

TUANZ Innovation Awards

Introduction Speech

Thursday, 3 September 2009

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When we decided to take on the premier sponsorship of this year's awards it wasn't because we had lots of spare sponsorship dollars burning a hole in our pocket. I'm sure that resonates with many of you.

Rather, through our work in diverse sectors of business and government over the past couple of years, we have become increasingly aware of a critical imperative for NZ.

We're living in a world in transition to a digital future. In short the Internet has changed everything. And let me illustrate that through the lens of my personal reflection on education.

When I was at school it was those who knew the most who made top of the class. Knowledge was truly king back then.

I have three kids, Laura 23, Patrick 21 and Eamon 7.

When Laura and Patrick were entering secondary school the Internet was starting to get traction. Many homes had computers, but many more did not. Google was starting to register on our consciousness.

The kids who rose to the top of the heap in Patrick and Laura's years were those who could ACCESS the most information. Access had become king.

And now, just 10 years on, Google has become a verb. Access to information is becoming a given and the kids rising to the top are those who can do the most with the information – those who can USE it most effectively.

CREATIVITY, and the innovation borne of it, is the new currency.

So herein lies the challenge for New Zealand.

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.

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

Government, across the political spectrum, has recognized the importance of it to just maintaining, let alone improving our economic performance, and through it our living standards.

And tonight we find ourselves looking forward, with a mix of excitement and trepidation I suspect, to the imminent announcements on the go-forward for the Broadband Investment Initiative.

But while we're getting all fired up by the prospect of this much-needed infrastructure make-over for NZ Inc. 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 drive our domestic productivity and create 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 optimize 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.

Thank you, and have a great evening.