



Our ticket to the dance

By Michael Foley, Director, Voco Limited



We're living in a world in transition to a digital future. In short, the Internet has changed everything.

If analyst predictions are to be believed, within 20 years something like 80% of world GDP will be in global markets. And much of those global markets will be accessed digitally.

And networks, the stuff of our industry, are the means by which we get to participate. Our ticket to the dance.

Now we're all pretty excited that 'broadband' has registered on the psyche of mainstream New Zealand.

Government, across the political spectrum, has recognised the importance of it to

just maintaining, let alone improving our economic performance, and through it our living standards.

But while we're getting all fired up by the prospect of the much-needed infrastructure makeover for NZ Inc., in the form of the Broadband Investment Initiative, we need to spare more than a passing thought for "what next?".

My colleagues and I have become concerned that a mantra has developed that says "broadband has been the problem, so broadband is the answer".

And of course it is an essential piece of the puzzle, but the simple reality is that when we've buried all that fibre in holes or hung





it on poles and done amazing things with wireless to fill in gaps or whatever...

...an economic miracle simply isn't going to happen.

Government's objective is not to put fibre in holes and on poles; it is to drive economic growth. That is not going to be achieved by simply supporting today's demand profile faster.

We must discover new ways to use that capability that both drives our domestic productivity and creates value that we can take digitally to this increasingly global market.

When people ask me what "innovation" is, the way I articulate it is "ordinary people doing ordinary things in extraordinary ways".

It is not the preserve of the ICT industry or the researchers or academics. But we do have a big role to play, and it starts with making sure we do things smart with what we've got.

While we're working on this infrastructure upgrade, we must simultaneously look deliberately to optimise the spend that keeps us standing still – what many of us know as "Business as Usual".

Why?

Because at a national level, we only have so much resource. And as a small country we cannot afford to be dumb about the way we use it.

If we're going to channel more time resource, capacity and money into a future focus, as I

think we all know we must, then it's almost a certainty that we're going to have to divert it from elsewhere. There isn't going to be what politicians call "new money".

It's our job individually and collectively to create the means to redistribute resources out of standing still and into moving forward.

There are some great exemplars of innovation in this year's finalists and we rightly get together to celebrate and congratulate them.

But let's challenge ourselves to go to another level in this next year and make sure we're not singularly focused on the plumbing. ■

This is an extract from the speech given by Michael Foley at the TUANZ Innovation Awards on 3 September 2009. Photographs courtesy of TUANZ.

