

Case study: Keeping lines of communication open in New Zealand



Figure 3.12: Auckland's 'Papatūānuku is breathing' campaign (courtesy of ATEED)

One organization that was very proactive in communicating to all of its stakeholders during the COVID-19 crisis was Auckland Tourism, Events and Economic Development (ATEED). ATEED is the region's economic development agency, and during the lockdown period it hit the headlines after producing an inspirational video. The video, *Papatūānuku is breathing*, was narrated by 11-year-old Manawanui Makiapoto Mills and began by panning across Kariotahi Beach on Auckland's west coast. "Stop. Listen. Papatūānuku, the earth mother, is breathing. Tāmaki Makaurau, Auckland. Still," Mills says. The video ends with: "And when the time is right, we welcome you. But for now, listen. Papatūānuku is breathing." Aware that other destinations around the world had created showcase videos amid the COVID-19 crisis, ATEED wanted to come up with something that was uniquely Auckland.

Papatūānuku is breathing went viral around the world. Within three weeks, it had been translated into seven languages by inspired viewers and had been viewed more than a million times on Visit Auckland's social media channels alone. "We are proud of the positive feedback that we have received about our video. That will provide us with inspiration as we move more purposefully alongside our tourism industry towards recovery," said Steve Armitage, ATEED's General Manager (Doyle, 2020). "We are grateful to all those who collaborated with us on this very special project and gifted us the use of their material." Mayor Phil Goff said the video was an inspiring portrayal of Auckland's beautiful natural environment. "As we all play our part in the fight against COVID-19 by staying home and staying local, *Papatūānuku is breathing* is a heartening glimpse of what we have to look forward to when the lockdown is lifted and a showcase of what our city has to offer," he said.

To leverage the success of the video, the team used user generated content (UGC) and excerpts from the *Papatūānuku is breathing* script to carry the sentiment through their social media posts. But producing this video was only one part of ATEED's communications strategy during the COVID-19 outbreak. For up to date information on COVID-19 related subjects, ATEED posted a temporary page banner on its homepage called 'Tamaki Makaurau Auckland – COVID-19 updates' and provided up to date news articles on its 'Latest News' link. The organization was also very active on social media, posting regularly on Facebook, YouTube, LinkedIn and Instagram. Weekly email updates to thousands of Auckland businesses alerted them to practical support available from regional and national sources, and highlighting updates to the resources page.

During the crisis, ATEED surveyed businesses to gauge how the initial response to COVID-19 was affecting them and how they were reacting. Financial and cash flow management advice and business strategy and planning were the top types of support Auckland businesses wanted as the response to COVID-19 ramped up. Increased digital marketing and social media capability and help targeting new markets, with a focus on local and domestic customers, were also high on the list. ATEED used insights gained from the survey to shape the business support it provided, to ensure it was delivering information and resources local businesses wanted. A new resources webpage, informed by the survey response, collated useful tools and information to help businesses of all sizes through the crisis. This page was being updated regularly.

ATEED also reached out to small and medium-sized businesses offering a free online tool to help them boost their digital know-how, including guidance on remote working, e-commerce, and increasing their online presence to make it easier for customers to find them. The tool was developed in partnership with social enterprise Digital Journey. "Our small to medium enterprises are a key part of the region's economy and employment," said Mayor Phil Goff. "This online tool will provide practical assistance to businesses looking to adapt to the new realities of working under the COVID-19 alert system, which in many cases will require rapid adoption of digital and online technologies."

Finally, ATEED partnered with the Employers' & Manufacturers' Association (EMA), and the Regional Business Partner Network to launch a free web series to help all businesses get through the COVID-19 pandemic and beyond. The combination of videos and live webinars covered topics such as mental well-being for employers, retention and redeployment, employee leave and payroll. Each week, three 20-minute sessions were added to the series on the topics that businesses were most asking about. As an outcome of all these initiatives, community engagement was very positive. In its first week, 427 businesses used the digital assessment tool, completing assessments and getting customized action plans. This exceeded its aim of 400 businesses over three months, which was the project target set pre-COVID-19.