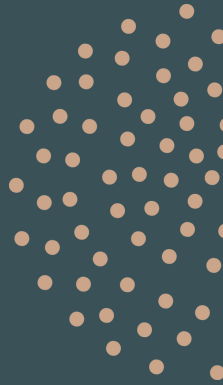


# Our vision for Kiwi thought leadership

Intelligent Ink  
December 2020



# Taking Kiwi thinking to the world



Aotearoa is a land of makers and shakers. We're home to some incredible innovation, clever technology, and original ideas. Our people include great thinkers and doers with the potential to share their insights, have a greater impact, provide meaning to local and international audiences, and build stronger connections with their ideas. But too often, we sell ourselves short.

Now, more than ever, we need strong leaders. We need entrepreneurs who aren't afraid to do things differently. We need great thinkers to lead us into tomorrow. We need to see Kiwis take centre stage with our unique view of the world.

What if our thinking – our ideas – could become New Zealand's greatest export?

Let's make that happen.



OUR VISION FOR KIWI  
THOUGHT LEADERSHIP

# Defining thought leadership

Thought leadership is a tricky thing to define, and it seems to change depending on who you're asking. Taken in its simplest terms, thought leadership is about leading with your thinking and ideas.

At the heart of thought leadership is a clear conviction. Passion. Drive. Why you're here. You've helped people and seen what works – and now you want to help more people. Thought leaders believe in something. There's a version of better that you're striving for; something about the world that you are here to change and you're not prepared to half-arse it.

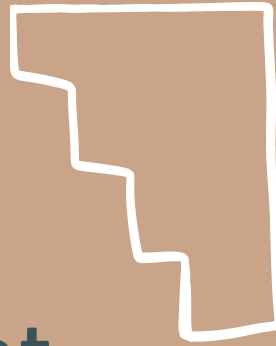
However, true thought leaders move beyond feeling. To be in the market of knowing and understanding – using your insights to create and sustain authority – thought leaders' ideas must be backed by rigorous thought and solid data. Not only are you willing to stand by your thinking, you also ensure that your ideas aren't going to fall over in a stiff breeze. You've considered, contemplated, and looked at where the holes are.



Thought leaders act on ideas; you're making proactive efforts to change something. Thought leadership is a long game, and you live and breathe your ideas daily. We often talk about thought leaders as having something to say and the experience to back that up. Action is about results, and this is the first thing people need to know you for. Walking the walk – and proving your point everyday – is important.

Finally, there's leadership. The rest is all well and good but isn't going to move the dial if a thought leader isn't inspiring others to act, listen or think – building trust and legacy in the process. You can't have thought leadership without leadership. Thought leaders show others the way.

Thought leaders share expertise, knowledge, and passion freely. You show up for the people you are here to serve and give them the tools they need to be their best. In doing so, you drive conversations, lead the way in your industry, create products and services that have a (well-deserved) edge and become the expert in your field.



# The current state of thought leadership in Aotearoa

Right now, there aren't many New Zealanders actively seeking to be thought leaders. Instead, we're seeing many who have naturally fallen into it. They set out simply to provide value, which is great, and have gained recognition because of it.

But why are so many practicing thought leadership, without calling it what it is?

We believe that we're not placing enough value on thinking. Unless you're Don Draper, most people don't believe themselves to be in the business of ideas. They believe themselves to be in the business of whatever product or service they are providing.

However, it's the thinking – ideas about how to make things better, theories we seek feedback on, and methods we try out – that enhance these offerings. When these evolve (and when you demonstrate that), you're showing thought leadership.

For too long, there's been a misconception that thought leadership is just a cog in the wheel of content marketing. And while it's true that thought leadership can be part of content marketing, engaging in content marketing doesn't make you a thought leader on its own!

By filing thought leadership solely under marketing, New Zealand businesses are missing out on a whole heap of potential. Thought leadership is really about strategy. It's about taking a strategic position in your market, and considering all your activities in the light of advancing thinking and claiming authority in that space.

Overseas, many larger organisations have thought leadership teams – often classified under the strategy department – dedicated to growing and harnessing thought leadership. It's not that we're lagging behind – we just haven't yet realised the full potential of thought leadership and the power of ideas to drive and strengthen our businesses.

But that can change.

The common perception until now has been that our geographical distance acts as a barrier to competition. It's true that we are a small market at the bottom of the world, but our thinking is much larger than we give ourselves credit for.

Now that technology and innovation are disrupting the traditional challenge of our distance to market, there's an incredible opportunity to export our ideas and see Kiwi thought leadership – as well as our businesses and communities – thrive. Now more than ever, the world has a greater interest in our approaches and perspectives post-COVID (although that's a whole other can of worms!)

We might not have realised the full potential of thought leadership yet – but we've got all the passion, expertise, and innovation we need to be world leaders.

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Thought leadership has forced us to be thinking more. It's so easy to get caught up in the day to day business, but thought leadership has allowed us to take a different lens when looking out at our sector and industry.

Maurice Dubey

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# What makes New Zealand a great place for thought leadership?

New Zealanders are people of innovation. It's the good old 'number 8 wire' mentality – we're good at what we do, we're good at fixing things and we back ourselves to figure things out and come up with a solution.

Because of this, we're creative and curious problem solvers, who aren't afraid to give something a go. In 2019, there were 546,740 enterprises in the country – one business for every 10 people. That's a lot of people not afraid to go out on their own and innovate to find the solutions they want!



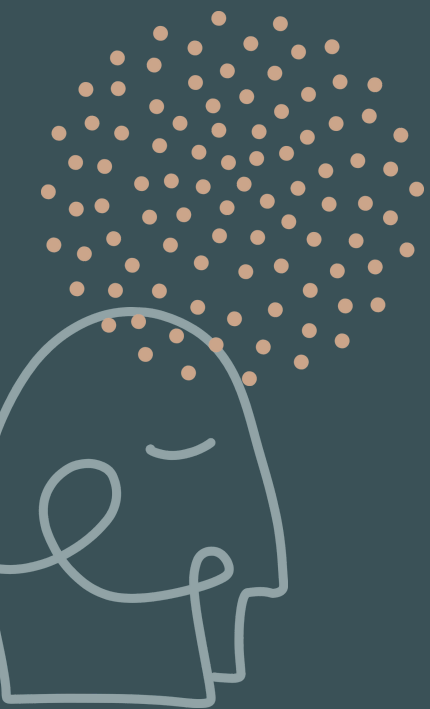


We're also adventurers and pioneers. We've been the first in a lot of things – whether it's reaching the top of Everest, women winning the right to vote, or the first ever bungy jump, we're not afraid to take a leap ahead of the curve.

So there's plenty of people in little old New Zealand doing ground-breaking stuff. There are plenty of experts. Those voices need to be heard amongst the clutter – because it's those voices who have the potential to make our world that little bit better.



# So, what are the Kiwi values that will hold us in good stead for thought leadership?



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New Zealand has always been somewhat of a quiet achiever when it comes to all things thought leadership. The problem I believe is in what we do with that! We sometimes fall short in how we take these innovations to the rest of the world. I think there's an opportunity for Kiwis to harness thought leadership in a more purposeful way.

Suzi McAlpine

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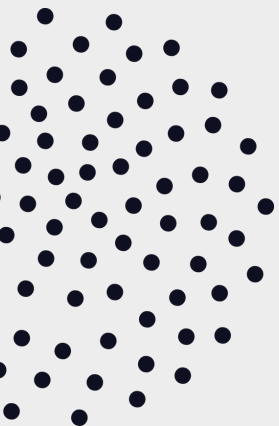
# Manaakitanga | Generosity

Thought leaders believe in 'better'. They don't believe in doing the same thing they've always done. They peer around corners, look for weaknesses that need to be improved, and challenge assumptions.

Then, they generously share their findings, expertise, and ideas in a way that allows other people to find insights and learn from them. Thought leadership isn't about 'me, me, me'... it's about giving thoughts and ideas freely to those you're here to serve.

Kiwis' natural instinct for generosity bodes well with the spirit that's required for thought leadership. As New Zealanders, we share knowledge not because we want to be well-known, but because we know it's the right thing to do.

We look out for our mates, and give without any expectation of return. We may sense that it'll do us some good in the long run, but really we're just keen to have helped or contributed to making something better for someone. The same goes for thought leadership.



# Mana Tangata | Status accrued through one's leadership

In New Zealand, we believe in earned leadership. We lift up and champion the people who have walked the walk and proven their ideas.

In general, that's a good thing – we bring a healthy scepticism and don't suffer fools easily. Our thought leaders are no different. We want to hear from the experts who truly know their stuff, who've lived the experiences and who have earned their authority by being able to back up what they say.

We're lucky in that there are plenty of people here who are experts. They have proven time and again that their thinking has merits and their ideas work. Yet so often, they're doing so quietly. Many of those with the most incredible and well-proven ideas don't share them – because they worry about putting themselves forward.



Why? Tall poppy syndrome is, sadly, still alive and well. If we want Kiwi thought leaders to succeed, we have to be willing to put ourselves out there – and not tear down those sharing new ideas. We need to empower people to share their thoughts and creativity, and support those who do take a leap faith in doing so.

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New Zealanders are still too afraid to take a leadership position because of our tall poppy syndrome. We're scared to put our heads up in case they get lobbed off!

Simon Mundell

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## Pono | Honesty

Kiwis tend to be fairly direct – and the best thought leaders are those who aren't afraid to pull any punches.

Of course, that doesn't mean being a d\*\*k – but it does mean calling out things that are being done inefficiently, or things that are harming people or our planet. If thought leaders really want to make Aotearoa (and the rest of the world) a better place, they have to be willing and unafraid to stand up to existing narratives, or to challenge those spreading outdated ideas that might be harmful as we're evolving.

It's scary sometimes. To go against the norm is an intimidating prospect – but if you've got the thinking, conviction, and experience behind your idea, you've got a duty to share it.

What's more, thought leaders need to be open and honest about where their ideas are coming from – because no person is an island! Being transparent around whose thinking contributed to their own and which parts were of their own invention is part of the honesty and humility us Kiwis do well. Our thinking is often an accumulation of lots that we've observed over the years, and we may not be able to recall everything. However, it's important to reflect on this as possible and to give credit where credit is due.

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# Kanorau | Diversity



We live in one of the most diverse nations in the world – and that diversity is the key to building true Kiwi thought leadership.

Have you ever been in a meeting room trying to solve a problem and fallen prey to ‘group think’? One person comes up with an idea and everyone else jumps on the bandwagon – going along with it without considering whether it’s the best solution? That’s group think – and it leads to many not-so-great outcomes!

Aotearoa is full of diverse people – so why are we still not hearing all voices?

Diversity of thought is vital to finding innovative solutions to problems. So it’s just as vital in thought leadership and the sharing of excellent ideas and insights. It’s time that we brought a diverse range of people – and ideas – to the table.

Whether that's bouncing ideas around with someone who has a very different background to you, or ensuring that you're promoting the voices of other diverse thinkers, there are steps we can all take to empower and promote diverse thinking.

All New Zealanders bring different kaupapa – policies – to the table, but we're all engaged in the kaupapa of strengthening New Zealand on the world map and making Aotearoa – and the world – better. It's time we brought our kaupapa to thought leadership.

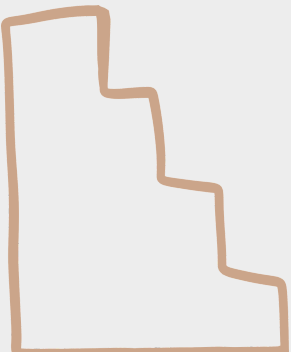
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For me a thought leader has an area of expertise and an articulated point of view on that area – but they also listen to others, and are constantly learning about their industry.

Mark Hayes

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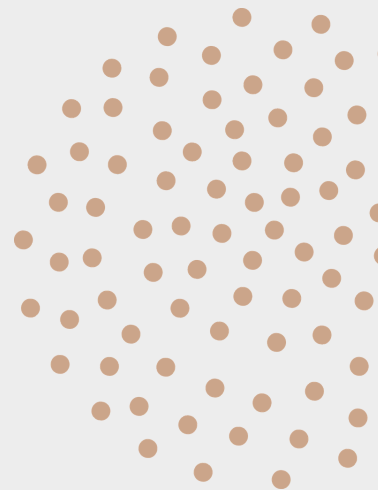


# Māhaki | Humility & humbleness

A thought leader can never know everything. Nor do they need to. In fact, it would be boring if they did.

Thought leaders accept a special kind of responsibility for their ideas and present them as the results of their experience, their research, and their robust thinking. They share their ideas in a way that can be both understood, and be open for critique and response.

It's important to be invested in your own ideas, of course. But there lies a balance.



A thought leader is also open to discussion. Whether openly asking for feedback, testing their thinking as it's forming and engaging in respectful debate, a true thought leader wants conversation to be happening around their ideas – even if that can be confronting.

It's scary to be disagreed with, to be proven wrong. As a result, we often feel like we know less. In actual fact, we know more – much more. It's only by discussing your ideas in the open, hearing other's opinions, and addressing people's critiques that you'll truly strengthen your thought leadership position. It is in conversation that you deepen your thinking, enrich your experience, and evolve your ideas.

“An unintended and surprising benefit of this thought leadership approach is that it has forced me to deepen my learning and round out my own thinking on the leadership topics I talk about - always a good thing!”

Suzi McAlpine

# Thoughts on the future of Kiwi thought leadership

When we think of our vision for Kiwi thought leadership in three years' time, there are a few things we see...

We see more Kiwi thought leaders on the global stage. We see Kiwis punching above our weight and defying the constraints of geographical barriers that sometimes hold us back. We see people respecting us for it – people saying “Damn, those Kiwis have some good ideas!”.

We see more Kiwis realising that their thinking, and that of others, has unbelievable value. We see people getting involved in the business of ideas, the trading of thought and insights.

But how can that vision for thought leadership here in New Zealand be achieved?

It starts with getting Kiwis comfortable with thought leadership. It involves educating people to get rid of the 'ick' around thought leadership as a content marketing buzz word, or an exercise in puffery, and to truly understand its impact.

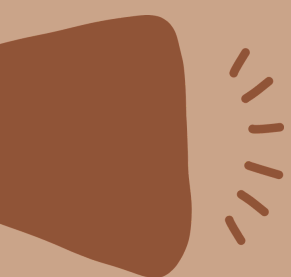
It's hard for businesses to invest in thought leadership when they can't see a measurable advantage. When the impact of thought leadership is mostly intangible, it's a hard sell.

There needs to be a big change in the way we value ideas and thinking. We need to start taking thinking seriously, and holding it in higher stead in the strategic direction of organisations. Thinking and ideas are what

separate businesses, and what truly elevates people's impact above the rest.

At Intelligent Ink, we're staking a claim in Kiwi thought leadership – and we're looking for some awesome people to join us. Whether you – or someone you admire – wants to be part of our thought leadership community, figure out your own thought leadership positioning and toolkit, or support other thought leaders; we'd love to have you along.

**Get in touch, and let's start sharing and empowering great thinking and ideas.**



# From the authors

Better content. Better conversations in the market.  
Better authority in your industry.

At Intelligent Ink, we develop and leverage our clients' expertise into exceptional thought leadership that sees them recognised as the leaders of their fields.

For over a decade, we have been working with businesses, brands, and champions of industry who, like us, believe in better. We'd love to see New Zealand punching above our weight in the thought leadership sphere – because we know that Kiwis have the ideas, skills and passion to do so.