



Kiwi expat Peter Bryant believes people like him can bring a fresh perspective to New Zealand businesses.

THE FUTURE NOW

Los Angeles-based business strategist Peter Bryant says expats like him can help Kiwi firms embrace innovation and take on the world.

STORY **MATT PHILP** PHOTOGRAPHY **JESSICA SAMPLE**

THEY’VE GOT CONNECTIONS, experience and bucketloads of goodwill, but the global community of successful New Zealand expats is still largely an untapped resource – at least, that’s the view of Los Angeles-based Kiwi business strategist Peter Bryant.

“There was a period where there was really strong engagement, but it has petered out,” he says. “There’s a reluctance to bring us into the tent.” In saying that, Bryant is heavily involved with expat organisation Kea and is a member of its World Class New Zealand Network which connects hundreds of Kiwi companies every year to in-market expertise to get the competitive advantage which comes with the diaspora organisation’s connection service. The opportunities are massive, but there aren’t enough domestic firms taking advantage of New Zealand’s global community.

The software entrepreneur and executive business strategist was also recently invited to appear as a keynote speaker at the New Zealand CFO Summit, alongside names such as Theresa Gattung and Forum for the Future founder Sir Jonathon Porritt.

Addressing finance leaders of Kiwi firms involved in multiple industries, Bryant focused on a subject close to his heart: innovation and the risks and rewards of technological disruption – artificial intelligence, machine learning, robotics – rapidly heading our way. “What I was trying

to do,” he says, “was open the eyes of these chief financial officers.”

Bryant knows all about technological change. A managing partner of US-based business strategy firm Clareo he cut his teeth in the nascent software industry of the early 1980s, after moving from New Zealand to Australia. “I was employee number three,” he says of his beginnings with the Australian arm of GE Software International, which was eventually acquired by US software behemoth Computer Associates (CA).

By 1996, when he left with his Australian wife for the US to set up a new business for CA, Bryant had risen through the ranks to become chief operating officer for the Asia Pacific region. “I wanted to be at the epicentre of the technology revolution, especially software,” he says of the move.

He did a couple of years with CA in America, then started up a software company and ran another. In the early 2000s, he quit to become a consultant, simultaneously helping to establish the Kellogg Innovation Network (KIN), now known as The World Innovation Network (TWIN), a multi-sector global network of business innovation leaders. Innovation is what gets him up in the morning. His online bio says, in addition to being an advisor for fortune 500 companies, he is also an advisor to start ups and a mentor for



Bryant recently spoke to Kiwi finance leaders about innovation.

business accelerators and incubators, including Auckland-based The Icehouse. He gives guidance to Kiwi businesses on how to enter the US market.

In 2012, he co-authored *Growth Champions: The Battle for Sustained Innovation Leadership*, a book analysing the success of 20 innovative global organisations.

Inventiveness is not the problem in the New Zealand business scene, he says. “I see New Zealand as a highly innovative country, with tremendous ideas. However, there’s not the same track record when it comes to building highly successful companies – and particularly getting them offshore.”

Why so? “There are a number of barriers. Some aren’t as great as they used to be, but they’re still there and they inhibit New Zealand companies from realising their opportunities on a global stage.”

One is access to capital – still a major hurdle, he believes, despite the creation of various Government-supported innovation funds. But he also believes there’s an attitude barrier. “I’m not sure if every Kiwi entrepreneur has the mindset: ‘I’m going to create a unicorn, and do whatever it takes to get there.’ There’s a reluctance among a lot of people to leave New Zealand.”

If a Kiwi company wants to make a serious bid for the US market, says Bryant, it needs to “flip” and become an American company

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– at least in name. He cites the example of eco-friendly shoe outfit Allbirds, which has its headquarters in San Francisco but maintains a determinedly New Zealand identity. Set up shop in the US and it suddenly becomes far easier to raise serious capital, he notes. “And venture capital firms are fine if you’ve [still] got your development team in New Zealand.”

Another aspect of business where he thinks Kiwi companies could step up their game is marketing. “It’s not an aspect that comes naturally to New Zealanders, but we really have to sing our praises – otherwise the market is not going to hear us.”

Where does Bryant see export potential? He cites smart, innovative food companies. “And there’s a lot of leverage for New Zealand to do some interesting things in

clean energy.” The latter is of particular interest to Bryant, who sits on the board of advisors for leading clean-tech venture fund Chrysalix and for the World Economic Forum’s Mining and Metals in a Sustainable World 2050 initiative. As well, he recently co-founded an ambitious non-profit initiative to rethink how the mining and resources industries engage with governments and communities. Called the Development Partner Institute, it’s motivated by “the notion of moving [industry] towards being a development partner rather than an extraction business”, he says.

A sceptic might say, “Good luck with that,” but Bryant believes there is a genuine openness in the resources sector to consider new ways of doing business. “Any industry moves one company at a time,” he says. “I think they’re serious about changing, but it’s hard to change.”

One key to transformation is to be regularly exposed to different perspectives – which brings Bryant back to his point that New Zealand could make more of its expats.

“I’m a big believer in breaking conventional thinking, and we expats can bring a different insight into the challenges the country faces. We have new perspectives and new ways of doing things – and hopefully out of that comes opportunity.” ☺

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