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Think

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CREATING AND ARTICULATING AN ACHIEVABLE NATIONAL VISION

It seems we have a major challenge in defining a vision for New Zealand. We prefer to look backwards with affection rather than forwards with anticipation. We hark back to 'better' times in everything from fashion to film, whereas the truth is we are all very much living in a 'now' society.

No one as yet has defined New Zealand's pathways into the future with any tangible understanding for people to view and buy into. There is no story we can read about which takes us into the future. There is a desperate need to build the future tapestry so that everybody 'gets it'. This means weaving together and articulating a wide range of scenarios in different sectors across the social, economic and environmental fronts in an engaging story to captivate people's enthusiasm and contribution.

New Zealand's economic development opportunities should be seen in a niche sense. We have no chance of building an enormous motorcar industry but we could corner the softest sustainably-farmed leather vehicle upholstery in the world, complete with the New Zealand story.

What to Think

We should be thoroughly conversant with the niche opportunities within the context of a troubled, over-populated, urbanised world and then work back from that position. Over 53% of the world's population are now urbanised people who, as they become increasingly removed from nature, are prepared to pay more for it.

The challenge for New Zealand is to market its products city by city, looking for 2% market share at best. We currently have 2% of the British wine market above £12 a bottle. It's all we need to produce sales of some \$300 million in the UK alone. The development of our tourism experiences need to consider the same context. 2% of the intelligent European backpacker market could be significant for us. Although it is not upmarket, we know we are growing young people's perception of New Zealand and for the rest of their lives they will favour New Zealand.

But the backpacker lodges and related experiences need to be better to capture this special group who in a six week period spend more than the short stay package tourist. Beautifully designed utilitarian buildings in the right places run by well-trained personnel. Putting together the Kiwi visitor experience in a compelling brand similar to Icebreaker is entirely possible. After all, the French did it with their Club Med in the post-war period for an inexpensive holiday. Surely this is a fabulous opportunity for Maori who have the most beautiful sites throughout New Zealand and could well give birth to something uniquely 'them' in terms of a memorable tourist experience.

How to Think

We are currently obsessed with the improvement of our processes as opposed to the invention of new products. Our dairy industry would have to be the most significant example. The world's most efficiently produced dried milk powder but few opportunities to leverage the return through brands of integrity.

Innovation begins in the classroom by way of our education techniques which have traditionally been more liberal than the Asian 'rote' learning systems. Currently we can 'out-think' the Asian mind creatively for probably two more generations at best. Developing real innovation is now our only hope in building a future suite of products and services at the premium end. Innovation is where the higher margin prices are in any category, linked to a group of key industries we believe we can compete in.

Think Story

What's the future of business after the information age? It won't be the latest technology or the newest product, but the story behind a product that will provide competitive edge. The company with the best story wins; consumers will pay for the story that sparks the imagination and reflects how we see ourselves and how we want others to see us. The most important raw materials of the 21st century will be stories that translate information for consumers into accessible, emotional terminology. Since there will be so much product parity, 'cookie cutter' products, companies will have to differentiate themselves from their competition by creating stories about who they are and what they stand for – stories that appeal to the heart of the consumer. Above all, the stories have to be true in that in an age of greater transparency we will be found out very quickly in terms of the efficacy of the product or service, often with disastrous consequences.

The past is receding from us at a dizzying speed. The future is heading towards us with increasing velocity. We need to think a few steps ahead of the competition. Yet most of our futurist planners are thinking in economic terms because these are the disciplines they have come to. Thinking in society terms of course sounds a little 'woolly', yet it is the only way we will galvanise every New Zealander.

Think Dreams

What is the 'Dream Society' for us? No-one has ever tried to write it down. No-one has taken a position to describe what kind of society we would like to have 25 years from now. And yet it is such an important scenario to give to people.

I believe that societies, certainly in the Western world, are moving from uniformity and materialism to diversity and post-materialism. What this means is people wanting to live in a much greater individualised world. As the world globalises, a vigorous push-back will follow as people wish to personalise their lifestyles more and more.

All of our products should occupy a small market-share percentage, become 'discovered' and handed on by way of peer referrals. This doesn't mean we shouldn't be into China, but certainly not at the bottom end where we are currently with our dairy products. Rather, we should be selling liquid colostrum shots, offering natural immunity to stressed-out commuters at the newsstand in the right suburbs of Shanghai alongside the peppermints and fashion magazines.

Think Personal

Having the consumer almost as a co-designer in the way you buy your food or wines from New Zealand as part of our global 'Kiwi cuisine' web purchasing community, is entirely possible now. Products which come from the heart, from a small country, with total transparency and trust.

You buy carpet in the US from the hillsides of Geraldine in Canterbury New Zealand. You can know the farmer who grew your Icebreaker, in your niche holiday experience you met the locals.

We already have a great deal of authenticity, however, image-washing brands that confer association without substance are especially dangerous to Brand New Zealand. The developments beyond image branding will be 'first-hand' product associations.

Building the dream society is a creative initiative to script a future which we can put in front of people. Sector by sector we do know a great deal, however, describing it to others in a captivating way requires an almost theatrical approach. It is the ultimate 'reality' TV we should be commercially producing for all to see. 'The Dream' would become an annual ritual in which we would revisit this initiative and challenge the media networks and major community players to become involved. As the present financial crisis illustrates, New Zealand isn't immune from outside influences but the surest way to achieve the long term future we want, is to conceive it.