

The best of both worlds

Interview Louise Lawton

When Reuben and Miriama Reid left Auckland and took their graphic design business, 360 Degrees, to Napier three years ago, they took many of their clients with them to work by remote. So how's it going?

Was the decision to move to Napier based on the fact that broadband makes it feasible to work out of town?

Reuben: Actually it was more of a lifestyle and family decision... We focused our attention primarily on website design and development services, and referred a good majority of our print based clients on to other companies.

Miriama: The decision was a family initiated move that was made possible by the fact that broadband gave us the flexibility to do so. I needed to move back to my iwi stomping ground and Napier was the closest, economically viable city to Mahia that allowed us to still travel regularly to Auckland with ease.

Were your clients happy to continue to work with you remotely? And how do you find managing clients long distance?

Reuben: Yes, the majority of them were more than happy to continue to work with us. A few were even envious of our position.

Managing clients from a distance isn't a problem. I've become the king of email-based project management and once a month I travel to Auckland to do face-to-face meetings, this has proved invaluable in building good long-term client relationships, and to kick off new projects. The other advantage is that we sub-contract our services to design, advertising and PR companies where a lot of the CRM work is already done.

Miriama: We had a few clients drop off – more so the ones who didn't really understand how much we can work with broadband really. As always there were the critics who thought it was too much of a risk in business but the majority were positive and we're still enjoying working together today with them.

Long distance management has actually meant our hours in the office are far more productive as all our meetings are conducted once a month and the other three weeks are head down, bum up delivering flat out without interruption. We still work with our main subbies in Auckland so our team are all very used to working via chat, phone and video conference.

What about new business?

Miriama: Word of mouth has always been our way. In a small centre it spreads quicker and in Auckland referrals via clients bring in quite a variety of work. It has only been recently that we've looked into the local market and we're enjoying the people we meet and relaxed style of business they bring.

What is the major bonus of working/living in a small town?

Reuben: The relaxed, friendly lifestyle and cost of living. We can park right outside most shops, only 20c for a half hour of parking. We don't have to contend with rush hour traffic. Seeing people you know around town during your work day, stopping randomly to catch up for coffee, and getting a smile from people in the street... Oh and the diving, anyone for a fresh crayfish or paua fritters?

Miriama: First and foremost I would say family life is better for us than we could have hoped for in

Auckland. Reubs came home every day for lunch when our son was a baby – a quick five mins (or one ipod soundtrack) bike ride. The cost of living is lower which allowed me to spend more time on maternity leave as well... We can pop out to the bach for weekends and have our entire beach to ourselves and a cray on the table for dinner with a nice local chardonnay. I think a balance of lifestyle and work is essential – what's the point of huge hours and massive stress that only leads to missing out on the years where your children are developing and changing everyday. Get the right balance and it reflects back in your creativity, enthusiasm and passion for what you achieve in business and life.

The cost of real estate has allowed us to own our office, a lifestyle block and build a bach all for less than a small home on a small section in say Sandringham, Kingsland and just forget about Mt Eden, where we were based.

Last words?

Reuben: No regrets, life is much better for us living in Napier, we get the best of both worlds and we're loving it.

Miriama: It was the best decision we could have made... From a Maori perspective, a sense of self both culturally and creatively comes easier on home ground I think (probably because I was lucky enough to grow up on my whanau land). Technology now allows us to work with ease on both national and international clients.

And as soon as we sort our satellite dish on the bach, who knows where the next video conference will come from? I'll just make sure Reub is out of his dive suit before he sits in front of his screen! **pd**

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