

Brand New Zealand: Making the most of a glowing reputation

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Lewis Road Creamery founder and brand virtuoso **Peter Cullinane** talks to IP Partner **Jenni Rutter** about the immense potential he sees right now for Brand New Zealand, and making the most of a global demand for all things New Zealand.

**Peter Cullinane****Jenni Rutter**
Partner

I first began thinking of New Zealand as a brand while watching TV in the basement kitchen of our terrace flat in South London a few weeks after giving birth to twins. I was low on sleep and high on hormones, but the visceral emotion I felt as I sobbed through a 100% Pure New Zealand advertisement was as pure as the ad's slogan. We packed up pots, pans and babies and moved home three months later. Despite the lure of overseas work, New Zealand has been my brand of choice ever since. Twelve years later, in the midst of a global crisis like no other, I've never been more grateful to have returned home, and I'm wondering - could we be on the verge of a once in a generation opportunity for 'Brand New Zealand'?

The world has noticed how successfully New Zealand has tackled the virus. Clearly, the price to be paid for going hard and going early will see many of us in the hurt locker for an extended period to come. But we can and should feel that our individual sacrifices have been made for the greater good, for our extended whanau of five million, for the team. A pat on the back from the New York Times has been earned by every single one of us. We now need to focus on thinking and trading our way out of the

hole. The power and value of Brand New Zealand could play a major part in us digging out, if we play our cards right.

Clearly, international tourism is extinct for now. Will I still be able to fulfil a family promise to take our sons to London, to meet the amazing city in which they were born? Not this year, and very unlikely the one after. The cost of doing so could be prohibitive for years to come. More importantly, how will London come to us? How do we tackle the challenge of breathing life back into our inbound tourism industry, upon which the livelihoods of many rely and which looked like such a promising sector for our children's working futures? Yes, it will be fantastic to welcome Australians and share our bubble, but what about the rest of the world?

Peter Cullinane, founder of Lewis Road Creamery and a brand virtuoso, believes there is an opportunity to invest in Brand New Zealand right now through the food we export, making the most of an insatiable global demand for all things New Zealand. In his previous life as an ad man extraordinaire, Peter believed the marketing of our exported products went hand in glove with the marketing of New Zealand as a destination. Given the potential for the two to nourish each other, and given that there's little use right now in advertising New Zealand as a tourist destination - why not invest those marketing efforts in taking our food to the world in a way we have never done before?

"My experience with NZTE as an enabler and supporter of Lewis Road Creamery's export strategy has been excellent" says Peter. "Imagine if Tourism New Zealand and others combined their know-how, energy and resources to capitalise on the sky rocketing credibility of 'NZ made' at this unique time."

Peter confides that when Lewis Road Creamery first launched its strategy to carve out a space for premium New Zealand butter in the supermarket chillers of Texas and California, the Lewis Road Creamery brand was centre stage on pack, with 'New Zealand' taking less limelight. That was 18 months ago. New packaging that gives 'New Zealand' more prominence on pack has helped propel sales in 271 Whole Foods stores across 37 states.

"New Zealand is the brand" explains Peter. "It's the star to which we can hitch our wagons as we cross the economic desert many of us find ourselves in. Factors that have hampered us in the past, such as our geographic distance and our small population, are now unique selling points that give us a significant opportunity on the world stage".

We'll need a multi-faceted approach to make the most of our opportunity. It's a good sign that discourse around international trade shows positive support for the free flow of our goods. The New Zealand and Singapore initiative that promotes the movement of essential goods between them by removing duties and imposing measures that speed up transit is a good start. As noted by Minister of Trade and Export Growth David Parker, global cooperation on trade can assist in dealing with the crisis.

We also need the sort of government support that stimulates innovation. Kiwifruit won't pick themselves, and crayfish will not swim to shore. Investment in innovation and technology is essential so we can build a secure and efficient supply chain that allows us to feed ourselves as well as the rest of the world. The days of relying on overseas travelers to pick, pack and process our world class food have been and gone. We need to automate, and quickly. We also need to look beyond what worked for us before the pandemic. A vast number of us have less to spend on food than we did two months ago, meaning we must look after ourselves as well as looking offshore. At the same time, demand for natural alternatives like animal-based proteins seems likely to rise. As Global Head of Agribusiness at KPMG Ian Proudfoot¹ points out:

"Rapidly rethinking the size of a product, channels it is sold through, price point and frequency of purchase is critical to ensuring the product offering is fit for purpose in a market where austerity is likely to be top of mind for many potential customers. A

deep recession will materially reduce the purchasing power of millions of consumers globally. The costs of producing natural animal-based proteins will continue to rise, reducing the number of consumers able to regularly afford to purchase these products. This will likely increase the demand for the novel plant-based and cell-cultured protein products."

Other than necessity (and in some cases desperation), it would be good to see levers that encourage and reward investment in innovation when balance sheets are tight. The availability of intellectual property rights will hopefully continue to underpin innovation, but the provision of tax incentives for R&D activities could help – perhaps with a review of the eligibility criteria or a lowering of the expenditure threshold (currently \$50,000).

Clearly, 'New Zealand' is not a brand or trade mark that can be monopolised by anyone. It is available to all of us, and could be a far more valuable asset than we realise. There are nevertheless competitive yet collaborative advantages to be found in the brand. For example, there is nothing to prevent the creation of certification trade marks that tell the rest of the world that a product carrying the mark in question is entirely made in New Zealand, from ingredients grown in our country, and that the product complies with other specific standards of safety and quality. I've also thought for a long time that a certification mark for products made by Māori could have enormous value.

Unless we misstep, the time to pull out all the No. 8 wire we can find, and invent our way out of crisis is right now. Let's not underestimate the value that brand New Zealand can bring to the table.

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¹ [See Food and fibre in a world emerging from COVID-19](#)