data:** Clean titles, accurate specs, fresh stock info, delivery details. Give the machine what it needs to crawl quickly.
- **User-generated content across product pages:** Ratings, reviews, photos, FAQs, social proof. These act as key validation signals for humans and machines alike.
- **Semantic relevance:** Your product copy needs to sound like how customers ask questions. Don't copy+paste

content from AI and assume this will help AI. It's quite the opposite.

- **Fast, accessible websites:** If your site is hard to navigate, slow to load, or poorly filtered, LLMs will notice and quietly skip over you. This is the same as key page speed optimisation that impacts humans.

A Shopify study recently showed that a one-second improvement in website speed can boost mobile user conversions by up to 27%.

Site speed has been proven to be essential for customer retention, as 79% of customers are less likely to repurchase from a site if they were dissatisfied with its speed.





How do money marketers attract interest?

In the high-tech, social media-driven world of modern finance, boring and 'banky' is out and innovative marketing that captures the cultural zeitgeist is in.

Words:
Niko Kloeten

Like so many marketers, banks want to capture Gen Z. It's a group Westpac went all out to reach with two recent campaigns developed with Saatchi & Saatchi.

'Black Friday hangovers', which saw Westpac team up with Arepa to create a Black Friday hangover prevention drink, won Excellence in Financial & Banking Marketing Strategy at the YouTube NZ

Marketing Awards 2025.

More recently, Westpac embraced the horror genre with 'Fear-free credit', creating a House of Credit Card Fears pop-up with the help of experiential company Spur and the team from haunted attraction theme park Spookers.

Allie Buczkowski, senior proposition manager at Westpac, says the perception that 'young people don't think about or talk about money' is really outdated.

"They are keenly aware of, and interested in money, particularly saving and investing. During Covid, they learned the importance of saving and the impact of market volatility on investments, which has stayed with them."

"This is the first time many of this generation are seeing meaningful interest rates, providing a monetary incentive for getting 'savings savvy' and establishing a clear path to financial stability."

Buczkowski says there is also an insatiable curiosity for what others are doing. It's fuelled by social comparison. "Financial TikTok (#FinTok), for example, has over 4.7 billion views on the platform."

Lee Sunter, executive creative director at Saatchi & Saatchi, says: "There's so many interesting and creative ways for this generation to talk and learn about money we simply couldn't turn up in a traditionally boring, banky way."

For 'Fear-free credit', Westpac needed to build trust with an audience who want credit to work

for them but worry about getting it wrong, Buczkowski says.

"We wanted to take the fear out of credit cards with education to unlock credit confidence – not with lectures, but with something they actually like."

"We also knew this is the most horror-loving generation," Sunter says. "Gen Z are 12 times more likely to watch horror than other generations and horror film admissions are up fourfold, year-on-year."

However, Sunter says there's a lot of "same-same work" out there in the category.

"It's because there's lots of legalities and social responsibility when it comes to money, so it's easier to default to a safe space," he says.

"But if you can navigate those challenges, we see that as a great opportunity to show up differently, and this is just the beginning of doing just that."

Empowered consumers

At the other end of the financial marketing scale is Sharesies, which won Best In-House

Marketing Campaign at the YouTube NZ Marketing Awards 2025 for 'More ways to wealth'.

Elaina Hamilton, GM design and marketing at Sharesies, says it's been an exciting 12 months for the Sharesies team. The award win was a major highlight.

"This year we've also launched a range of products, including providing customers with the power to invest part of their KiwiSaver into US companies, a crypto offer and Sharesies Business."

"More recently, we've received great feedback on the value proposition of our new Sharesies debit card, which seamlessly connects our users' investing and spending."

"The card earns customers 1% 'Investback' of the amount they spend on eligible purchases – the first and only card that helps New Zealanders earn investments on their everyday spending."

Sharesies has two sides to its business. There's its retail platform, and Sharesies Business, which supports more than 600 listed and private companies with

their employee share schemes, registry and investor relations.

On the retail side, Sharesies has nearly 900,000 customers across New Zealand and Australia, managing over \$4 billion in funds.

But with small budgets compared to the big banks and other financial institutions, Sharesies has to find ways to make marketing dollars go further.

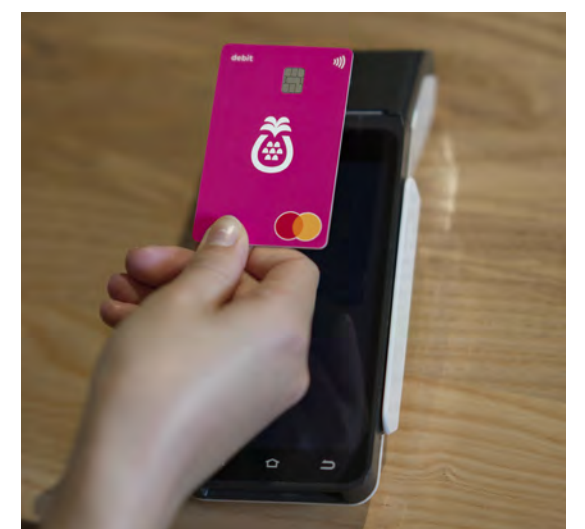
"We prioritise brand over everything. It's the foundation that underpins all our work – from a great customer experience to how we launch new products," Hamilton says.

And real-life recommendations play a huge role.

"The proof is in how our platform has grown through word of mouth and referrals, and this only happens through loveable experiences."

Hamilton says an encompassing trend she sees in the financial sector is the growing empowerment of the customer.

"This includes expectations of more control, transparency and options available to them," she says.



"With the rise of AI, changes in social media behaviour and developments in the open banking space, more people are turning to technology to help provide clarity and information on their financial situation."

"These trends are something we're taking into account through the way we design and evolve into a comprehensive wealth app." ☺

Above: Sharesies balances digital marketing with word of mouth.

Top: Westpac delivers financial education in a fun way that speaks to Gen Z.



Allie Buczkowski
Senior proposition manager, Westpac



Lee Sunter
ECD, Saatchi & Saatchi

#FinTok has more than
4.7bn
views on TikTok – young people are curious

Digital rewards made simple with iGoDirect

Keeping your customers happy is about to get much easier for Kiwi businesses, with high-tech rewards and promotions platform iGoDirect.



Pat Dalton
Founder and
managing
director,
iGoDirect

Forget coupons, catalogues and arcane reward points calculations, iGoDirect is revolutionising the rewards sector by bringing together loyalty, incentives, payments and rewards all in one place.

It's also the only company in New Zealand offering web-to-wallet technology, which transfers rewards instantly to an employee's or customer's Apple or Google Wallet.

The web-to-wallet experience transforms how brands connect with customers. Instead of waiting for physical cards or redemption codes, recipients receive their reward instantly, right into their digital wallet. It's fast, seamless and unmistakably branded, turning every reward into a real-time moment of delight. For marketers, it's not just convenient, it's a whole new engagement channel that merges reward, brand and emotion in one tap.

Having led innovation in the Australian market for more than 25 years, iGoDirect is no stranger to disruption. The company introduced branded prepaid Visa cards to Australia back in 2004, a move that redefined how brands engage with their customers.

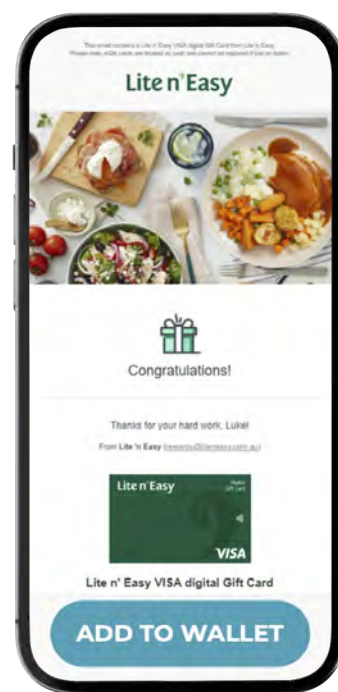
Founder and managing director Pat Dalton says iGoDirect wants to empower businesses on this side of the Tasman.

"Over the past few years, we've developed cutting-edge gift card technology that we're now bringing into the New Zealand market. We see a real opportunity to deliver more innovation and flexibility for Kiwi brands," Dalton says.

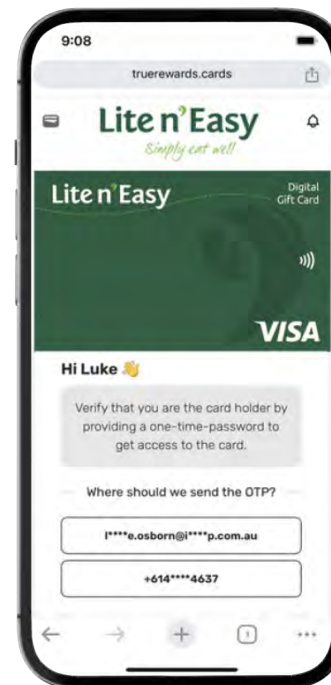
Your brand goes here

Dalton says another issue with the incumbent gift card providers in New Zealand is that their name

Web-to-wallet How it works 3 easy steps is all it takes for your customers to get transacting

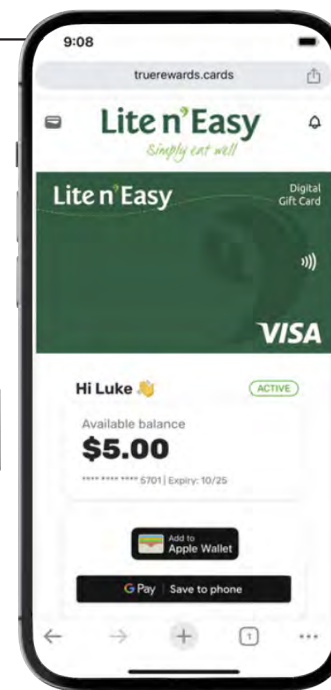


1. Customer receives their digital Visa card via email, SMS or mobile app.

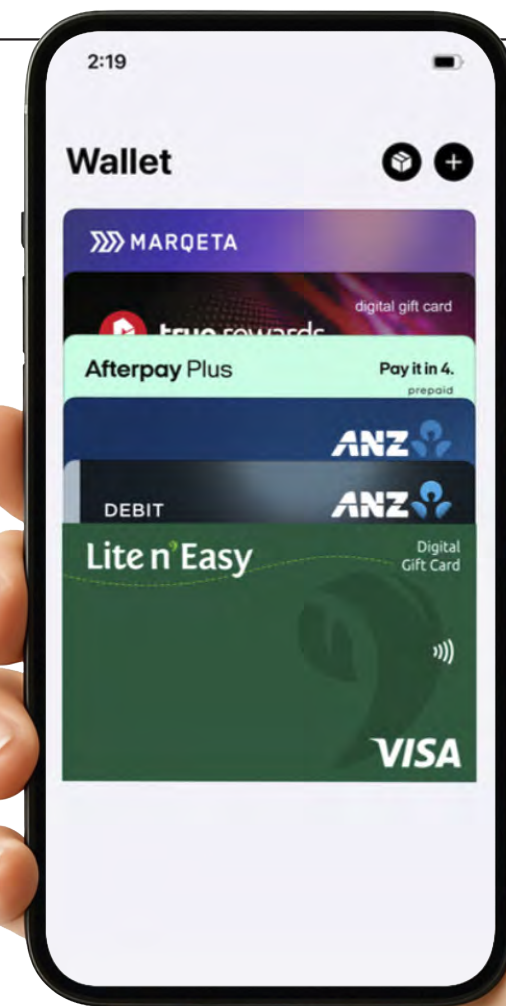


2. Customer is taken to a web page, requests a one time password to verify they're the cardholder, then taps 'add to wallet' for either Apple or Google wallet.

This is also the place to view transactions and card details for making online transactions. Customers navigate back here from the original email or SMS.



3. Customer follows the Apple or Google steps to add card to their wallet. Voila! The card is ready to use.



appears first on branded gift cards, ahead of the name of the brand using them.

"We are the engine room. We make all the parts work, but we also make sure that the customer's brand is front and centre during the whole customer journey."

iGoDirect is a licensed Visa issuer and AFSL (Australian Financial Services Licence), NZFSL holder and partner with ASB. Dalton says they have been developing their technology, credentials and toolbox to allow brands to use just one supplier for all aspects of their loyalty, cash back, incentive and rewards programmes.

"With our Visa credentials, a reloadable, fully branded card can be issued and added to a phone in minutes. Members can 'earn and burn' directly with participating merchants, with no need for separate platforms, gift card providers, or communications engines. We handle it all," Dalton explains.

The iGo single load or reloadable Visa sent straight to a recipient creates direct reward or payment with a much enhanced relevance, especially with the sender brand and artwork identified as the sender of that reward.

Versatile uses

Retailers love loyalty schemes, but iGoDirect's platform extends far beyond retail, helping brands across events, FMCG and trade marketing connect rewards directly to customer behaviour.

At the 2023 Fifa Women's World Cup, iGoDirect enhanced Visa's fan engagement with digital memorabilia gift cards and instant offers for event attendees, a technical innovation that Visa itself recognised as exceptional.

One of the platform's standout capabilities is its geo-targeting technology, which enables brands to deliver location-based rewards and offers in real time.

From Asahi's on-premise promotions to Great Northern's on-pack campaigns, iGoDirect can pinpoint rewards to specific venues, time slots or purchase locations – creating instant engagement exactly where and when it matters.

The same technology and data-driven approach also power iGoDirect's trade marketing programmes, such as its long-running partnership with one company, which rewards customers through quarterly performance-based incentives.

"iGoDirect helps a national automotive brand strengthen and grow quarterly trade spend through a data-driven rewards programme. Once participants hit their targets, their points convert into cash value on reloadable Visa cards, ready to spend anywhere. The brand also receives in-depth insights into spend categories and usage patterns, allowing the brand to continually refine its incentive strategy."

Dalton says in the current economy there is a clear focus on 'retain and nurture' rather than acquisition, including a strong uptake of 'refer a friend' programmes. Although acquisition campaigns using iGo Visa products are a key user case.

NZ's corporate gift card market is experiencing strong growth – projected to reach \$2.25 billion by 2028. But Dalton says iGoDirect is much more than just a rewards tool.

"Our platform is a powerful marketing and communications engine. Every card activation happens via SMS or email, creating a branded digital touchpoint that strengthens engagement and extends the customer journey." ❧

igodirect.co.nz



10 comms trends

When it comes to customer communications and the wider tech ecosystem, this is what to watch out for in the coming year, says Cumulo9's David Allen.



David Allen
General manager,
Cumulo9

1. AI

The roll-out of AI will dominate everything in 2026, as businesses move from talking about it to deploying AI in everyday business applications. I'm observing that boards are now demanding AI is a line item for discussion at their regular meetings. There is now recognition at a governance level that AI will be the cornerstone for creating competitive advantage.

2. Hyper-personalisation

Businesses are starting to use advanced data analytics and AI to deliver highly tailored interactions based on individual preferences, behaviours and purchase history. But they are realising they need to invest in customer data platforms or at least in unifying their data silos if they are going to unlock the benefits of hyper-personalisation. Early adopters have found you can't embark on any form of AI without cleaning up the application layers that exist in most large businesses.

3. Omnichannel integration

Seamless and consistent communication across multiple channels such as messaging apps, social media, email, chatbots and voice assistants. We are seeing a willingness to invest in modern customer communications platforms, where enhanced document creation functionality can be rolled out to front line staff as well as dealing with the regular batch-based comms.

At the heart of investment-based business cases is a need to deal with compliance as well as

enhanced customer experience. There is also a requirement for lines of business to have more control and the modern customer communication management (CCM) platforms make document changes a less technical task. This opens the opportunity for more real-time customer engagement. Businesses want to be in control of the documents they create and so there is an active move away from using mailhouses for documentation creation tasks.

4. Real-time engagement

We'll see greater emphasis on instant communication driving real-time responses that drive enhanced customer experience and satisfaction.

A shift to digital sending opens the door for richer communication types such as push messaging via WhatsApp or HTML5, where the documents can be 'active', allowing immediate in-document or via embedded URL responses.

5. Proactive comms

Anticipating customer needs and proactive outreach via predictive analytics and integration with the internet of things.

This is now a possibility following investment in data analytics – and ahead of that, the collection of supporting data, such as preferences and enhanced knowledge of the customer and their lifestyle situation.

6. Customer journey visibility

Modern customer journey mapping (CJM) tools can be accessed as a service and are now

far easier to fully integrate with data sources. This allows businesses to visually see an individual customer journey through every touchpoint – including the ability to surface specific customer comms at various points on the journey. Heat maps at a consolidated level allow a business to understand where bottlenecks are occurring and take immediate action.

7. Client security as a KPI

There is growing focus on transparent data handling and privacy protection as a way to build customer trust.

Businesses are recognising that legacy platforms need to be dealt with for data security reasons. In the past, reinvestment decisions were heavily driven by marketing and process improvement gains. But no one wants to be in the news for the wrong reasons, and it would be hugely embarrassing if out of support legacy platforms were the reason for a data breach.

8. Turning off letterbox

Full rate postage is now \$2.30 for a standard letter and consumers accept it's in their best interest to help reduce costs by opting in to digital. The digital preference is also being driven by fewer delivery days and less reliable postal services. Both businesses and consumers are appreciating the convenience of digital channels. For businesses, there are compelling reasons to drive digital interaction. For example:

- Digital drives convenience, as customers can resolve issues

without waiting for human support. McKinsey research found that digital self-service adoption can reduce churn by 15-20%, since customers feel more in control.

- Bain & Company's work in banking found that customers who actively use digital channels are more loyal, less price-sensitive and generate more cross-sell opportunities.
- Digital connections can drive frequency of contact, driving more "light-touch" but meaningful interactions (notifications, insights, nudges).

In 2026, we'll see more businesses announce they'll stop using mail.

9. SaaS and subscriptions

Microsoft Azure now has a significant footprint in New

Zealand, with its "New Zealand North" cloud region officially live. This major investment provides New Zealand businesses with enterprise-grade cloud services.

In September 2025, Amazon Web Services (AWS) launched the AWS Asia Pacific (New Zealand) Region. Both services claim to offer low-latency access, local data residency, enhanced performance and support for digital transformation. They will compete with existing platform providers like Spark and Datacom creating accelerated opportunity for businesses to move their applications from on-premises into the cloud.

At the same time, those providing software applications are moving to "subscription" or consumption-based billing

where users pay at a transactional level, rather than a fixed annual fee. This is certainly so for the CCM vendors who now have subscription-based, cloud enabled offerings as well as any-premises deployment options.

10. Integrating feedback

Businesses are starting to use AI-driven insights from customer feedback to continuously improve communication strategies and offerings. In the past, insight gathering was a more difficult and highly manual task. It was often outsourced to third parties but now businesses are building in-house insight capability, only using third parties for more complex and often specific insight gathering and analysis. ☺



Trust is the new key metric

Innovation and profit are no longer enough to secure prosperity. Integrity will be crucial to brand success in 2026 and beyond, says Nikki Wright of Wright Communications.



Nikki Wright
Founder,
Wright
Communications

New Zealand is on the cusp of a new economic era.

Breakthroughs in biotech, artificial intelligence, advanced manufacturing and clean energy are rapidly gaining momentum and reshaping our economy.

But innovation on its own won't secure our future. The real test over the next decade will be trust. Without it, the smartest algorithm, the most sophisticated technology or the cleanest energy solution won't gain public support, market adoption or long-term investment. With it, these industries can become the backbone of a more resilient, prosperous nation.

For years, our economy has relied heavily on the primary sector. Farming, horticulture and tourism helped lead our post-Covid recovery. But as the global economy shifts, the pressure is now on our urban, tech-based industries to lift productivity and diversify our strengths. These emerging sectors carry enormous

promise. Yet their success will depend not only on what they build, but on how they're seen.

New Zealanders are no longer satisfied with businesses that only deliver profit. Increasingly, we expect them to show integrity on climate change, cultural respect, digital privacy and social equity. Companies that fall short in these areas risk losing public trust and in a digital age, reputational damage spreads fast.

We've already seen the early warning signs. Renewable energy is vital for our climate goals, but wind and solar projects have faced local pushback over environmental and landscape concerns. Biotech and agritech innovations like gene editing and lab-grown proteins raise ethical and cultural questions, especially in a country where whakapapa and kaitiakitanga matter deeply.

Meanwhile, the fast-growing digital and AI sector faces its own set of risks. Data breaches, algorithmic bias and digital

exclusion are no longer abstract fears. They're real and visible. Public confidence in digital tools is fragile and one misstep can trigger a viral backlash or regulatory response.

Cybersecurity is no longer a niche IT concern. It's a central reputational issue.

Four elements shaping trust

Looking ahead, four major shifts will shape the trust landscape for New Zealand's emerging industries.

First, the "prove it" era of **sustainability** is here.

Vague promises or carbon offsets won't be enough. Investors, regulators and the public want hard evidence in the form of measurable emissions reductions, biodiversity outcomes and circular business models. Claims without proof will be seen as greenwashing, with real consequences.

Second, **AI and data ethics** will become a public test of leadership.

As automation enters health, finance and education, businesses will be judged on how they manage bias, consent and surveillance. Transparent, human-centred AI design will be a reputational asset. Opaque or exploitative systems will be punished, fast.

Third, **internal culture** is now public brand.

Younger workers – especially Gen Z – expect inclusive, equitable and psychologically safe workplaces. A toxic culture or lack of diversity in leadership can quickly leak into public view through social media or whistleblower platforms. Culture isn't just an HR issue any more – it's front-page news.

And fourth, **staying silent** is no longer neutral.

Whether it's climate justice, housing or indigenous rights, companies that avoid taking a stand will increasingly be seen as taking the wrong one. But empty gestures won't cut it either.

People want consistency between values, behaviour and impact.

These aren't future hypotheticals, they're already happening. And while the landscape is changing, the underlying principle remains the same: trust is earned through openness, respect and early engagement. That means involving tangata whenua and communities from the start, not after the fact.

It also means understanding that reputations are more fragile than ever. What used to stay internal now becomes public in hours, sometimes minutes. From TikTok to Reddit, internal culture is no longer hidden. How companies respond to criticism matters just as much as what sparked it.

So what's the path forward?

Trust can't be treated as a PR strategy. It must be a strategic capability. New Zealand's industries need to:

- Engage early and honestly with communities and iwi.
- Set measurable sustainability targets and verify them independently.
- Embed digital ethics into governance.
- Make diversity and inclusion real, not marketing slogans.
- Take principled stands on issues that matter to staff, customers and society.

The opportunity is massive. If Aotearoa can match innovation with trust, ethics and transparency, we can lead not just in technology but in responsible, inclusive growth. But if trust is ignored, no breakthrough invention will protect our industries from the cost of reputational failure.

In the end, it won't be innovation alone that defines success for our businesses and brands in the future. It will be innovation backed by proof, purpose and public trust. ☺

What is a Tiriti-dynamic social marketing framework? Find out on page

10

TRUST AS A METRIC

A person in a white shirt and dark trousers is standing on a large, glowing yellow lightbulb. The lightbulb is suspended by three thin black lines from a blue, grid-patterned base that resembles a computer monitor. The background is a blurred indoor setting with wooden tables and chairs.

CONSCIOUS CONSUMERISM



Local media completes the picture

It's been a brutal few years for New Zealand media businesses, but Kiwi brands and agencies are teaming up to support an industry that remains crucial to their success.

Words:
Niko Kloeten

Reporting on the state of New Zealand's media industry in the past couple of years has often brought to mind Yogi Berra's famous quote: "It's like déjà vu all over again."

Although there were some glimmers of hope in 2025 – such as TVNZ reporting a full-year net profit of \$25 million after a net loss of \$85 million the previous year – we continued to see the red ink, job losses, mergers and closures that have plagued local media companies for years.

These included Sky buying Discovery NZ for \$1, Stuff closing 15 community newspapers, NZME cutting almost 40 jobs from the *NZ Herald*, *BusinessDesk* and Newstalk ZB and *Metro* magazine losing its

full-time staff and editor following a major restructure.

New Zealand media's struggles have raised alarm bells in the marketing sector. Now leaders including Goodman Fielder head of marketing Frankie Coulter are speaking out in support of our media industry.

Local media have played a key part in many of Goodman Fielder's recent marketing campaigns, including the Meadow Fresh Quick Brekkie product launch with NBA star Steven Adams, which won Excellence in New Brand Development at the YouTube NZ Marketing Awards 2025.

"New Zealand's media sector is like the Great Barrier Reef: if we don't keep it healthy at the top, it damages the whole ecosystem – the producers, the artwork directors... the whole thing is just an industry in itself," Coulter says.

"When you look from film to TV to studio to the other associated

things you get with that, it's massive and it's all local. If you get rid of that, then you're losing that industry, which I think is one of the best in the world."

Shared values

Coulter's belief in the value of local media is shared by Goodman Fielder's new media agency, Auckland-based independent agency Together.

Penelope Brown, managing director – media at Together, says the different attitudes towards New Zealand-owned media were on display during a conversation she had recently with a local media owner and someone from a large multinational agency.

"The holding company person was using the word 'cost' a lot in that conversation, while I used 'value' and 'partnership'. And the way that media partner was then able to interact with the two of us was very different," she says.



Looking purely at cost can be dangerous when assessing media options, Brown says: "The equation is business outcomes and/or value in the partnerships we create. Not pinning the media owner up against the wall and talking about only a rate."

TVNZ chief revenue officer Valerie Walshe says support from local brands (like Goodman Fielder) and agency partners is critical to the health of the local media ecosystem.

"That localness is in our DNA. One of our TVNZ core values is that we are 'by New Zealanders, for New Zealanders'. We are listening to our viewers every day, and the content that resonates best with New Zealanders is local content.

"When you think about *One News*, *Hyundai Country Calendar*, *Shortland Street* and our documentaries, our local stories are so important."

Innovative tools

Walshe says TVNZ's priorities for 2026 are investing in local content and continuing to innovate, adding new solutions to make it easier for people to trade with them.

"We recently launched co-viewing, and we are offering AI tools to help some of those small businesses be able to make the most of our TVNZ+ platform.

"SMEs are crucial to our economy, but often creative assets can be a barrier, so we use those tools to provide packages that include everything from brand work through to measurement."

While TV advertising has traditionally been the preserve of big advertisers with generous marketing budgets, Walshe says smaller advertisers can now get the benefits of TV as a medium.

"We offer such a premium, good-quality environment where you've got that level of attention and engagement," she says.

"It's great to be able to offer small businesses an opportunity to be on TVNZ+. For a couple of thousand dollars you can have a presence. We want the New Zealand economy to do well and helping those SMEs to grow is really important as well."

One advertiser taking up this opportunity was economic development agency RotoruaNZ's recent 'Robe trip to Rotorua' ▶

Above: TVNZ+ was a crucial component of RotoruaNZ's 'Robe trip to Rotorua' work.

Opposite: Rufus Chuter and Penelope Brown with Frankie Coulter of Goodman Fielder.

"The content that resonates best is local."



“You could argue that the real social media today is where brands get value from overhearing and cultural impact.”



Valerie Walshe
Chief revenue officer, TVNZ

campaign, developed by independent Trans-Tasman creative agency jnr. The work won a gold and two silvers at the Effie Awards Aotearoa 2025.

Walshe says Rotorua has had a tough time post-Covid, and the campaign was a major boost for the famous tourist town.

“As part of the overall campaign, we did some integration work with the *Breakfast* show, and the campaign achieved really phenomenal results for an advertiser on a small budget.”

TV = social media?

It's not just new technology bringing advertisers back to local content on local media. In a world increasingly obsessed with micro-targeting and individually tailored content, marketers are on the lookout for media that can offer shared experiences and cultural moments.

Veteran brand planner and advertising strategist David (DT) Thomason said recently that social media no longer deserves the word 'social'.

“The vast majority of interactions now involve an individual scrolling the contributions of strangers, rather than connecting with friends and family, or anyone. It would be more accurately called 'solo media'.”

Rufus Chuter, managing partner and co-founder of Together, says marketers need local media, as they offer “powerful local contexts and connection points” to build their brands and businesses around.

“If social media is becoming 'solo media' then you could argue that the real social media today is where brands get value from overhearing and cultural impact. So perhaps social media should really include linear and live TV, outdoor, live radio – media where I know other people are experiencing the same thing as me at the same time.”

He points to the example of *The Celebrity Traitors*, a linear

show that quickly became the talk of the UK, garnering almost 12 million viewers per weekly episode.

“That's a good example of an increasing desire for shared experiences and the importance of those for marketers, because without them we lose the irrational multipliers that drive brand and marketing success – like signalling and norming.”

Transparency is key

Coulter says Goodman Fielder chose Together as its media agency not only because it's local, but because they were looking for transparency.

“What I'm not going to get from Together is trying to push global tools and services to me where it may not be relevant for the New Zealand market, and bombarding us with complicated metrics as to why we should buy into a certain package.

“The second thing is transparency in terms of cost. When you have situations where your money is getting bundled up with other advertisers and then

taken to the media houses as a big bag, the free space or the additional discounts that they get, it's completely unclear how much you get as a client.”

Goodman Fielder is also excited by the creativity Together brings to the table, which Coulter says reflects the fact they are run by passionate local owners.

“When you have a local agency, you tend to get a bigger share of time from the senior intellectual people in the business on your account and their care factor runs through the business.”

Brown says they are thrilled about the new partnership.

“We've got New Zealand's biggest FMCG company taking a leadership position to not only buy into a local agency, but to sit around a table with local media and talk the way he is, and to have set that ambition for his team. That is for us a massive tick for why this partnership is the right one.”

Global still important

Despite his passion for supporting local media, Coulter emphasises that he's not having a

go at global players like Meta or Google.

“We need them for the eyeballs and we need them for targeted and we need them for whatever brand objective we've got. But this is actually an opportunity for us to get our house in order from a local perspective and provide a clear and meaningful offer. For me it's local and it's global, it's not an either/or.”

Chuter agrees, confirming that Together does a lot of work with the global platforms, and they have a vital role to play especially in amplifying cultural moments that often originate in local media – whether live sport, a must-see TV programme or loved radio show.

“This isn't an either/or equation. It's understanding that to impact culture and drive brand fame, we need to use all the levers we have at our disposal. Local media is often overlooked in this equation because our industry seems intent on reducing media value to basics like reach and cost – which ignores how brands are actually built.”

Opposite:
Together works with several big Kiwi brands, including Barfoot & Thompson.

As we went to press, Kiwibank announced
all
of its agencies are now Kiwi owned

LOCAL MEDIA

A different set up

As the industry becomes younger and holding companies consolidate, how do you choose an agency? Art of the Possible's Adam Brami has some suggestions.



Adam Brami
Director ANZ,
Art of the
Possible

After a decade of pressure, 2025 may prove the tipping point for marketing. Economic uncertainty and geopolitical instability dented confidence. As budgets tighten, generative AI is reshaping the industry – automating tasks juniors used to cut their teeth on. It's forcing agencies to rethink how they deliver work.

Marketing teams must do more with less, while holding company networks double down. Omnicom's US\$13 billion acquisition of IPG will leave four of New Zealand's five biggest agency brands under the same global roof. In a small, already concentrated market, that kind of consolidation hits harder.

Marketers aren't just asking how to get their brand chosen over another, but who to partner with to make it happen. Is there a smarter way to tap external expertise?

The roof no longer fits

The traditional agency model is built on a singular premise: the best minds under one roof. But that roof is looking increasingly irrelevant.

It fitted an era of fewer channels, slower cycles and predictable spending rhythms. No wonder it's under strain. Marketers are questioning the return on their investment, and while the model still works for some, many brands need less theatre and more traction.

Talent crunch at both ends

The challenges are also human. The industry has become younger, by design. As holding companies shift toward

junior-heavy teams to protect margins, senior staff are often viewed not as strategic stabilisers but financial liabilities. And those over 45 – once the wise heads guiding entire departments – are disappearing.

About 35% of public service workers are 50 and over, while 41% of the wider workforce is 45+. But just 21% of advertising professionals are in that age bracket. Only 6% of marketing roles are held by the over 55s. Experienced voices have become rare in our industry.

With AI automation, entry-level jobs are evaporating. At the same time, traditional agencies struggle to justify the cost of senior talent while still delivering shareholder returns. They're closing the door to juniors, and pushing out seniors just as they hit their peak.

A model purpose-built for now

But a different model is gaining traction.

Across Australasia, newer players including Art of the Possible, Game Creative and Virtual Marketers are assembling custom teams per project. This set-up

puts outcome above overhead. It wraps experienced talent around the brief, not an office structure.

These aren't experimental ideas. Assignment Group and Consortium – both founded by respected ex-holding group agency New Zealand execs – successfully ran similar models in a previous era. Both firms have since been folded into other entities or closed, but they

showed how a modular, senior-first set-up could deliver faster, higher-level work.

Today, remote collaboration, flexible work cultures and growing comfort with project-based engagement make this streamlined version ready to scale. On top of that, many of the industry's best minds are working fractionally – often delivering more value than they ever did within the system. In short: the conditions have finally caught up with the idea.

What clients are really asking

Most businesses don't want an agency, they want a commercial outcome: to get chosen more often.

Clients are asking:

- Who's actually working on my business?
- Are they experts in my category?
- Why am I paying for anything that doesn't directly affect the outcome?

Fran Bellingham, founder of Virtual Marketers, sees this daily: "Clients are done with unnecessary layers. They want fast access to the right capability, embedded where it makes sense. That's where fractional resourcing and blended teams shine."

Jodine Banks, a senior marketing leader and head of marketing at HQ Travel Group, is an advocate for the modular agency. She says: "The value of an agency really depends on your business requirements. Long-standing relationships can be brilliant – when an agency knows your business as well as you do, that continuity is powerful."

"But for many, the desire for fresh ideas can mean changing agencies, which often disrupts day-to-day momentum. What I've needed in the past wasn't more ideas – it was smarter execution from people with genuine expertise in our space. Working this way gave us speed, relevance and greater control over investment."

Why it matters now

These emerging models are more affordable and more accountable. They cast for fit and offer project-based pricing. And they are led by seasoned marketers who can navigate complex challenges without adding layers of process or politics.

That shift from volume to value is everything. A recent study indicated 82% of New Zealand businesses would consider partnering with a lesser-known, independent model if it delivered the same quality at lower cost. This willingness to trade brand-name familiarity for proven ROI underlines how ready the market is for smarter, senior-led alternatives.

The opportunity ahead

It's time for the industry to rethink how we structure capability. Holding company networks will continue to consolidate. AI will keep automating tasks. And clients will remain pressured to do more with less.

Whether it's embedding fractional experts into internal teams (as Virtual Marketers has done) or assembling custom strike squads for specific category requirements (as Art of the Possible does), the models now exist to meet the moment.

In Australia, Game Creative – founded by industry leader Dan Beaumont – is showing how fast this approach can scale.

"We've been amazed at how quickly clients have embraced this way of working," says Beaumont. "They want to work directly with senior people without layers and associated costs – and the momentum we're seeing proves the appetite for a leaner, smarter model."

For a long time, the industry mantra was: "No one ever got fired for hiring <big agency name>."

But in 2026, the smartest move might be asking: is there a better way? 🧐



Fran Bellingham
Founder,
Virtual
Marketers





Almost anything, everywhere, all the time
 Unscrollable, unmissable. Uber Eats' takeover of the Wellington Station Underpass via oOh!media was impossible to ignore.

76

From digital programmatic to good ole static, out of home is (still) so hot right now

OOH ... what's new?

Out of home advertising has more than doubled its revenue in 10 years. Industry players say new measurement tools and tech will keep momentum rolling.

Words:
Niko Kloeten

The numbers don't lie: outside is where it's at. Out of home association OOHMAA show the industry had record third quarter revenue of \$57.4 million in 2025, dwarfing the \$26 million in the same quarter back in 2016.

And the industry is gearing up for further growth following the recent launch of knOOH. It's the first unified audience measurement system for out of home – replacing a previous method, Calibre.

Kath Mitchell, CEO of OOHMAA and knOOH, says knOOH is on another level to Calibre. The new system uses standardised and unified reach and frequency data from a variety of sources, applying it to individual sites.

knOOH adjusts for foot or vehicle traffic at different times of the day and even incorporates 'viewing corridors'. These are regularly updated to account for new buildings.

"There's one site on Hobson Street in Auckland CBD that's seen from a lot of places. But if there's a building in front of it, it will block it," Mitchell says.

"So the system says you are not getting an impression. And then if you continue on your path, you pop back into range."

Mitchell says knOOH's standardised data will make it more straightforward for out of home media owners to trade. Meanwhile, having the same team run knOOH and OOHMAA makes it easier to put out a unified industry message.

"We'll use data out of knOOH to drive a little bit of our storytelling about what we do, but we'll also use that combination to champion and advocate for out of home. We take on that role so that the out of home companies can focus on promoting their own brands."

Showing confidence

Lumo Digital Outdoor co-founder and CEO Phil Clemas says they are confident in the future of out of home in New Zealand, as shown by two recent moves: their management buyout of other shareholders, and their acquisition of regional digital billboard operator Globox.

Clemas says out of home currently accounts for 6-7% of New Zealand's overall ad spend, and the

industry aims grow that share to 10-12% over the next three or four years.

"That's significant for us, but to help achieve that, we've agreed that we needed a unified audience measurement system, which is knOOH," he says.

To get there, Clemas says the out of home industry needs to get more creative and make ads work better for clients.

He cites an example from February 2025, where Lumo teamed up with Dulux NZ, MBM and Pitchblack. Together they captured the hues of Aotearoa's skies and landscapes in real time, as part of the Dulux Colours of New Zealand campaign. Cameras on Lumo billboards recorded live footage of the scenery, which was transferred to the digital displays. These were overlaid with Dulux swatches that updated every two minutes to match. ▶



Left: The 'Colours of New Zealand' campaign from Dulux used Lumo's digital billboards to showcase the ever-changing sky and land.



Purple people greeters

MediaWorks split off its out of home business in October, after winning the Auckland Transport contract. Now rebranded as QMS NZ, it covered AT's network with Spark and PHD's 'It's better with Spark' campaign, which included station takeovers and purple double-decker buses.



Kelly Harvey
Head of NZ,
oOh!media

Although tech like this allows better contextual targeting, Clemas says out of home media buyers shouldn't forget the strengths of the medium.

"Out of home is a broadcast medium and is primarily a brand opportunity. There's been, in my view, too much performance marketing investment in the last couple of years. Marketers need to consider adjusting their media strategy and invest more in their brands or risk losing market share.

"We're 'one to many', we're very good at building fast reach and frequency and now we have a way of measuring it.

"We certainly think we can compete head to head with other mainstream media, particularly TV. There's an opportunity for out of home to attract that media spend, otherwise it will likely go overseas to Meta and YouTube and the sector risks losing it forever."

Industry working together

Kelly Harvey, head of NZ, oOh!media, says launching knOOH was a major highlight of the past year.

"After more than five years in the making, it's delivering greater trust, consistency and transparency in how OOH is planned and measured," she says.

Harvey says the past year saw oOh!media expand its digital out of home footprint across new regions of Aotearoa, unlocking fresh audiences and driving growth for advertisers nationwide.

"Looking to 2026, we're focused on smarter, data-led planning and stronger accountability – helping advertisers cut through a fragmented media landscape with campaigns that deliver real results.

"With improved audience measurement and closer industry alignment, we expect OOH planning

to shift back to the metrics that matter: reaching the right people, in the right places, at the right moments. Expect to see more creative, data-informed, and unmissable OOH campaigns lighting up Aotearoa."

Go Media director Mike Gray agrees the new measurement system – which his company is a shareholder in – was a major milestone.

"The OOH industry is working together to grow the category. Go Media now has 135 sites nationally, and with unified measurement we can confirm the best reach in nearly every market south of Hamilton," he says.

"Our priority for 2026 is to be the most agile and fast-moving OOH partner – expanding in Auckland with 50 new sites while growing our share of the category. We'll keep scaling quickly and delivering dynamic, data-driven solutions that put our clients ahead in every market."

Gray says the rise of programmatic DOOH is transforming the way brands buy – from targeted campaigns to hour-long takeovers and flexible share-of-time deals.

"As advertisers embrace data-driven, real-time buying, we're moving from selling screens to selling moments of influence.

"OOH is now one of the most transparent media channels – live audience data and shared governance give advertisers real confidence." ▶



Charging to the top

Jolt is New Zealand's fastest-growing OOH operator, redefining street furniture through its public EV charging and digital network.

"We're sparking change by reducing urban carbon emissions and enabling brands to connect with audiences through purpose-driven, data-led media," says Chris Monaghan, Jolt country manager – New Zealand

Jolt launched Spark Intelligence, its audience-led planning platform in late 2024. AI-driven capabilities to optimise campaign delivery were added in 2025. Together with in-app advertising, it connects brands directly with EV drivers during 30-minute charge times.

"Brands are increasingly looking to partners who contribute to cities and communities, not just occupy public space," says Monaghan.

"Jolt sits at the intersection of clean energy, technology and digital media – combining EV charging infrastructure with impactful advertising to create genuine community value.

"At the same time, AI and real-time optimisation are transforming how we plan and deliver campaigns.

"Through Spark Intelligence, Jolt uses AI to track audience movement patterns and minimise impression wastage, bringing OOH targeting and performance closer to digital standards."



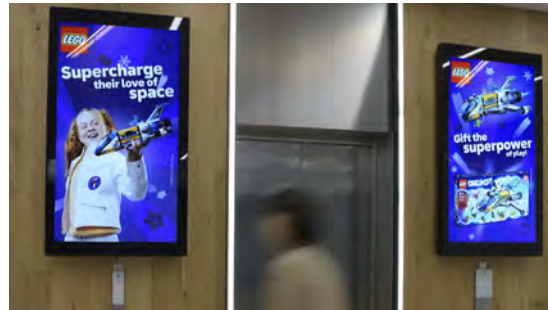
Chris Monaghan
Country manager –
New Zealand, Jolt

Top: Jolt connects brands with EV drivers at its charging stations.

“We’re moving from selling screens to selling moments of influence.”



Clockwise from above: Perion showed off DOOH on a bus tour, Vistar Media picked up awards for work with Pak'nSave, retail spaces are a growth area for VMO.



Sandra Scott
New Zealand sales and partnerships director, Vistar Media

Hybrid models

Vistar Media is a key player in programmatic. In 2025, its work with Pak'nSave, PHD and FCB was recognised at the YouTube NZ Marketing Awards, and its Department of Corrections campaign with Stanley St shortlisted at the IAB Digital Advertising Awards. It also welcomed new media owner partners on board, including Bishopp, Shout and Giggle.

Sandra Scott, Vistar's New Zealand sales and partnerships director, says out of home is evolving fast, with several key trends reshaping the landscape.

"Retail media continues to surge, with digital screens becoming a powerful extension of the shopper journey and offering brands new ways to connect closer to the point of purchase.

"At the same time, we're seeing programmatic DOOH growth across new environments – from health and hospitality locations to transport hubs and lifestyle spaces – expanding where DOOH can play."

Scott says hybrid buying models – blending direct and programmatic – are becoming the new standard, allowing advertisers to combine the scale and impact of traditional OOH with the precision and flexibility of programmatic.

"For Vistar, this shift reinforces our role as the connective layer between the two worlds, helping buyers and media owners activate truly integrated campaigns. Meanwhile, AI is transforming how those campaigns are planned and optimised, accelerating insight generation and creative decision-making."

Fellow programmatic specialists Perion took a bus load of agency and client partners on their first DOOH site tour in Auckland earlier this year.

Olivia Hay, marketing manager, ANZ for Perion, says AI is helping convert DOOH from traditional

media buying and static creative to a more digital-style, automated, responsive channel.

"While innovation from AI and programmatic is driving significant growth in the channel, it is also helping to facilitate more dynamic and refined targeting and measurement in DOOH. For Perion, this means expanding our AI-driven creative optimisation and analytics capabilities to deliver smarter, real-time campaign performance across DOOH inventory."

Hay also sees a "bright future" with end-to-end solutions that power more intelligent ad serving for DOOH beyond the loop.

"For Perion, this opens the door to creating holistic solutions that unify DOOH with other digital channels, enhancing efficiency and cross-channel intelligence."

Reaching more shoppers

Paul Butler, managing director of VMO, says 2025 has been a big year for the outdoor sector across New Zealand, with a strong industry-wide focus on measurement and data-led accountability.

"Both in-centre retail environments and retail media have continued to experience growth reinforcing strong confidence in the channel, further strengthening the position of our market leading network across both New Zealand and Australia."

Butler says programmatic buying is still picking up momentum and over the past year VMO has recorded double-digit growth across shopping centres and office towers. It now represents about 30% of retail locations nationwide.

"As New Zealand's exclusive provider of office media, we will continue to develop this channel." ☛



Tom Horton
Marketing manager, Phantom Billstickers

Taking it to the streets

While more than 80% of out of home assets in New Zealand are now digital, there is still a place for good old-fashioned posters and street art, and Phantom Billstickers is excited for what the future holds in this space.

"As digital gets noisier, brands are coming back to the real world, to something people can touch, photograph and share," says Phantom Billstickers marketing manager Tom Horton.

"Creativity is driving results again. The campaigns that connect – that make people smile, think or pull out their phone – are the ones that cut through. People want colour, craft and human connection.

"And the local focus is stronger than ever."

Brands want to "show up in real neighbourhoods, not just in feeds", Horton says.

"That's our home turf: on the streets, in the mix and part of the culture. Lastly, and maybe most importantly, we're seeing a rise in sustainable thinking, which is something we really appreciate."

Horton says in 2026 Phantom will keep building on what makes it unique: more special builds, more creative collaborations and more campaigns that bring people to a stop.

"We're seeing a surge in hand-painted work, and we're ready for it. Our artist network operates at a global standard, and we're committed to pushing the craft even further," he says.

"Of course we'll keep deepening our roots in the creative community, giving space to artists and musicians and keeping the streets a platform for local voices.

"We'll also keep strengthening relationships with our clients.

"Our goal is simple: make it easy and effective to run a campaign with Phantom. When brands win on the street, we all do."

“As digital gets noisier, brands are coming back to the real world.”

Above right: BNZ's Diwali poster campaign lights up at night.

Right: A special build for ASB with 'balloons' that look floaty and fun, yet can withstand outdoor conditions.



The original social network

How Phantom Billstickers grew from an underground poster outfit to a national platform for culture, creativity and connection.



in association with Phantom Billstickers

Before there were feeds, there were walls. Before algorithms, there was the street. Before “content” became a marketing term, it was a poster – printed by hand, pasted by night, seen by everyone.

That’s where Phantom Billstickers began. Not in a boardroom. Not in a spreadsheet. On the street. Among the bands, poets, artists and events that gave New Zealand its heartbeat.

Forty-odd years later, Phantom’s still at it, connecting people through paper, place and presence. Only now, the scale has changed. The spirit hasn’t.

Born in the underground

Phantom’s story starts long before “out of home” meant media plans and metrics. It started with an urge to get ideas into the world.

In the early days, that meant stapling gig posters to power poles, brushing paste on walls and doing it all again next week. It was DIY culture at its purest – the same drive that powered indie record labels, zines and art collectives.

Posters were how communities spoke to each other. They spread news, built scenes and made the invisible visible. They were democratic – the street belonged to everyone.

Phantom grew up inside that world. The people who built it weren’t media operators, they

were believers. They saw posters as more than promotion. They were participating.

That belief still runs through the company today.

From paste to platform

What began as local passion has become a national platform. Phantom’s network now stretches the length of Aotearoa, with posters in every major centre and most small towns in between.

The approach hasn’t changed much. Walls are still chosen for their character. Posters are still pasted by hand. Every frame is still cared for by humans.

What’s changed is how the work fits into the modern marketing mix. The same walls that once promoted punk gigs now carry national campaigns for some of the country’s biggest brands.

It’s a rare kind of evolution – staying true to the craft while scaling it for today’s creative and commercial worlds.

“We were doing content distribution before it had a name,” says Tom Horton, marketing manager at Phantom. “Now we just call it what it always was – getting ideas into public space and seeing what happens next.”

The street as a stage

Phantom’s walls have always carried a mix of content, music, theatre, art, events, activism and

brand campaigns all layered together. It’s what gives the streets their texture.

To walk through any major city is to see a living feed, constantly changing, overlapping and evolving. There’s no algorithm, no sponsorship model, no swipe to skip. Just what’s there, right in front of you.

That authenticity is exactly what draws brands back to the street. In an era of digital overload, there’s something grounding about being seen in the real world.

“People aren’t just looking for reach,” says Horton. “They’re looking for relevance. You earn that by showing up in culture, not just online.”

For some, that means a beautifully designed poster for a local theatre season. For others, it’s a national roll-out that takes over multiple sites at once.

Every campaign, whether grassroots or global, shares the same canvas. That’s what makes it feel human.

Where art meets commerce

Phantom’s work sits at the intersection of creativity and commerce, where the energy of art collides with the ambition of brands.

Phantom’s Custom Shop department brings that to life through large-scale special builds and creative installations that



blur the line between media and street art. These projects turn city walls into experiences, whether it’s 3D neon beams, giant hand painted murals, or something no one’s ever seen before.

At the same time, Phantom remains a constant presence for the country’s creative community. From poetry posters to music launches and arts festivals, the company continues to make space for culture.

It’s that blend, commercial, cultural and communal that makes Phantom unique. The streets they care for aren’t sterile ad environments – they’re living galleries that reflect the country’s creative pulse.

Still made by hand

For all the national scale and brand partnerships, Phantom is still a human company. Every poster, every frame, every wall involves real people and real craft.

There’s something satisfying about that. The buckets. The brushes. The quiet discipline of getting a job done right, rain or shine. In a media world obsessed with automation, that kind of hands-on approach feels radical.

“Our algorithm is a ladder and a brush,” say the team. “And our data is the number of heads that turn.”

It’s old-school, but it works. Because in the end, marketing still comes down to one simple idea: attention. And nothing grabs it like something real, right in front of you.

A platform built on presence

Phantom isn’t nostalgic about the past. The company’s focus is on what’s next: how to keep public space alive and full of ideas.

That means new creative formats, deeper partnerships and finding ways to make real-world media even more powerful in a digital-first landscape.



The goal isn’t to compete with online channels, it’s to complement them. A poster might spark a scroll, a photo, a share – but it begins in the physical world.

“The streets still matter,” says Phantom’s leadership. “They always have. The mediums will change, but people will always respond to what feels real.”

Long live the wall

Phantom Billstickers has been part of New Zealand’s creative life for more than four decades. The company’s history is written on walls across the country – from indie gigs and poetry launches to global brand campaigns.

Through it all, the idea remains the same: give ideas a public life.

Because even in a world of infinite screens, the street is still where culture lives. Raw, public and alive. 📍

phantombillstickers.com

Top: A hand-painted mural acts as a multiplier for the poster campaign at street level.

Above left: Every frame is hand pasted.

Above left: Phantom CEO Robin McDonnell snapped on a poster run back in the day.

Go hard or go home: Go Media's origin story

Mike Gray is celebrating 30 years in outdoor advertising. The Go Media co-owner talks through the past three decades and why he believes in the power of giving back.

Mike Gray's vision is to build the largest, New Zealand-owned outdoor advertising company. "It's never been done before," he says. "It's always been foreign-owned companies that have controlled our industry."

He's walking the talk. In May 2023, Go Media drew a big line in the sand, making the naming rights deal with Mt Smart Stadium in Tāmaki Makaurau.

"I had a bit of trouble convincing our board and it was pretty audacious," says Gray. "Banks, financial institutions and insurance companies, that's who take naming rights deals."

Not an outdoor advertising SME, he laughs.

"I wanted to change the perception that we were small, so we negotiated the deal. It has been the most incredible thing for our brand."

Gray has been sponsoring sports, arts, music, culture for as long as he has been in advertising. But the stadium deal and subsequently signing on as a principal partner of Auckland FC's debut season has helped the public see that too.

"You get the power of association, you can be part of magical moments of a team when they lift the trophy, hospitality, hosting rights. It's all these intangible benefits, but ultimately you are part of

the community and you can help contribute and you can help elevate," says Gray.

A story 30 years in the making

It's been three decades since Gray first set foot in the advertising world – he has one of the longest running tenures in Aotearoa.

"Other than Duncan [Harris] from Ad-vantage, no one's been going longer than us."

But Gray didn't start out in advertising. He used to be a standup comedian, with the stage name Late Night Mike in the early 1990s.

"While I was touring, I noticed billboards were starting to appear in Auckland," says Gray. "I'd see a wall and think, 'Oh, you could put one there.'"

"A month later, a billboard would suddenly appear and I realised I had an eye for it."

It was 1993, and Gray had just spotted "an amazing billboard site" on Auckland's Fanshawe Street. He

called the landlord, but wasn't taken seriously. Gray retorted that he'd pay \$50,000 a year. The landlord asked him to put it in writing and send a lease.

"I realised in that moment that I'd overturned him," says Gray.

While he never acted on that opportunity, it got the wheels in his mind turning – especially when, six months later, someone else put a billboard on that site.

"I learned that if you don't take action when you have an idea, someone else will."

A company telling brand stories

That was the beginning. And more than 20 years later, his vision became Go Media, a locally owned outdoor advertising company that aims to help brands tell their stories.

Gray continued touring and noticed there were fewer billboards the further south he went. Originally from Ōtautahi Christchurch, he started there.

He thought it would be straightforward: he'd written a business plan and received a \$5,000 government grant.

It didn't quite go that way. Gray met with Christchurch City Council planner Barbara August, who told him: "Don't waste your money, son. You'll never get a billboard approved in this city."

Gray was undeterred. Eventually, August relented, telling him if he could find an industrial zone that couldn't be seen from the road, she'd consider it.

Not long later, he found his spot: a massive wall everyone saw as they left a movie theatre.

August laughed when he returned. But she approved his application. So Gray built three billboards and sold them all.

As Gray picked up sites, he encountered more and more hoops to jump through. "I was constantly battling councils. It wasn't for the faint-hearted."

For 10 years, he focused on building his business, then called Phantom Outdoor in Christchurch and a few sites around the South Island with his wife, Andrea Rongonui.

Phantom friends

Theirs was a sister business to Jim Wilson's Phantom Billstickers – the latter had put up posters for Gray in his comedian days. Gray even worked as a billsticker for a while.

"Between Jim and I, we literally changed the face of outdoor advertising in New Zealand. We made the most instrumental changes."

But they parted ways: "Jim's priority was his poster business and I really wanted to focus on large format. So we rebranded as Waho, which is the Māori word for outdoors."

In 2000, Gray won EY Young Entrepreneur of the Year for Phantom Outdoor. Three years later, Waho was named Canterbury Small Business of the Year.

The next afternoon, Gray and Rongonui sold Waho. It was 10 years to the day since they started. ▶

Below: Andrea Rongonui and Mike Gray at the ribbon-cutting ceremony for Go Media Stadium.



“I wanted to change the perception that we were small, so we negotiated the deal.”

New ventures

But Gray didn't step away for long. He set up a new media buying company, Aidemedia, which was ticking along. After the global financial crisis hit in 2008, he started developing billboard sites again.

Then came the 2010 and 2011 Christchurch earthquakes – destroying Gray's family home and nearly all of his billboard sites in the CBD.

"I didn't know for six months whether I had a business left or not. You couldn't get in [to the CBD]. I tried one day, only to be escorted out by the army. So I would see on the TV news a building had come down and go, 'Oh, that site's gone.'"

Gray and Rongonui relocated to Waiheke Island "temporarily" – they've never left.

Fast forward a couple of years to a 45-minute coffee meeting. A merger deal was struck between Gray, Christchurch company Big Picture (since bought out) and Bacbou Billboards, run by current business partner Dean Shaw in the lower North Island.

On September 1, 2014, Go Media was unveiled in the merger announcement. They built a successful static billboard company, then the tide turned: "Suddenly people want digital. So off you have to go again."

All the while, Go Media was getting bigger. In 2018, they won the Metlink Greater Wellington contract – the first time it was awarded to a Kiwi company. Winning – then retaining – the five-year contract was a feather in the cap.

"It was huge for us to win it. It proved we don't have to give our major contracts to the foreign-owned corporates."

Almost business as usual

When Covid hit, Gray says Go Media shouldn't have survived, but good relationships with landlords let them negotiate generous terms to continue trading.

At that point, Go Media were the biggest in every market south of Kirikiriroa Hamilton, but still small

in Tāmaki Makaurau as they had waited for the digital revolution. So when everywhere except Auckland came out of lockdown, it was almost business as usual – Go Media operate offices in Hamilton, Wellington and Christchurch.

Still with an eye to growth, they were planning a mass digital expansion, with their sights set on Tāmaki. LED screens were going cheap due to Covid, so Go Media doubled down and purchased "several million dollars' worth of screens at half price".

The screens started arriving just as Auckland went to Covid alert level 3, so they got to work – building 88 digital billboards in 18 months. Go Media now has 37 digital screens in Auckland and the largest nationwide reach for their roadside digital billboard network.

Community support pays off

While digital expansion has been significant, Gray is always looking to acquire sites. And Go Media's community involvement has helped that mission.

"We've picked up a lot of really good sites from competitors, especially post the lockdowns. We had landlords approach us. A lot of them were like, 'We see you sponsor the Hurricanes, the Pulse. You seem to back the community. We want to come with you.'"

Gray sees giving back as an important part of Go Media's wider brand storytelling work.

"Being digital, you always have some unsold space, so there's capacity. I'd rather use that space to help the arts or help someone fundraise or help charities or sports – because what we do is we help storytell for brands.

"What we do gives meaning. We are more than just a media business and we are more than profit. If you could choose to be that or not, I'd choose to be that every day of the week."

gomedia.co.nz

Below, from left: Mike Gray, Auckland FC manager Steve Corica and Auckland FC CEO Nick Becker with the A-League Premier Plate.

Below right: A young fan at the Go Media Stadium in 2023.

“We help storytell for brands. What we do gives meaning.”



How to Win on LinkedIn

LinkedIn hasn't stopped working. It's just stopped working for people using it like it's still 2022, says LinkedIn and social selling specialist Kate Nankivell.

LinkedIn has become more competitive. The volume of content has exploded and quality has shot up. Yet only roughly 1% of users share content regularly on the platform.

People know – in the world of sales and marketing – that LinkedIn is important. But people can feel nervous about posting and there are a lot of lurkers.

We know a small percentage turn up and post regularly. Some got into LinkedIn during Covid and found it was an awesome place to explore and create business success. But the LinkedIn algorithm has changed significantly in the past 18 months, affecting reach. You could be creating the same fantastic content but it's not landing like it used to.

What works on LinkedIn now?

Using a range of strategies was important back in 2013 when I started providing a LinkedIn training service and it's still important now.

Focus on growing your network, engaging with people who comment on your posts, nurturing connections and incorporating content. You need all of that together.

Think of it not as broadcast – LinkedIn's not a radio, it's more like a telephone. And people need to know who they're talking to. Personal profiles should carry the lead generation load, because people engage with individuals more than brands. Your company page can support your brand growth. And your staff can be brand ambassadors – that's powerful.

Can LinkedIn bring me work?

People always want the shortest route to bringing new business and they hear: "LinkedIn is awesome." So they sign up and wonder why nothing's happening.

First of all, you need a well-optimised profile. It needs to be well articulated for your ideal clients. Every interaction on the platform is an opportunity

What can I do today?

- Revamp your headline so it communicates what you do and who you help.
- Make sure your banner shows the problems you solve for your ideal clients. Why not include a customer testimonial?
- Tell people above the line on your LinkedIn profile what you do.
- Engage with people – peers, clients or prospects – in the comments and say something more worthwhile than "great post". Commenting enhances reach.
- Use a hook at the start of a post and always finish with a call to action.
- The algorithm loves video right now. Start creating now and add to your skillset. Don't let perfection stop you from taking action.

for someone to check you out – and if your profile doesn't create a clear understanding of who you serve and how you help, you can miss out on opportunities.

Establish your authority. This creates trust within your niche. Showcase your expertise and share points of view. It warms up connections to create warm leads.

No pitch slaps. You accept an invitation to connect and immediately get a reply that says: "Buy my stuff." That's a pitch slap – it's the opposite of what you should do.

It's not a numbers game. Some people think: "I need to grow my network. So I've invited 1000 people to connect this month." But you're not doing a quality job of nurturing connections if you go high numbers. It cheapens the potential relationship.

Connect with people in a non-salesy way. Focus on the value you offer and build rapport. Because all of us need to win the right to have the business conversation.



Ways to be less shy

As a student, David Farrier swapped med school for journalism. Turns out he traded organ dissection for eviscerating the powers that be.

Words: Zahra Shahtahmasebi

Not everyone likes what journalist David Farrier has to say. Perhaps not surprising, given he writes about everything from Christianity and megachurches to fascism and ICE protests.

He faced legal threats while making his first documentary, *Tickled*, and had a temporary protection order in *Mister Organ*. In June, he challenged RNZ over misgendering and deadnaming Alex, a young trans man who starved to death in 2023.

But, having been “very online” since the age of 17, he’s built a thick skin: “I got very used to internet culture and to trolls very early on. That set me up to be pretty stoic about the crazy shit that can head in my direction. I just make sure I get out and touch grass as much as I can.”

He never expected to become a journalist. He went to Auckland University aiming to study medicine. Though he quickly realised it wasn’t for him.

“I wasn’t smart enough, I wasn’t great at dissecting rats and organs.”

It was “rabid and stressful”. “People would tear pages out of the short-term loan books in the medical school library.”

In that first year, he found comfort writing for student magazine *Craccum* and doing news at campus radio station 95bFM.

“I’d always been intrigued by the likes of Louis Theroux, who I was deep into at the time,” says Farrier.

Strangely enough, Theroux and Farrier even look alike (media in Aotearoa had a field day when they met in Auckland for the first time in 2020).

His career path is also similar to that of the British documentary maker.

But, he says: “Journalism was this thing I knew about, but never thought I would work in.”

Mostly because he was a “super nerdy shy kid” who was homeschooled before attending a private Christian high school in Tauranga.

Moving to the big smoke for uni was a shock to the system: “Having all these different opinions and ideas around me. And for some reason, I just gravitated towards wanting to write. That forced me to meet people and find ways to be less shy.”

It sounds cheesy, he says, but seeing broadcasters John Campbell and Carol Hirschfeld in Albert Park one day in that stressful first year sealed the deal.

“I was like, f...! I should try this journalism thing. And so I went across the road to AUT and enquired about their journalism programme.”

Lived experience

He “pretty much” failed the radio and TV portions of his degree, but a volunteering gig with TV3 gave him “lived experience” in the newsroom.

“Man, without TV3, I wouldn’t be doing anything that I’m doing now,” says Farrier. “That was everything to me.”

He went from autocue operator to working on the news desk, then “the best job I will ever have in my life” – arts and entertainment reporter on late night news show *Nightline*.

“I got to meet a bunch of my heroes doing that job. But then it was also getting into the things I’m more interested in now... little subcultures and off-the-grid stories,” he says.

In 2014, he made *Tickled*, a documentary on competitive endurance tickling and its legal and ethical issues. There were legal challenges, but it did “relatively well for a weird niche documentary”.

“That’s when I decided to go freelance and see what else I could make.”

In the years that followed, he wrote for *The Spinoff* and produced two more documentaries, *Dark Tourist* and *Mister Organ*.

Then, in 2020, a chat with his friend Hamish McKenzie led Farrier to Substack, the writing platform McKenzie co-founded.

“I suddenly had a place where I could do the kinds of investigative writing and weird musings and rabbit holes that I like doing.”

He called it Webworm. “And there was an audience for it. It was a guilt-free way of writing in a way where my main stuff wasn’t behind a paywall, but if people had money they could pay for it.”

Substack was really good, he says. Until it wasn’t.

In November 2023 and January 2024, *The Atlantic* published articles about Substack’s “Nazi problem”: the platform’s hands-off content moderation policies were allowing white nationalists to air their message.

This didn’t sit well – and many of his readers were being pushed some “pretty dicey content”.

Not taking over the world

In August 2025, Farrier moved to Ghost, which has “a much more solid approach to moderation”.

It’s been a scary yet empowering transition. “But I have a greater piece of mind to be much more independent,” says Farrier.

Besides, he doesn’t want Webworm to take over the world – he feels “super lucky that anyone reads it”.

He’s grateful for his community – even when they disagree, comments are polite and informed.

He also runs a podcast called the Flightless Bird, which he started in 2022. In it, he observes American culture, which he’s been immersed in after getting stuck there during Covid-19 lockdowns.

One thing he loves about being a journalist is hopping into someone else’s world.

“I get to have these snapshots of people’s lives and learn about how different everyone is.”

But it’s tough out there: “Journalism at the moment is in a bleak, bleak, bleak place. When I was studying at AUT, I had no idea I picked such a terrifying career path.”

But, he believes there’s always a need for journalists: to distil complex information, to get to the root of things, to kick at the powers that be.

“It is still really important. So as long as that exists, I think we’ve got a fighting chance.”

“I get to have these snapshots of people’s lives.”

David Farrier’s films have 10 awards nominations – *Mister Organ* won at the Philadelphia Film Festival

Opposite: David Farrier now lives in the US, where he got stuck during Covid.

Surface value

Romana Pawar sets YouTube's global strategy for connected TV monetisation and advertiser experiences. She sat down with *NZ Marketing* to talk about why Kiwis love watching on the living room telly – and why it works for advertisers.

Words:
Penny Murray

Connected TV is YouTube's fastest growing screen – or "surface" as YouTube's senior director, product management, Romana Pawar calls it. She's worked with streaming services since the early 2000s, and was instrumental in the evolution of digital advertising even before joining Google in 2013.

"I was so happy to finally get to YouTube," she says. "I was like, OK, I think this is where streaming will be defined in the future."

She's seen the pivot from desktop to mobile: "And then consumers decided – with the pandemic – that the TV is the better screen. Another set of opportunities and challenges."

"We work through them, with laser focus on how can we provide the best viewer experience across all of these surfaces. And the best creator experience, because

ultimately creators are the heart of YouTube. Finally, our mission is also to help advertisers connect with these audiences," she says.

"TV is the fastest growing YouTube surface in New Zealand for five years in a row. You have about two million viewers watching TV screens. And over one million hours of YouTube content is watched on the big screen daily in New Zealand."

"I'm watching this very closely – I'm pretty sure it's following the trend we've seen in markets like Japan, Taiwan and the US."

Easy for everyone

Of course, households need to have the right kit to watch connected TV. Is the uptake in Aotearoa down to people updating their sets, or changing viewing habits? A bit of both, says Pawar.

"There is a certain ease of watching content in your living room – that big screen, the sound."

Crucially, accessing CTV is easy now – even Pawar's 91-year-old neighbour became a fan.

"I showed her how easy it was to watch YouTube on TV. She was like, 'Wow, I have discovered a whole new world.'"

"Four or five years ago, people didn't know how to consume YouTube in their living room. And what they're finding is, on YouTube, there is something for everyone to watch."

"TV has become very personal, very tailored. I like to say it's personal prime time."

Delightful experiences

That prime time content can blur the line between entertainment and sales. Pawar believes

advertising experiences should be delightful. How do brands do that?

"An ad does three things. It entertains you. Or it helps you find something. And the third thing: ads can also be a source of knowledge. Of late, I have discovered so many smaller brands from YouTube. That discovery process for smaller brands is very important."

While the fundamentals remain the same, Pawar says "advertising is changing in multiple ways" when it comes to content generation.

"Creators or influencers are, in my opinion, the content studios of the world. They carry a lot of credibility, a lot of authenticity, and people trust them."

"If I see a campaign for a cosmetic brand done by a creator I've been following – because that creator may be a similar age group or has the same kind of skin as me – I'm more likely to lean in to that," says Pawar.

"We have done studies on this: when a creator is sharing the details on the product, the

purchase intent and the sales associated with it are much higher."

Buddies boost engagement

You know what else makes viewers lean in? Other people.

"We have seen that when you watch an advertisement with a co-viewer, you are actually leaning in to it more," says Pawar.

Research from Omnicom Media Group in 2025 found those who co-view are more receptive to advertising than those who watch alone – 66% of large families said they were more likely to consider buying a product if they saw its ad on video streaming platforms.

"Think about it: you see an ad for a BMW car – if you are seeing it with someone else in your family, it does spark a conversation."

What's coming next?

Now people routinely watch YouTube on the biggest screen in the house, the platform is thinking about what happens next.

"I think ads are going to get far more interesting," says Pawar.

"Ads will be more interactive. And we at YouTube are leaning in to that quite a bit. We want to help viewers connect their mobile screens to their TV screens."

Because one of the hardest things when you are watching TV is you can't find your remote – but you always know where your phone is.

"What happens with the second screen in the room is going to be a very important element."

Content creators will become even more integral to advertising. "Over time, this line between what is content and what is ads is going to really blur. It's going to be all about what you as a consumer want to learn. That is the world we are preparing for."

It's already starting to happen. Watching shorts – rather than shows – on TV is a growing trend, says Pawar.

"I wouldn't have said shorts on TV would be such a hot way of consuming content, but it is. And once you try it as a consumer, you completely understand why." 📺

Below: Romana Pawar, senior director, product management at YouTube, says she's watching connected TV trends in Aotearoa closely.

Below and right: YouTube repurposed Kiwibank content into shorter clips that really resonated.

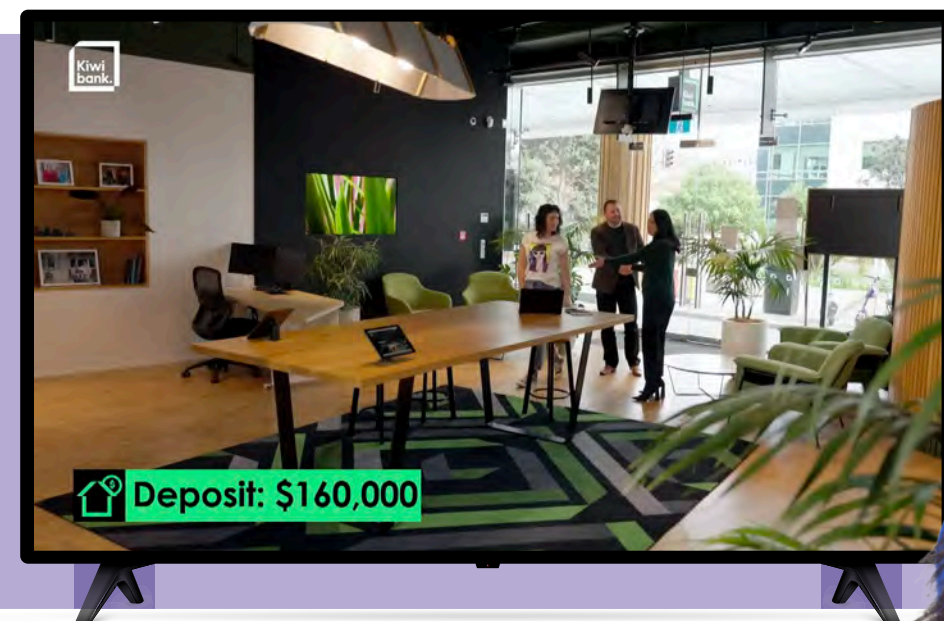


Kiwibank

YouTube recently repurposed Kiwibank's existing content for connected TV, achieving impressive completion rates well above benchmark.

"Kiwibank had 184 minutes of creative that were built for linear TV – 20+ minute long episodes that were not getting the performance they were expecting. So they came to us," says Pawar.

"We helped them create an ecosystem of assets from six second bumpers to 10-minute ads, fit-for-purpose with YouTube at the core. One 30-second ad was a huge success. They saw a 59% view-through rate on that ad because it really resonated on YouTube."



Renovation innovation

Season two of social-first reality DIY show NZRealReveals hit more than 10 million views by mid-season. Is it branded content... or broadcast? Perhaps a bit of both.

Words:
Jessica Weale

If season one of NZRenoTok felt like a surprise hit, its season two evolution into NZRealReveals proves it wasn't a fluke. Starting as a creator-led reno experiment on TikTok, the social-first series is now a multi-platform content ecosystem backed by some of the country's biggest brands.

It's also a great case study in not only reaching new demographics, but how to build a show for the way audiences are actually consuming media – rather than the way we wish they would.

When founder Brooke Howard Smith talks about the idea behind it, the logic is simple. After years in television, he started to notice that independent creators were outpacing traditional production.

"I watched independent creators improve the content they were making. So much so that, by 2024, I really believed we could create a show that harnessed their skills, and did away with the need for a big crew," says Howard Smith.

"Our creators do almost everything. They reply to each brand's brief, they pitch the content, shoot it, edit it and share it with their audience. We have no directors, cameras, soundies or even a broadcaster. We don't need any of them any more."

The creator-first model shaped the heart of season one. Sure, the show wasn't glossy, but it was real. It plugged right into the way that younger viewers already experience content.

Howard Smith says authenticity wasn't just a creative choice, it was the whole value proposition. "This creator-first, authentic approach fits the way millennials and Gen Z engage with DIY content on TikTok and social media," he says.

Sponsors as partners, not interruptions

The team built key brand partners into the DNA of the series. Mitre 10 and Resene were natural fits

from day dot, with plenty of history in social-led content. "Mitre 10's team has likely made more content for social than any other brand, so they brought a lot of IP," says Howard Smith. "Resene has just as much experience but they also have an amazing media network that helped provide reach."

Season two sponsors included Stanley, Black & Decker, Yates, Noel Leeming and returning charity partner the Kindness Collective. And the pitch was simple: reach under-50s with fresh, creator-driven content that blends naturally into the narrative.

"We were lucky enough to land a very cool group of adventurous brands keen to bring new content to under-50s," says Howard Smith.

A bigger stage for small screens

Season two's launch as NZRealReveals brought the biggest shift yet, expanding from TikTok and Instagram to YouTube. Moving the series to longform wasn't the goal, it was about widening reach while keeping the experience familiar.

"TikTok remains core, but we expanded to YouTube and more of Instagram, to broaden reach. Since YouTube Shorts is similar to TikTok, the format stayed authentic, fast paced and creator driven."

"What we also learnt is that the content is evergreen. So people can still start watching any time."

The recent season also featured weekly live shows on Wednesday nights, streaming simultaneously on TikTok and YouTube. This blended model brought a touch of 'event TV' back into a social-first world.

The shift was a natural step. "With NZRealReveals, we're taking that energy and amplifying it across YouTube, TikTok and Instagram. And developing a live format that will allow NZ families to watch NZRealReveals from their living room TV, while voting on TikTok," he says.

This clever approach links passive watching with real-time participation. You can sit with family and friends and still join the conversation on socials.

From a marketing perspective, this ability to merge linear viewing with instant engagement is a dream scenario.

Real people, real homes, real impact

Creator-led storytelling was there in season one, but season two really tipped the authenticity scales. Viewers followed Ash Davis and her father-in-law Lou Davis, Black Ferns champion Kelsey Teneti and her partner Tai, dynamic reno duo NZDIY's Carla and TJ, and Micah and his mum, DIY flipper Blondie, as they tackle projects in their homes.

No script. No polished set ups. Just real moments, wins... and challenges. According to Howard Smith, it's exactly what viewers want.

"The show has no script and we encourage the creators to plan, shoot and edit in their own style," he says. "They can't help but be authentic. That's why we think it's gone so well on TikTok and Instagram where Gen Z and millennials value realness."

That authenticity shows, and the numbers don't lie, with views hitting around 10 million by midway through the season. The series also pulled in viewers beyond the usual DIY crowd.

"This season has real intergenerational appeal," Howard Smith says.

"The series has some wonderful involvement with mums, dads and grandparents helping."

Weave in the Kindness Collective partnership, where the teams built bespoke playhouses for local Kōhanga Reo, and you've got a series that's moved beyond content into community impact.

The blueprint behind the buzz

NZRealReveals proves that the next era of content isn't sitting in one box. And it doesn't have to sit in polished productions or heavy-handed integrations. It can lie in these connected ecosystems, nimble creative cycles, cross-platform thinking and trusting creators to do what they do best.

Season one generated more than 24 million views and 428 pieces of original content. Season two led to another huge finish. And, season three may be already on its way. "We are already looking for creators who want to join our autumn 2026 series," says Howard Smith.

At its core, the series shows what can happen when brands, creators and real-life homeowners meet in the messy middle of DIY where real life actually happens. And for modern audiences, that might be the only place worth showing up. ☺

Right:
NZRealReveals teams did it all – from answering briefs to editing.



Brooke Howard Smith
Founder,
NZRealReveals

“We were lucky enough to land a very cool group of adventurous brands.”





Fire brand

The 'Hotter than climate change' campaign from VML aims to make ethical action sexy.

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Who says advertising is only about profit? Meet some agencies who give back

Good works

'We're not saving lives here,' goes the oft-quoted saying about advertising. Except sometimes we are. The festive season is upon us – who's on Santa's nice list this year?

Words: Zahra Shahtahmasebi

Kerryn Thrupp was thrilled to get an invite to Kind By Design. The Woven Earth founder knew the pitching event for charities was a great opportunity. "It puts us, as a little charity, in front of a room full of people who think they might be able to give some pro bono support with their expertise. We can't go to an agency and pay, that's just not even part of the reality of running a charity," says Thrupp.

Woven Earth helps people who have left violent relationships furnish their new home.

In six years, they've kitted out more than 900 houses in Tāmaki Makaurau Auckland – and demand continues to grow, says Thrupp.

Her background in partnerships and communications is helpful in telling Woven Earth's story – but she's the only full-time employee.

Pitching for partnerships

Kind By Design, which ran for the first time this September, was set up by Alaina McGregor, a marketing and PR professional with 20 years' industry experience.

She describes it as a more wholesome version of *Dragon's Den*

– though this version has no scary investors with stacks of cash.

It was born from her experience of running 10x10 Aotearoa from 2019 to 2024, a similar charity pitch series.

In those five years, that event grew into a marketplace for skills-based philanthropy. "It became really powerful for a lot of people – they don't have a lot of money to give, but they've got time, they've got networks, they've got connections. There are other ways people can give back," says McGregor.

Kind By Design builds on that: it's all about really "zeroing in" on pro bono partnerships, she says.

"We put a call out on LinkedIn and had 20 applications. We said to the charities, 'Let's just start small – what's an end-to-end project that you need help with?'"

McGregor and co-founder, Inside Recruitment sales and marketing director Richard Gray-Smith, chose five non-profits to pitch at the event.

Each charity had five minutes to present to the 120-strong group, followed by questions.

"You hear from some pretty incredible organisations doing

really powerful community work," says McGregor.

Thrupp's ask was for help to turn a video of the charity's work into a regular giving campaign. She made incredible connections, and conversations are ongoing.

"People have amazing ideas. Just some extra brainpower being dedicated to Woven Earth – wow, that's gold."

Presents and PJs

One Kind By Design 'dragon', marketer Sarah Page, knows full well the hustle of building a charity from the ground up.

Page started the Kindness Collective in 2013 in Tāmaki Makaurau with her husband and a group of friends. It has grown into

a nationwide charity supporting over 100,000 people every year.

One of its annual programmes is Christmas Kindness, which provides presents for thousands of Kiwis. This year, for the first time, festive food is on the gift list too.

In winter, The Kindness Collective runs the PJ Project, which provides a growing number of children with new winter pyjamas. From keeping 400 children cosy in 2020 to 28,137 in 2025, the PJ Project harnesses community kindness with pro bono support from its partners, PHD Aotearoa and Pead.

"Through the power of marketing and our media partners, we've been able to tell the stories of why it matters, how

people can help and how it makes a difference throughout the country," says Page.

PHD's chief of investment Helen Brown adds: "We were so inspired and impressed by Sarah and her mission and the passion she brings. It aligns really well with what the team want to do and the values of our business."

"Anything we do from a pro bono perspective is over and above your day-to-day and I'm always impressed and amazed that, for our team, that's not a problem. This comes purely from their own heart."

Every year, PHD take the charity's campaign creative and call to action to its network of media partners, including ▶

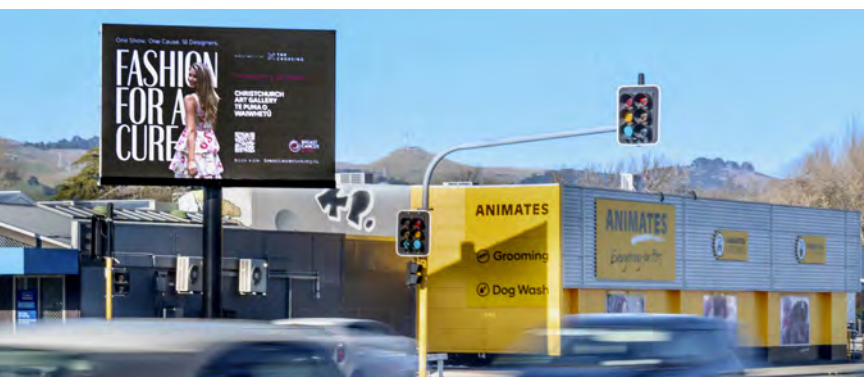


“They’ve got time... There are other ways people can give back.”



Kerryn Thrupp
Founder
and CEO,
Woven Earth

Opposite:
The Kindness
Collective's
Christmas
campaign relies
on donated
media.



Top: These Guys I Know created a show featuring lifejackets – ‘The ultimate fashion statement’ – during NZ Fashion Week. The runway show wasn’t real and the models were AI-generated, but the campaign for Water Safety New Zealand attracted a new audience.

Above: Vast Billboards has increased its support for charities in the past year.

Above right: 2degrees and TBWA\NZ’s SupportHer club champions girls in sport.

TVNZ, Go Media, Lumo, NZME, MediaWorks, oOh!media, Stuff, Sky, Vast Billboards, VMO, Shout and JCDecaux.

In 2025, \$1.3 million worth of media across out of home, TV, radio, retail and digital was donated to the PJ Project.

“We are so fortunate to have these relationships and to have the local media partners that we do,” says Brown. “To donate the media inventory is phenomenal.”

This support is “massive”, says Page. “It’s because of Pead and PHD that we’ve been able to go from 600 children for one year for Christmas to 20,109 last year. And same for the PJ Project.

“People can see the billboard, they can read the Stuff article. Charities are always under pressure. We don’t have enough money, we never have enough time, we never have enough staff. We couldn’t do it without them.”

These Guys know

These Guys I Know is another agency that tries to solve important problems, says brand strategist Amanda Wilson.

Honorable mention to...

Motion Sickness’ 2024 campaign for the NZ Herpes Foundation: ‘Make New Zealand the best place in the world to have herpes.’ It aimed to destigmatise herpes – and stats show it worked.

From the *Heavyweight* with David Letele platform to working with charity Big Buddy to the recent ‘Thanks driver’ bus campaign, creating positive change drives These Guys I Know.

“I see our work as an expression of our values. Topics we focus on are areas that we are genuinely interested in and can drive societal impact,” Wilson adds.

This year, for Water Safety New Zealand, the agency created ‘The ultimate fashion statement – wear a lifejacket’ show for NZ Fashion Week. There was a twist: the ‘show’ was a stunt for socials, rather than a physical event.

Nonetheless, it made the point that safety is sexy and life jackets are the accessory you need to prevent drowning. One post generated 28,000 views for Water Safety New Zealand on Instagram

alone – 50% of whom were new followers.

“Everything we do, we look for the human impact side of it, and this comes through in our storytelling,” says Wilson.

The power of giving

In 2024, Pead worked pro bono with the Raukauri Music Therapy Centre on one of the biggest campaigns of the year: bringing the Guinness World Record for the largest haka back to Aotearoa.

The campaign clinched the record, raised \$270,000 for the centre and won Excellence in Not-For-Profit Marketing Strategy at the 2025 YouTube Marketing Awards.

Support from other agency partners was either heavily discounted or gifted.



Hot people make change

VML Aotearoa lives up to its mission of creating meaningful change by donating expertise and working on social good campaigns, says executive creative director Kim Pick.

Recent work includes the ‘Have a hmm’ for ACC and extension campaign, ‘Love ghosting’, for NZ Transport Agency Waka Kotahi and the NZ Police.

Both encouraged people to reconsider their behaviour towards risk, with the latter urging people to “ghost” their loved ones when they drive by ignoring their phone.

They also worked on the 2023 ‘Stick it to hep C’ campaign. It made waves for using images of people raising their middle finger.

But it worked, helping raise awareness of the deadly disease.

Pick says: “We had a 150% increase in testing with the campaign. More importantly, we had a 1000% increase in positive detections – meaning

that the right people were stepping forward to be tested, so they could go on to get treatment.”

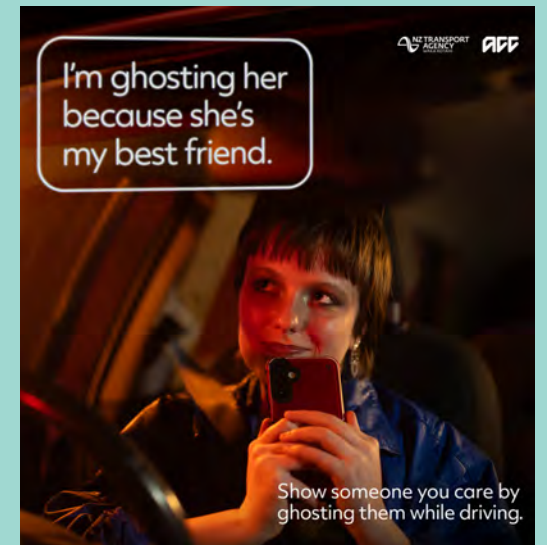
Work like this requires significant research to make sure it’s not too flippant or retraumatising – and lands well with the audience, she adds.

“We often co-create with audiences with lived experiences to make sure it is OK and that the approach we’re taking resonates in a good way.”

Last year’s ‘Hotter than climate change’ campaign with grassroots movement Take The Jump had a similar vibe.

Data showed people thought climate change was insurmountable, and felt apathetic as a result. But this campaign showcased seven key actions, from ethical investing to planting trees, that actually make a difference.

“We realised there was no point creating more fear around



climate change because we knew that wasn’t going to generate action. However by doing something that was self-empowering, it can make you feel good and look good too,” says Pick.

Above: VML Aotearoa’s ‘Love ghosting’ driving safety campaign.

“We think we can make a bit of a difference in that space.”

Go Media donated \$200,000 worth of billboard space.

Co-owner Mike Gray says he’s always believed in the power of giving – that ethos informs all the work he does.

“I believe in the power of giving, and I don’t do it seeking some specific result. I just believe that it will come to us,” says Gray.

Fellow out of home company Vast Billboards agrees. Account director Ivana Moreton says community engagement is a core part of Vast’s ethos.

In the past year, the team has increased its support for non-profits and charities, including Ronald McDonald House and Breast Cancer Cure.

“There’s a real sense of purpose that comes from seeing how much positive impact we can make. Billboards are such a

powerful medium for visibility and it’s a privilege to use that power for good.”

Play brave

Meanwhile, 2degrees and TBWA\NZ focus on women’s sport.

“Everyone knows it’s underfunded – less resources, less attention. And we think we can make a bit of a difference in that space,” says the telco’s chief of strategy Zac Summers.

Earlier this year, 2degrees and TBWA\NZ announced the SupportHer club, an initiative built around helping girls stay in sport. Local research shows this group are twice as likely to drop out as their male counterparts.

“We’ve got a breadth of insights around what it is that women or girls in sport particularly need to stay in the game and this one was

based on how they feel when they play,” says TBWA\NZ CEO Catherine Harris.

“This leads you to resources that help parents say the right things before a game and after a game. At the same time, it’s really important for girls to learn how to speak positively to themselves.”

In August, SupportHer branched out, with a line of T-shirts and hoodies designed by Kiwis – illustrator Bonnie Brown and sports psychologist Dom Vettise.

Kids’ sizes have the words “Play brave” printed in reverse, so they can see the message in the mirror.

Supporters’ versions read: “Play like you” – championing effort and enjoyment over performance and pressure. The proceeds go to school sports across the country. ☺



Catherine Harris
CEO, TBWA\NZ



Struggling to care for his autistic son, Jordan Ikitule looked for help and found community. It became Ausim Kids – a brand that’s changing lives.

Words:
Rachel Tsai

A passionate dancer and choreographer, Jordan Ikitule dreamed of performing on the world’s biggest stages. Then life took a turn.

“I was planning to become a backup dancer. A lot of my friends are doing that now for Chris Brown or Jennifer Lopez, and they’ve performed at the Super Bowl or Coachella – that was what I wanted to do.

“But when I had my son, I realised that dream was gone,” says Ikitule.

In 2020, his son Storm – who was three at the time – was diagnosed with severe autism.

According to Autism NZ, around 3% of our population have the condition. Ikitule describes it as a non-physical, neurodevelopmental condition that covers a wide spectrum.

“Some can speak but struggle with social cues, and then there are those like my son, who are non-verbal.

“Storm has just turned seven. He’s still in nappies and is also a ‘runner’, so if the door’s open, he can wander off and disappear, unaware of any danger.”

A new calling

Parenting an autistic child was tough for Ikitule and his wife, Jane.

“I had to call in sick nonstop. It was crazy. Work thought that I was mucking around when really, we had to spend time with our son.”

On the brink of giving up, he had an idea.

“One day after work, I was sitting in the driveway and just thought, ‘I’m going to make a video inviting dads with autistic kids to come together, share our experiences and relate to each other.’

“There weren’t many resources out there, so I wanted to create a group that gave them the support they needed.”

Ikitule expected a couple of dads to respond, but the video blew up on TikTok.

“So many people showed interest and wanted to learn more. I was even invited on Newshub, Māori News and TVNZ to share my story. Things took off pretty quickly.”

A week later, around 30 dads showed up at his garage.

“September 17, 2023, was our first meeting. And from there it just went crazy,” he laughs.

Extra protection

The monthly meetup evolved into a community trust called ASD Dads (Autism Solutions-Driven Dads).

The gatherings gave dads a safe space, but Ikitule knew their kids were still vulnerable.

That realisation hit home when they lost Storm at a park.

“The police eventually found him, but because he can’t speak, they didn’t know how to return him.”

The incident inspired Ikitule to found Ausim Kids, a clothing brand that raises awareness for autism.

The merch includes bumper stickers, phone cases and, most importantly, Ausim Reconnect – a line of T-shirts, hoodies and bracelets printed with QR codes. If a child gets lost, scanning the code quickly provides their emergency contact details.

“It’s designed to give families that peace of mind,” he says.

“You can’t be with them 24/7, but when they’re wearing clothing that raises autism awareness, it makes a difference.

“The whole purpose is to give them an extra layer of protection.”

Close to heart

When Ausim Kids launched, the website crashed after receiving \$5,000 in orders in two hours.

“Now we’ve had interest from 14 countries, and we designed the QR codes to work globally.

“We’re also adding more languages, so it’s not just in English,” says Ikitule.

For him, the most rewarding part is seeing how the brand helps kids and families.

“I often get stopped in public, and parents approach me with tears in their eyes. It’s very touching.”

He sees it first-hand, too.

“Recently, we were on the train and my son was running around, changing seats. This elderly couple started getting angry at him.

“But then he stopped to look out the window, his back facing them. On the back of his shirt, it says: ‘Please be patient with me, I have autism.’

“Once they read it, they couldn’t stop smiling and couldn’t take their eyes off him.”

Together, we can

Ikitule says autism awareness is just the beginning. Acceptance is the goal.

To grow the movement, ASD Dads recently rebranded as Ausim Kids Collective (AKC).

“Our mums have been wanting a group for a long time, and now 1,400 mums are part of it,” he says.

The monthly meetings continue both in person and online. When they meet online, Ikitule likes to surprise them with special guests.

“We had actor TK [Te Kohe Tuhaka] from *Chief of War* not long ago. He’s also got a kid on the spectrum.

“I try to bring in influential people in movies or sports because it’s always interesting to hear how they were able to build their careers while raising an autistic child.”

Running AKC comes with its challenges, especially managing fast growth, he says.

“But we’re always working to bring the right people on board so we can do even more.

“Before, it was me who designed all the clothing for Ausim Kids, but now that we have different designers, I can focus on the charity and create more content.”

From a viral video to a life-changing cause, Ikitule hopes to pass on life lessons to his three kids.

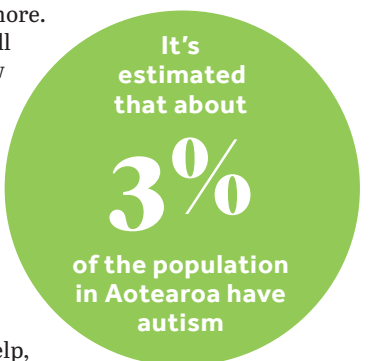
“I want them to do their best and not be afraid to fail. The other big thing is to help others – if you can help, then help. Give back where you can, because together, we can make a difference.”

Above left:

Branded clothing raises awareness and has a QR code with emergency contact details for lost children.

Top: There’s a range for families and supporters too.

Above: The Ikitule family rep the brand. From left: Storm, Jane, Cleo and Jordan.



Creative Soul

What's going on in Ōtepoti? Join our whistlestop tour of Dunedin agencies and find out.

Words:
Zahra
Shahtahmasebi

What's special about working in Ōtepoti Dunedin? "You mean other than the weather?" quips Walsh & Beck's Alex Lovell-Smith. It's been raining and blowing a gale almost the entire day.

On that soggy Monday, I meet four local agencies who share the magic of Ōtepoti – filled with innovation, heart and creativity.

"You'll want to move here after this – I can feel it happening," Enterprise Dunedin's Sian Sutton tells me. She markets Ōtepoti, and she's doing a great job.

Morning coffee with Claude & Co and BrandAid

Advertising creatives Steve McCabe and Kim Fraser have worked for big agencies all over the world. But there's nothing quite like Ōtepoti Dunedin.

The two have been running Claude & Co, named for Fraser's cat (who sadly died in 2024), from their Dunedin homes for the better part of 10 years.

"We had no idea if it would work. We started before people worked remotely, before Covid-19.

People were a bit suspicious," says McCabe.

Ōtepoti was planned as a big city, but never really filled out – it's small but doesn't feel provincial. Fraser speaks of the city's distinct pull and its "creative soul".

"You can breathe and you can be yourself."

It helps that the city is "ludicrously beautiful," says Luke Johnston, founder of advertising and design agency BrandAid.

He started BrandAid in 2004 after cutting his teeth at Taylormade Media: "There was nowhere else I wanted to work, so I had to start my own."

The trio connected over a beer in Fraser and McCabe's early days in Ōtepoti and have worked on projects ever since.

"We do smile when we get emails talking about 'getting your teams together' – it's just the three of us," says McCabe. "We could bring the dog, I suppose."

The most surprising client call they've received was from tea company Dilmah. Mostly because it came direct from Sri Lanka.

To this day, the two agencies have no idea how Dilmah found

them: "I did ask," says Johnston. "They were like, 'Oh we just like your work.'"

Their trans-Tasman 'Make the world a better tea' campaign went global. As did their Dunedin Airport "Max hug time" sign – the world's media "went crazy" for it, says McCabe.

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Creative Soul

What's going on in Ōtepoti? Join our whistlestop tour of Dunedin agencies and find out.

Words: Zahra Shahtahmasebi

What's special about working in Ōtepoti Dunedin? "You mean other than the weather?" quips Walsh & Beck's Alex Lovell-Smith. It's been raining and blowing a gale almost the entire day.

On that soggy Monday, I meet four local agencies who share the magic of Ōtepoti – filled with innovation, heart and creativity. "You'll want to move here after this – I can feel it happening," Enterprise Dunedin's Sian Sutton tells me. She markets Ōtepoti, and she's doing a great job.

Morning coffee with Claude & Co and BrandAid

Advertising creatives Steve McCabe and Kim Fraser have worked for big agencies all over the world. But there's nothing quite like Ōtepoti Dunedin.

The two have been running Claude & Co, named for Fraser's cat (who sadly died in 2024), from their Dunedin homes for the better part of 10 years.

"We had no idea if it would work. We started before people worked remotely, before Covid-19.

People were a bit suspicious," says McCabe.

Ōtepoti was planned as a big city, but never really filled out – it's small but doesn't feel provincial. Fraser speaks of the city's distinct pull and its "creative soul".

"You can breathe and you can be yourself."

It helps that the city is "ludicrously beautiful," says Luke Johnston, founder of advertising and design agency BrandAid.

He started BrandAid in 2004 after cutting his teeth at Taylormade Media: "There was nowhere else I wanted to work, so I had to start my own."

The trio connected over a beer in Fraser and McCabe's early days in Ōtepoti and have worked on projects ever since.

"We do smile when we get emails talking about 'getting your teams together' – it's just the three of us," says McCabe. "We could bring the dog, I suppose."

The most surprising client call they've received was from tea company Dilmah. Mostly because it came direct from Sri Lanka.

To this day, the two agencies have no idea how Dilmah found

them: "I did ask," says Johnston. "They were like, 'Oh we just like your work.'"

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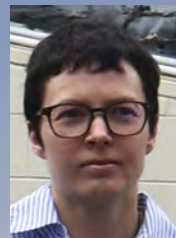
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Zahra Shahtahmasebi was hosted by Enterprise Dunedin.

The pleasure of the unpredictable

The future people want depends on leaving space for surprise, discovery and being human, says TRA's Colleen Ryan.



Colleen Ryan
Partner at TRA

If future tech and AI solutions create a seamless and frictionless, aka predictable experience, what happens to the joy of spontaneity, the thrill of discovery and the growth that comes from learning through mistakes?

These were the questions people asked themselves when TRA immersed them in nine scenarios that showed what might be possible by the 2030s. Though people marvelled at the advantages and benefits, in the same breath they pondered the impact. The results show that people are not yet convinced we're designing the future they want.

This data shows the conflicting emotions that the future triggers. Excitement about what's possible sits alongside fear of what might be lost. The adverse impacts are not of 'the robots will take over the world' variety. Instead they are much more personal and relate to what it is that makes us human.

Spontaneity

A study by neuroscientists at Baylor College of Medicine used fMRI scans on people as they squirted fruit juice or water into their mouths in either predictable or unpredictable patterns. The scans showed that the people who got the unpredictable sequence had more activity in the area of the brain that processes pleasure. While technology can make sure everything is predictable, it's not predictability that makes us feel good.

Discovery taps into our fundamental curiosity drive. We're motivated to close the gap between

what we know and what we want to know. We're inherently nosy. This drive served crucial evolutionary functions, helping our ancestors find resources and navigate new environments. Neuroscience shows that the experience of discovery activates reward pathways in the brain, releasing dopamine when we encounter novel information or experiences. Yet algorithms can flatten discovery by feeding people only what they have previously shown interest in.

Control

When we feel in control, we experience lower stress and anxiety because we believe we can influence outcomes, and this need is so strong that we often prefer having control – even when the outcomes might be worse than if we let others decide. This applies to AI-driven tech, for example.

Learning by mistakes

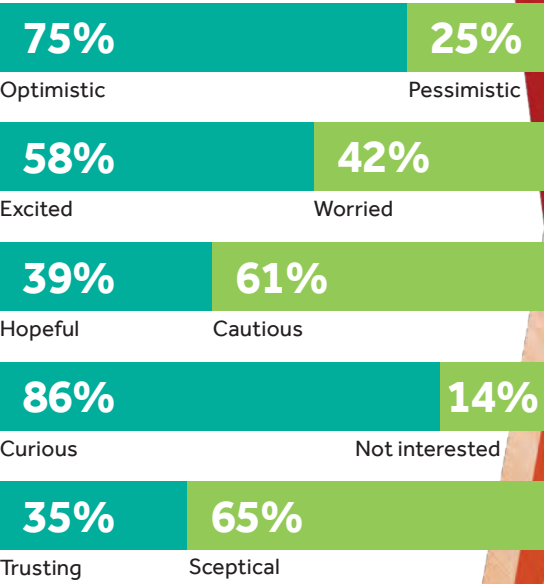
Some of our most valuable growth experiences emerge from unexpected challenges and mistakes. If AI is so good that it steers us way from mistakes, then how do we learn and grow?

Humanity: a muscle that might atrophy

Preserving our humanity reflects multiple psychological needs working together. There's our need for authenticity – staying true to our core values and identity even as we grow and change. This desire often emerges most strongly when we

Methodology: TRA and Dynata interviewed 1000 New Zealanders in a quantitative survey plus 30 qualitative interviews.

New Zealanders' feelings towards the future of technology



face technologies that might reduce our humanity.

While we may struggle to define humanity, a simple question captures the essence of this idea: "If you saw someone struggling to cross the road, you'd help them. But if there's a robot standing by to do that, would our humanity shrink if we don't need to use it?"

The message is clear

We need a more nuanced approach to designing our AI-powered future.

We should ask: How do we build systems that support human flourishing while still leaving room for unpredictability? How do we create technology that enhances rather than replaces the essentially human experiences of discovery, learning and spontaneity?

We can continue down the path of hyper-optimisation, creating a world of frictionless efficiency where every experience is perfectly predicted and curated. Or, we can acknowledge that the Baylor study points to an important insight: human pleasure and growth are intimately tied to unpredictability.

The path forward

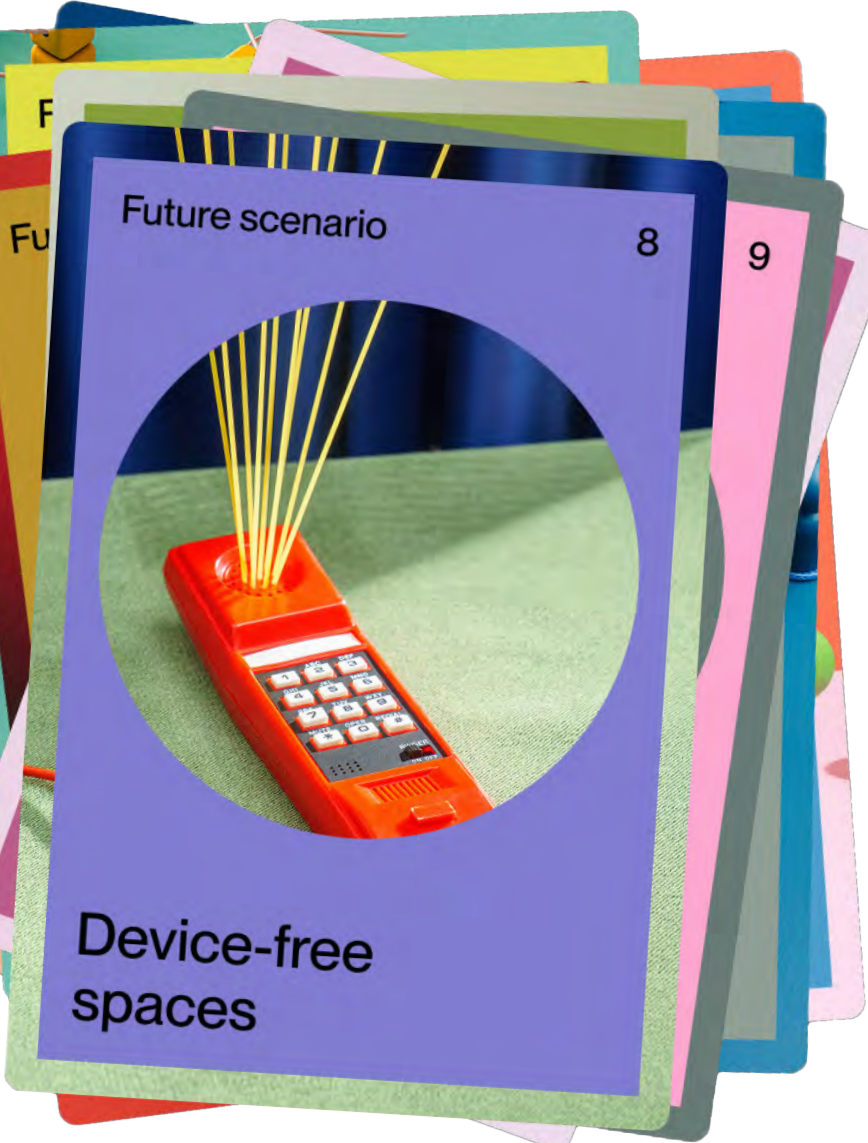
TRA's research shows that people aren't anti-technology, they're pro-human.

1. Trust must be earned before people cede control

With seamlessness comes the handing over of functions and decisions. People are willing to give brands more control over their experiences, but only if trust is explicitly built and maintained.

2. Design for discovery, not just efficiency

While AI-driven personalisation can create seamless experiences, resist the temptation to make everything predictable. People fear missing



out on the unexpected joys that come from serendipitous discovery.

3. Put control and agency front and centre

People want the benefits of smart technology, but they need to feel they're still in the driver's seat. Control can't be an afterthought or buried in a settings menu – it needs to be a visible, celebrated part of the experience.

4. Celebrate individual humanity

In an age of mass personalisation, brands have to show they understand that behind every data point is a complex human being seeking authentic connection and recognition of their unique identity.

What is the future they want?

People want the extraordinary possibilities that new technologies offer, but on terms that preserve humanity, choice and the ability to steer their own course. Brands that can deliver both efficacy and humanity, both efficiency and surprise, both personalisation and agency, will build the future that people believe is possible to steer toward.

The question isn't whether your brand can deploy the latest AI or automation technology. The question is whether you can do so in a way that makes people feel more human, not less.

Above: TRA asked people about nine possible future scenarios to uncover what they really wanted in the future.

“Discovery activates reward pathways in the brain.”



“The whole process took the art department several days to disassemble the car bit by bit.”



Before you ask: yes they really did chop up a car. Spark’s latest campaign aimed to capture joy and optimism. But first came the angle grinder.

Words: Rachel Tsai

When Hannah Bay heard the brief about sending a quarter of a car on a journey powered by Spark’s network, she thought: “What could be more captivating?”

The story, pitched by creative agency Colenso BBDO, follows a young woman named Sam whose phone isn’t working. After she borrows her friend’s Spark-powered device, Sam’s world is transformed. Her section of the car breaks away, setting off on a ride of its own.

Before the campaign took shape, Spark’s creative team conducted customer testing, drawing on feedback reflecting its new brand positioning: ‘It’s better with Spark.’

“Our customers talked about our network as an enabler for this kind of wonderful, bigger, better life,” says Bay, Spark New Zealand’s brand experience chapter area lead.

“One mother told us Spark gives her the reassurance of always being able to call her daughter.

“We also had a few gamers who spoke about the importance of Tetris on the way to work,” she laughs.

“Wonder and joy are what we want this campaign to leave New Zealanders feeling, and this script really captured that sense of optimism.”

The telco partnered with production company The Sweetshop to make the quarter-car road trip – symbolising new possibilities and connections the network enables – happen.

And... cut!

Sam rides off in the quarter car, which takes her around Auckland, visiting spots including Onehunga Wharf and the Sky Tower’s Orbit 360 restaurant.

Along the way, she befriends Mrs Kim and Lilly the goat, falls in love with Quinn and eventually reunites with her mate in the rest of the car.

But did it really happen? Yep, the car really did have a chunk cut off – and it really did go on a tour of the city.

“The production team are magicians – they worked wonders,” says Bay. But before the passenger section could move independently, they first had to cut it apart.

“We’d never cut up a car like that for an ad before, so a lot of testing was done. We used a mixture of machines, including an angle grinder with abrasive or diamond disks for the metal parts, Dremels for the plastic bits and a large bandsaw for the engine.

“The glass was the trickiest bit – the curves made it hard to get a clean break, so we had to try two methods. First, we used a glass cutter and flammable fluid to melt the lamination, and then a solid diamond disk on an angle grinder. The whole process took the art department several days to disassemble the car bit by bit, before piecing everything back together,” she says.

Magic in post

After the exterior was carefully cut, the art department filled the vehicle with all the things you might find inside – like lip balm and a CD – sliced in half.

From there, the production team figured out a way to make the quarter car roll away.

They shot the ad using two vehicles: a whole one and the other that had been cut.

“The quarter car and the three-quarters car were towed behind other vehicles. We filmed them while being towed and then removed the towing cars in post-production to make it look like they were moving on their own,” Bay explains.

“For the splitting scene, the cars were positioned farther apart during filming. They were then towed away from each other, and it was post-production magic that made it appear as though the intact car split in two.”

Embrace the rain

Bay says working with director Damien Shatford was eye-opening.

“The way Damien can visualise everything and piece it together in his mind is truly special.”

Shatford even managed to turn Auckland’s bad weather into a highlight, she adds.

“All I can say is, don’t shoot in spring – the weather was our biggest challenge throughout. But the beauty of having an exceptional director is that Damien just leaned into it and made some gold out of it.

“In the scene near the end, Sam is quite wet from the rain. None of that was planned – we just decided to embrace it. At one point we honestly thought it was even better than if it had been

sunny, bluebird weather the whole time.”

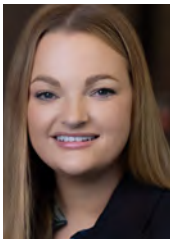
That scene is also where the best friends and the car reunite on the Auckland Harbour Bridge – with Mrs Kim, Lilly and Quinn in the back seat.

“When the two halves of the car reunite, the tow truck was replaced with a very determined crew member, who carefully guided the quarter car by hand, pushing it back into place,” Bay laughs.

“This campaign focuses on the emotional benefits of our network, rather than just the functional features, but it’s also part of something bigger,” she says. “It’s better with Spark’ is a five-year plan designed to deliver a stronger network and better customer experiences at every touchpoint.

“And if we get it wrong, we’ll make it right – and be better.

“We want people to feel that Spark is a reliable, safe network that gives them the confidence to live a bigger, more joyous life and focus on what matters most to them.” ☺



Hannah Bay
Brand experience chapter area lead, Spark NZ



Opposite, from top: The car splits and, after a hasty retrieval of the charging cable, Sam’s off an adventure.

Opposite bottom: The sliced up vehicle.





Interview:
Rachel Tsai

When Asahi introduced its Super Dry Nama Jokki to Kiwi beer lovers in 2024, it quickly became the brand's fastest-selling product.

In September, Asahi teamed up with Hearts and Sciences Content to launch "an express trip to Japan," celebrating the return of its popular self-foaming beer.

Hearts and Sciences Content general manager Cassidy Meredith and Asahi marketing manager Jono Mar share what made this izakaya-style activation one of a kind.



Cassidy Meredith
Content general manager, Hearts and Sciences Content

How did you decide on this activation?

Jono Mar: "Our goal was to build hype and awareness around the relaunch of Nama Jokki in New Zealand, bringing to life the brand's tagline, 'Enjoy draught beer, anywhere.'"

"The activation was designed around the product's unique selling proposition – a self-foaming draught beer can – while tapping into the cultural energy of modern Japan that sits at the heart of the Asahi Super Dry brand."

Tell me about designing the pop-up to look like a traditional Japanese izakaya.

Cassidy Meredith: "We wanted to give guests a real sense of being somewhere distinctly Japanese, but with a spirited, modern twist."

"The space played on contrast. From the outside, it appeared as a traditional izakaya, a hidden gem tucked away in Britomart. Step inside, and guests were transported into a vibrant, reimagined konbini [Japan's iconic convenience stores], filled with neon lights, J-Pop, shelves lined with Japanese snacks and a DIY ramen station."

"The shift from the understated exterior to the energetic interior mirrored the unexpected experience of opening a Nama Jokki can: what

looks simple on the outside delivers something surprisingly elevated.

"Every element of the design was intentional, balancing authenticity and the brand's Japanese heritage with creativity. The setup encouraged exploration and content capture, ensuring the product and the experience lived well beyond the space itself."

Who was invited to experience it? Were they mainly die-hard Asahi fans?

CM: "We invited a curated mix of media, influencers and Asahi's key customers. While many were familiar with the brand, this wasn't designed just for existing fans or beer drinkers, it was about sparking curiosity and conversation."

"The idea was to immerse guests in a brand world that felt both authentically Japanese and distinctly Asahi, creating an experience people wanted to talk about and share."

JM: "Our goal was for every guest to leave as a brand ambassador – excited to share their experience and the product with their own communities on social media."

What did the guest experience look like?

CM: "Guests moved through intimate sessions of just 14 people (we ran 12 sessions across three days), giving the activation a real sense of discovery."

"They were greeted by Asahi brand ambassadors and entered as one group through the understated izakaya exterior, before being met with the energy and colour of the konbini interior."

"The experience was hosted by passionate brand ambassadors who brought the Nama Jokki story to life, guiding guests through the product's innovation and inviting them to share their first 'self-foam' moment together."

Key results

- In less than two months since Asahi Super Dry Nama Jokki launched (seven weeks), more than 14,450 cases were sold. This was nearly double compared to last year.
- The campaign reached almost 1.8 million Meta users and 590k on TikTok from the activation, through owned social media.
- The campaign achieved high engagement, with a 5% engagement rate on organic content and more than 530 reshares and 320 saves on paid social posts.
- Consumers responded with extremely positive sentiment at the event, creating over 150 pieces of user-generated content.

"That collective experience was a nod to Japanese drinking culture and the idea that the best moments are shared. From there, guests enjoyed self-serve ramen, snacked straight from the shelves and had the chance to 'shop' the konbini."

What were the highlights of the event – anything that surprised you or worked especially well?

CM: "The biggest highlight was seeing guests truly engage with the product."

"There was something universally satisfying about mastering that perfect tap-style foam. It made the product story tangible and memorable."

"The moment of reveal also landed exactly as we hoped. Stepping inside to find a lively konbini behind the hidden izakaya created genuine surprise and delight, often met with audible gasps. The small format gave space for real interaction, allowing brand ambassadors to bring the story and energy to life."

"Another standout touchpoint came right at the close, when guests were handed shopping baskets to 'shop the shelves' of the konbini."

"It was a fun, unexpected moment that encouraged exploration and left guests with a sense of ownership. It turned what could have been a

traditional PR exit into another moment of discovery – perfectly echoing the product truth: great draught beer, enjoyed anywhere."

What kind of feedback did you get?

CM: "Feedback was exceptional. Guests loved the sense of discovery and the balance between authenticity and surprise. Many described it as an 'express trip to Japan,' saying they felt transported for the hour they were there."

"People were genuinely impressed by how engaging the format was – the interaction, the design, the hands-on beer moment – layered together, it created a memorable brand experience."

"The amount of organic social content that followed was a clear signal that the activation resonated deeply."

What impact has this activation had on how people see the Asahi brand here?

JM: "The activation drove strong awareness of both the Asahi Super Dry brand and the Nama Jokki official relaunch in New Zealand, particularly across social media."

"It helped establish a deeper connection with Kiwi consumers by celebrating Asahi's Japanese heritage in a way that felt fresh and locally relevant." 🍶

Opposite:

From the outside, the Asahi pop-up experience looked like an izakaya – a traditional Japanese bar.

Above: Inside, guests found themselves in a konbini, or convenience store, fully stocked with Japanese snacks... and Nama Jokki, of course.

Shoot to thrill

Dylan Schwartz, managing director at Toast Creative, on making films in the mountains.

What's the most important ingredient for great video?

Making great videos is analogous to creating a great dish – while each ingredient should be fresh and high quality in its own right, the finished dish is greater than the sum of its parts. For film, this couldn't be more true, nor more impossible to achieve consistently. You don't always get to shoot in the most ideal conditions, but what you lack in control, you can make up for with flexibility. As a paramedic, I've been trained to get creative with what's around me and this has carried over into film-making. While I'm highly unlikely to have to fashion a lifting aid out of a blanket on set, knowing I can solve any problem is a great mentality to have and allows creativity to happen.

Toast started off making wedding videos – no second takes! What lessons from that do you use shooting commercials?

Wedding films are the perfect training ground for commercial shoots – you learn to become extremely efficient with your time. We take a similar approach when filming commercials, which encourages us to shoot intentionally. Our mantra is: 'Thoughtfully simple video production.' That means we do everything with purpose. There's beauty in elegant solutions and we celebrate this throughout our work.

The mountains are gorgeous, what are other advantages of being in Queenstown?

I think it's often forgotten just how much variety there is within such a small area. Of course, scenery is just the starting point and you need talented crew with local knowledge to get the most out of this place. Many people are drawn to Queenstown but few build a career here. Those who do are self-selected to be not only extremely talented but entrepreneurial too.

Favourite project from the last few years?

Most of our projects involving a heli ride or a day on the slopes filming outdoor brands (terrible way to make a living, I know), so it might surprise you that my favourite project was filming the recent Spark | Samsung Peak Sounds concert. It took place on top of Coronet Peak this year and was challenging both physically and mentally to produce while our hands and batteries succumbed to the cold. Watching our work trickle out has been extremely rewarding – and epitomises our ethos to create epic stuff no matter the conditions. ☺



Quick fire 5

Snow or sun?

Contrary to my complaint about the cold, I'm firmly team snow.

Unrehearsed or tightly scripted?

I'm going to be annoying and say somewhere in between. A rough plan to refer to and fall back on with freedom to explore organic ideas and moments.

Drone or phone?

You really can't beat the utility of having an incredible camera with you at all times in your phone so now I'm just waiting until they introduce a drone flying feature to really bring it full circle.

Podcast or live gig?

I hate to announce how boring I am to the world, but I love a good podcast.

A New Year resolution in five words?

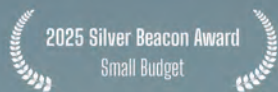
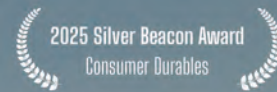
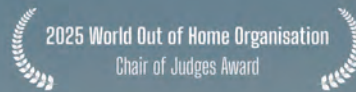
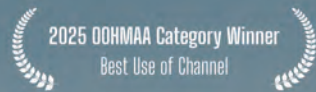
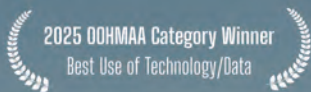
Take feedback well, cry later.



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