

What we've learned at Waiariki Institute of Technology.



These days we're accustomed to our public institutions behaving more like businesses, but Waiariki Institute of Technology in Rotorua faces challenges that few commercial enterprises would recognise. As a tertiary education facility it is one of the largest provincial tertiary institutes in New Zealand and services a scattered, sometimes remote population around the Bay of Plenty. It is spread over four regions in the central North Island - Taupo, Tokoroa, Rotorua and Whakatane. The largest campus is in Rotorua.

Waiariki needs technology to help face those challenges. TelstraClear is the Institute's fixed line and mobility communications partner with an additional focus on data and internet services. The size of the challenge we face has meant that we've become involved in the business at a fundamental level.

Remote learning can mean just that

They teach the equivalent of 2862 full-time students, but this actually represents over 9000 different individuals taking courses. Many of those people come from the regions' remote rural areas surrounding each campus, from small communities that suffer from lower socio-economic circumstance and successive generations of unemployment. For them, the idea of attending a university or a technical institute can be thoroughly intimidating.

The solution is to find ways to bring education to them, even though the obvious channel of broadband internet is typically unaffordable and, in many cases, logistically impossible. To make life more complicated, everything has to be achieved on a shoestring budget.

- Client:** Waiariki Institute of Technology
- Business:** Tertiary education facility based in Rotorua.
- Problem:** Keeping five campuses and 9000 students in contact with each other in some of the more distant parts of the North Island.
- Solution:** Understanding a business brief and finding the best affordable mobile and fixed-line solutions.
- Outcome:** Communities are brought into the tertiary education system for the first time.



We had to become a part of our client's business

Waiariki doesn't have the resources to employ a large team of information technology experts. To get the kind of expertise he needs, Information Director Ian Blackburn has established close relationships with key technology partners, including TelstraClear.

Each company is expected to become a vital part of Waiariki's Information Directorate team. When Ian talks to TelstraClear, business objectives are the primary focus of the conversation. We take those business objectives on board and make technological recommendations based on our understanding of Waiariki's aims and the financial constraints they face.

Finding the technology that will do the job

TelstraClear won the tender for Waiariki in 1998. When Ian took up his job there in 2001 he began working with us toward building a fully scalable, technically efficient system that would be in operation by 2006.

Waiariki's technology solutions need to be creative. For example, although penetration of computers and internet access falls off drastically in some communities, almost everyone has a mobile phone. Open Source Virtual Learning in Wellington has developed basic question and answer educational content that Waiariki will use to text via mobiles to students. The technique has proven highly effective elsewhere and it is just this type of technology that Waiariki needs to integrate into its business.

A commitment to the community is vital

The struggle to draw new communities into the education system is not an easy one, but fortunately there are allies. Waiariki is engaged in a technological alliance with five other regional tertiary facilities that will offer substantial efficiencies for all the participants. In addition, the Rotorua ICT Trust was formed with the goal of increasing community access to information technology, allowing people to take advantage of services like those Waiariki offers.

Here at TelstraClear we've recognised the role we have to play. Ian comments: "When you're working in the regions, you don't have many places to hide if something goes wrong or you let someone down. So in a town like Rotorua only so many suppliers will make a commitment to being there on the ground. TelstraClear has demonstrated that commitment, and that's one of the reasons we like working with them."



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