

# Vital role for agents as new TNZ boss ramps up digital marketing

Lee Mylne\* reports from the 2010 Tourism Rendezvous New Zealand (TRENZ) in Auckland last month.

DIGITAL marketing and social media will become a major focus for Tourism New Zealand under the leadership of new chief executive Kevin Bowler. Bowler, who comes from a background in marketing and online telecommunications, says he is keen to look at how the organisation can get in better touch with the industry.

Before joining Tourism New Zealand in January, Bowler was chief executive of Yahoo!Xtra, and had spent several years with telecoms giant Telecom, heading the consumer marketing division.

It is the first time in a decade the peak tourism body has had a new boss. Bowler replaces George Hickton, who was responsible for the long-running and hugely successful 100% Pure campaign.

"I think that the world of digital marketing is a massive revolution in marketing," said Bowler, calling it "a great opportunity" for New Zealand.

He said digital marketing and social networking provide a cost-effective and more measurable way of helping New Zealand market itself as a specialist and niche brand.

**'We still think the travel trade is very important. People do a lot of research online but then still want to talk to someone and buy product – anything more than air fares – as they have done before.'**

"Digital marketing and social media will become major marketing tools in all our markets, though we will use more traditional campaigns in countries like Australia where we have the budget to make that kind of marketing work.

"But even in Australia, digital will be a core part of our communications plan," he said.

Tourism New Zealand's marketing budget for Australia has been increased by \$NZ5 million this year, to be

spent on partnership programs with regional tourism organisations (RTO). Partnership projects will be matched dollar-for-dollar by the RTO, to spend \$NZ10 million in the Australian market.

Australian visitor arrivals for February, March and April have increased by 21,500 or 8.1 per cent compared with the same months last year.

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Bowler said that although Australia remained the largest and most important market for New Zealand, Tourism New Zealand needs to "spread its risk much more widely".

"We need America and parts of Asia to grow and we need to re-ignite long-haul markets," he said.

Detailed visitor research in six markets – Australia, the UK, Germany, the US, Japan and China – has given Tourism New Zealand insights to help develop strategies on how to

communicate with potential travellers. The research, to be completed later this year, will form the basis of campaign work in those markets.

Bowler said the 100% Pure New Zealand brand will remain as Tourism New Zealand's main brand, but potential visitors will be contacted more directly through digital marketing and social media.

He said the Tourism New Zealand Facebook page has 130,000 fans and the goal is to "massively grow" the fan base to one million.

That online following translates to bookings in the same way that television advertising does, he said, but travellers today are "looking to others" for word of mouth recommendations and advice.

"This is not about selling online," he said. "We still think the travel trade is very important to us and people do a lot of research online but then still want to talk to someone and buy product – anything more than airfares – as they have done before."

\*Lee Mylne attended TRENZ 2010 as a guest of Tourism New Zealand

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