



Right, from left: MintHC CEO Shayne Moore, director of communications Alice Moore and managing partner Neil Cameron.



feature

Two rivers braid Christchurch

In Christchurch, being embedded in the community is a key part of MintHC's business strategy, says Alice Moore, director of communications.

"In a relationship-based business ecosystem, word spreads fast when you do good work and just as fast when you get it wrong. That accountability keeps us sharp."

MintHC formed seven months ago, after Mint Design acquired Christchurch stalwart, creative agency Harvey Cameron.

Alice Moore set up Mint Design, a digital marketing agency, with her husband Shayne in 2010. While digital is Mint's strength, the pair always knew they needed a creative arm.

Creative firepower

They had long admired Harvey Cameron and its "creative firepower", so when the opportunity came up to merge last year, they seized it.

"And with Harvey Cameron's legacy and its track record, it was a no-brainer to see that come together," says Shayne.

Alice shares a phrase from Harvey Cameron co-founder Neil Cameron, who has remained on board as managing partner: "The right thing to do is always the right thing to do."

"That philosophy really guides us – on how we resolve issues, how we treat clients and how we run our businesses."

The agencies symbolised their merger with a new brand

identity: the braided river, a rare geographical feature, but one Canterbury is known for.

"The two rivers, meeting and joining and creating a bigger flow. The clients are flowing through that – trying to get out to the sea, all moving towards the same goal," says Shayne.

The region is growing across technology, innovation, aerospace and agriculture. But like Southland, there's a lot going on that doesn't get the visibility it deserves.

"We're doing a lot down here. I think it's part of that New Zealand humbleness that we don't really talk about it, but people should," says Alice.

Eyes on Auckland

MintHC and fellow agencies Plato and Elevate all point to talent acquisition as one of the biggest challenges of being based in Te Wai Pounamu.

Opening an office in Auckland in 2021 helped MintHC gain access to a much larger hiring pool.

"I feel like we didn't launch in Auckland, Auckland launched us – because we organically started getting more and more of a client base up there," Alice says.

MintHC's partnerships with Southern Cross and the National Heart Foundation is Alice's biggest point of pride.

"We do big things that help the big infrastructure and we also do little things like making it easier for a Southern Cross nurse to check a patient in when they're having a procedure done."

Join our whistle-stop tour of the South Island – Aotearoa's humble powerhouse.

Words: Zahra Shahtahmasebi

Carla Forbes is proudly Southland's loudest cheerleader. She's the director of Naked Creative, an agency she set up after moving to Invercargill for a short stint 21 years ago.

"I was going to live here for two years and then it's the famous story, I'll be the last one to turn off the lights," laughs Forbes.

"Twenty-one years ago in Southland, marketing felt like an add-on, not a line item. Now I think more people are saying we're in the business of people, we need to sell our product or service.

"I saw it as quite an opportunity to come down here and carve

out a little position in the Southland market."

Here, a handshake still matters, she says. "I have clients that ring up wanting big projects done, and I just go and do it because I know they're going to pay."

Don't overcomplicate it

It's this "bullshit-free" approach, coupled with the agency's focus on authenticity and transparency, that prompted a rebrand from Market South to Naked Creative in 2021.

"It's a very Southland approach to not overcomplicate things. Let's not get into the fluff, let's just go and get the job done," says Forbes.

Many Naked Creative clients come from logistics, technology, heavy industry and primary sector businesses. Not your typical marketing customers, but brand recognition is as important for them as anyone else.

Southland is "one of New Zealand's biggest contributors" to the GDP, says Forbes. (It's the third-highest region per capita.)

"We have some incredible technology and innovators doing things on the world stage, and in the truest Southland way, they just roll up their sleeves and get the job done.

"There's every joke in the world about Invercargill and Southland.



Above: As well as her role as director of Naked Creative, Carla Forbes is a proud advocate for Southland.

And some of that comes down to the fact that we're incredibly humble and just don't make a lot of noise about the successes when we have them. It's possibly our best accolade and also our worst."

So Naked Creative makes noise for them. ▶



An energy in the mountains

Wānaka

The South Island has always been home for Celia Crosbie.

In 2013, the journalist turned PR professional set up Scope Communications after moving from Queenstown to Wānaka.

"It's never been an option to base my business elsewhere," says Crosbie. "There is definitely an energy in the mountains."

Scope Communication holds deep connections in the region – but that doesn't mean the agency is entirely focused on Wānaka.

It helps clients from Australia, Auckland or Christchurch reach the local audience.

"More and more people see this place as a lifestyle destination and want to do business here. Having deep knowledge within the community is an advantage for a lot of clients," says Crosbie.

Epic work

She describes the way Wānaka and Queenstown have grown into vibrant melting pots.

"I love the landscape, I love the energy that makes you do cool stuff. It's an amazing place to bring up kids. Seriously talented people have moved here and are creating opportunities for the next generation."

The agency punches above its weight, says Crosbie. Last year, Scope helped AJ Hackett Bungy launch EpicShot, a new software product developed using iPhones.

"Having the opportunity to work alongside Apple was really cool," says Crosbie.

As we went to press, Scope was named best Small to Medium PR Consultancy in Aotearoa at the prestigious Public Relations

Arrowtown

Words: Rachel Tsai

Auckland born and bred Matt Van Tiel, head of design and experience at dentsu Aotearoa, had spent decades living in his home city. Two years ago, he decided to leave the big smoke behind and raise his young family in the quiet charm of Arrowtown, just outside Queenstown.

"I've been with dentsu for six years now, and for about four of those, I was based out of the Auckland office."

The idea to move took shape during the pandemic, when Van Tiel had time to pause and re-evaluate. "My wife and I both work in the industry, and with a young family, we just felt it was time to ease the pace a little."

Relocating with a young family has its challenges, but the route between Queenstown and Auckland is "very accessible," he says.

Van Tiel's work life has a new rhythm, with occasional visits to HQ in Tāmaki Makaurau.

"When I go into the office, it's usually a couple of intense days of face-to-face time with the team and clients – a chance to make the most of being there," he says.

At home, "when you do step away from work, you can have pretty amazing experiences straight away," he says.

Van Tiel is also enjoying the Arrowtown community.

Institute of New Zealand Awards. Yet the agency finds it sometimes has to spend time convincing brands of its prowess.

"Some people assume that, because of our location, we don't have the same media connections as the Auckland-based agencies."

"We've had to modify our proposals to show work that's made national headlines."

Education and budgets

Budgets are another challenge, with clients on the Mainland having less to play with than those up north. It restricts the amount of work they're able to execute and the clients they can take on.



"We've built a great support network with friends, family and a fantastic local school."

"My son can bike himself to school, which he loves. In Auckland, we had to juggle multiple drop-offs and deal with traffic, all before even starting our workday," he says.

"Moving here has taken a bit of pressure out of the household. It's made our day-to-day life smoother and, in turn, made me more productive at work."

Above: Matt Van Tiel, dentsu's head of design and experience, loves the work-life balance of living in Arrowtown.



Celia Crosbie
Scope Communications managing director

"In bigger city centres with more corporate entities or bigger companies, people understand what PR is about, so we don't need to educate them along the way and agonise over small budgets."

A highlight of Crosbie's career is working with Socius Media to produce a three-year strategy for Rotorua to rebuild the city's mana and reputation, both of which had suffered significantly post-Covid.

"Scope Communications was incredibly honoured to be able to deliver this mahi for RotoruaNZ," she says.

As for remote working, Scope had been doing video calls before it became mainstream.

Know where you belong

West Coast

Supporting local businesses is one of Courtney Thompson's favourite things.

From Nelson originally, Thompson grew up on the West Coast and lived in Christchurch before moving back in Greymouth over four years ago.

"I was living in Christchurch and I'd always miss something here. I think that's knowing where you belong."

Young people often left the coast for work, never to return, but she's pleased to see that's changing now.

"It's really important to be able to keep growing professionally, but you don't have to move off the coast to have a business or be successful."

Last October, she left her head of marketing role at a large uniform and PPE company to go full-time on her side hustle, Elevate Marketing.

She'd seen a gap: local businesses needed marketing support, and she had the skills to help. Now she's raised the number of local marketers

from zero to one. Coasters don't have to let marketing fall by the wayside, or search for an agency "off the coast".

"I'll look for a strategy to grow you organically first and then we'll build your community. Then we'll bring in the ads and extra things to build out that marketing funnel."

Her goal is to one day have a full-scale agency. But for now, she's a one-woman band, working mostly in the B2B space.

"My client base was meant to be originally planned for marketing here, but now I'm getting enquiries from all over New Zealand."

Thompson is passionate about increasing education and helping smaller startups upskill.

"It's just giving them the tools. If you want it all taken care of, then I'm your girl. But if you actually want to learn how to manage it yourself for your business, then cool, we can set up something for that."

feature



Courtney Thompson
Marketing strategist and owner, Elevate Marketing

Emotional pull

Sunny Nelson

Marketing feels easy when you are working in an "insanely desirable" place like Nelson, says Zest marketing director Mike Kumagai.

Take the view that greets travellers as they fly in: the ocean on one side and the mountains on the other. Incidentally, the airport is one of Zest's biggest clients.

"It's very, very easy to market those guys," Kumagai laughs.

Being based in a small place means being nimble and having a diverse set of skills is a must, he says.

It means clients have a one-stop shop, and somewhere to build long-lasting relationships.

In general, budgets, or the lack thereof, remain a challenge.

"My background in marketing is in Auckland and some in Japan as well, where audiences are much larger. The clients have a lot more money," says Kumagai.

"The tricky part for us is trying to get people over the line."

"A lot of our job is trying to talk to our clients about marketing as a

way to grow your business rather than as a cost," he adds.

Kumagai splits his time between Aotearoa and Japan, where he gets homesick when looking at campaign imagery of Abel Tasman.

"I do feel like there's an emotional connection to the work I do and I'm really proud of that. We have really awesome clients we love to work for."

They range from agriculture, fishing, forestry and viticulture to hospitality and tourism.

Technical and creative

Working alongside Zest Creative is sister company Digital Diligence Limited. DDL was set up by husband and wife Tim and Savannah Smart-Pullyn, and it specialises in business systems, custom applications, augmented and virtual reality.

It's a powerful combination that allows the team of 10 to work across both the technical and creative ends of a project, says Kumagai.



"We can come across a project from both angles and we have two different lenses of looking at the same thing."

After some kiwi were relocated from Kapiti to Nelson's Brook Sanctuary, Zest and DDL worked on building a VR experience at the airport that travellers could use to "look around" the sanctuary and see the birds.

"We did the videography so we did get to be up close with the kiwi," says Savannah Smart-Pullyn. "At the sanctuary there's probably not a huge chance of ever seeing them. So it's cool people can actually see what they look like." ▶



Mike Kumagai
Marketing director, Zest

Mainland rises



Michael Durie
Southern regional chair of the Marketing Association

Words: Michael Durie

You know a city is on the up when locals complain about traffic. In 2015, I returned to Christchurch after more than a decade abroad and saw a city tentatively emerging from the devastation of the 2011 earthquake. Now it's a vibrant, bustling community.

There's a palpable shift across the whole of Te Wai Pounamu. The Mainland has transformed into a growth hub of innovation, Kiwi authenticity and strategic marketing savvy.

Christchurch, Dunedin, Invercargill, Timaru, Oamaru, Greymouth, Queenstown and Nelson are regional marketing powerhouses. Up and coming brands are everywhere.

A stream of marketing grads are entering the workforce, complemented by imported talent and a growing cohort of seasoned marketers. They're at iconic local brands such as Dairyworks, Farmlands, Hamilton Jet, Kathmandu, Meridian Energy, Ravensdown, Skyline Enterprises, Swannndri, Tait Electronics and Untouched World.

The mood is optimistic, determined, inventive and quietly competitive. Regional pride is everywhere.

But it's not all flat whites and golden success stories. While cashflow pressure is easing, the cost of compliance is a constant grumble. Exports are a major concern.

There are supply chain headaches, the fickleness of the Cook Strait ferries and the ongoing struggle to stand out in a global algorithm. But marketers here are rewriting the playbook with audacity and elbow grease.

South Island marketers are focusing on authenticity, community and sustainability. Less glitz, more grit. But don't mistake that for a lack of ambition. We're watching, learning and adapting – often faster than our bigger cousins in Auckland and Australia.



Deep connections Christchurch

The South Island is a really different market to Auckland, says John Plato. He founded Christchurch-based Plato Creative with wife Lisa in 2007. Now it's the Mainland's largest independent integrated marketing agency.

"It's a harder market just to come in and trade. But down here if you form a partnership or a relationship with a client, and you do a good job, you will be there long-term."

In short, there's less turnover and clients stay longer. Some of Plato's clients have been with the agency for a decade or more.

Valuable insight

Its team of 60 cover strategy, brand, creative, websites and technology. Plato manages some of the agency's biggest clients and also sits on their advisory boards.

"You get shared information, not just on how marketing or brand is performing. You're having conversations around business operations, knowing what's actually going on. You've got the opportunity to problem solve and when you're in at that level, it's easier to form trust."

"We focus on building out strategy and advisory, we're not just centred on brand or marketing strategy," says Plato.

While Plato Creative has national clients, most have come from South Island businesses that have expanded.

"We've followed them into Auckland. We see ourselves as a national player and have desire to build that over time."

Look for opportunities

He admits it can be hard to get a seat at the table to pitch to clients in Auckland or Wellington, and advises being nimble – looking for opportunities the bigger and traditional agencies might miss.

Like MintHC, the next phase for Plato is to look at acquisitions, particularly in Auckland.

"We are very interested in how we can take other owners – who have different agency specialties – and bring that into the fold."

"We really wanted it to be more around partnerships – meaning we've got a more integrated and connected relationship with clients who then engage us on a monthly basis, rather than two or three core projects a year."

A 10-year relationship with curtain and blind manufacturers Bargain Blinds and Russell's Group is one Plato is proud of: "We established an ecommerce platform for them that started off doing \$8,000 a month and is now doing a million dollars a month."

Equal pride comes from Plato's work around Christchurch – branding for Metro buses, Te Pae Christchurch Convention Centre and the new stadium Te Kaha.

"At least 90% of the main assets in the city have been branded by our agency, which is pretty cool."



Small town charm Rangiora

When people ask where Ryan McDonald's agency is based, he usually says Christchurch. Not many know where Rangiora is.

Luckily, the North Canterbury town is my old stomping ground. Thirty minutes' drive from Christchurch, the place has changed a lot post-earthquake, from quiet and rural to a bustling hub of cafes and retail.

McDonald started MoMac as a one-man band in his parents' lounge in 2007. Now with a team of 18, it has grown considerably, but never lost its small-town charm or location.

"When we started growing, my parents said, 'OK, well you can't have any more employees in the house. You need to find somewhere else,'" laughs McDonald.

So he converted a house into an office and renovated as the agency gained more staff.

About a year and a half ago, they outgrew the space, so McDonald started building another office space in the garden. On a video call, he gives me a laptop tour.

It's still unusual to have an agency of MoMac's size based in North Canterbury, rather than Christchurch, he adds.

MoMac's specialty has been digital, photo and video, but it became full service after acquiring local agency Create Design Studio earlier this year – a move that saw creative director Laura Good come on board.

In May, MoMac launched a brand awareness campaign, 'Man sues marketing agency for making him millions.' It ran on billboards across Christchurch and Rangiora.

Make a statement

Such campaigns are not usually within the budget, says McDonald. "We had one shot. So whatever we did, we wanted to make a statement and be remembered for good or for bad."

The MoMac team pulled the concept together in just 24 hours, drawing inspiration from Tui's 'Yeah Right' for its simplicity and focus on text and Vast's 'Bill is Bored' for its interactivity.

The final piece of the puzzle came from Red Bull. The team stumbled across an article where someone sued the energy drink company for failing to give him wings – and won \$13 million.

The original draft read: "Man sues marketing agency for not making him millions." But it didn't format nicely, says Good. She deleted 'not'.

"That is the master stroke – it made it that much more silly and much more fun," says McDonald.

He admits it was a bit risky – poking a bit of fun at both the industry and clients. But that's why both parties can giggle at it.

McDonald says it's a friendly reminder that: "Hey, we'll work hard, but don't set unrealistic expectations."

Good adds that there's no silver bullet – sometimes the work you'd least expect goes viral – but the key ingredient is trust.

"Our success is dependent on their success. If they're happy and we are achieving their outcomes, that's a win for us." ☺

Above left: MoMac's creative director Laura Good, and director Ryan McDonald.

Opposite: John and Lisa Plato run Plato Creative, the South Island's largest independent integrated marketing agency.



“We had one shot. So whatever we did, we wanted to make a statement and be remembered.”