

FEDERATION.

CHANGE AGENTS

Change is constant, so collaboration must be at the centre for an agency and its clients. **Federation** explores the need for seamless understanding when it comes to transforming a brand and communication.

Q Mastercard's new brand character has driven a major step-change in brand love and audience engagement at a time when competitors are aligning with traditional financial services metaphors.

“People usually come to us when they have a complex problem or a business opportunity that needs lateral, category-challenging thinking,” says Sharon Henderson, founder and managing director of established, independent agency, Federation, a creative, data and technology agency built to inspire brand growth and customer engagement.

“Often, there's something they want to change and they look to us to make a significant impact on their business, typically sharing some hefty goals or targets to deliver on - right up front.” Far from feeling daunted, Henderson says, “we thrive under that kind of pressure. It challenges

us to approach everything with a transformative mindset that focuses on the end game.”

Inside-out brand transformation. Customer engagement. New product or category launches. New customer acquisition models. Audience behaviour change. Whatever it is, clients who approach Federation are typically seeking a fresh, innovative response to their brief from a marketing agency partner that's able to seamlessly integrate every brand and customer touchpoint to fully optimise the opportunity.

Henderson says, “We live in a world where accelerating change is the only real constant. There is something very

‘Star Trekian’ in how we work now.

It demands that as an agency we explore strange new worlds, seeking out new life in existing customers as well as new audiences, with the imperative of boldly going where the brand or product hasn't gone before.

“Stepping away from the siloed traditional agency network model over ten years ago means Federation started ahead of the curve, an outlier with agile-thinking and lean-business modelling deeply imbedded in its DNA from the outset. We have changed constantly as an agency and quickly too, whenever we've seen new trends and tipping points emerging.”

The need for that level of ambidexterity is she says, omnipresent. “Where once the tried and true offered marketers security, there is now a real risk in moving too slowly. Boards, shareholders and consumers have bigger expectations and less patience. More and more New Zealand CEO's and their marketers are seeking rapid innovation that builds new products or even entire new categories - comparatively overnight, and from entirely different marketing and agency cost models.”

Federation has worked extensively with both ASX and NZX listed organisations in exactly this way, creating brand relaunches, marketing campaign step-changes or even agile-based customer acquisition engines, often designed to drive annual growth of 20 percent or more that can be reported back to the market.

“We've seen a widening of our role as a creative agency partner which frequently shifts us into business consultancy too. It's all about the potency of ideas that are transformative by nature. Real ideas make lasting impressions and deliver success for our clients. It's what we love doing and why we exist - to create, execute and deliver real ideas, underpinned by true strategic depth.”

“We make it our business to know our clients' business inside out no matter what the industry - financial services, tourism, airline, agribusiness, FMCG, utilities, manufacturing, public service, not-for-profit. We constantly build our institutional knowledge and learnings and use them almost as compounding interest by marrying them up with step-change strategies that create genuine year-on-year growth.

“We're always aiming for transformative results, rather than just shifting the needle



a notch or finding a way to cut \$100 out of a creative process. Real ideas make lasting impressions, deliver authentic, long term success for our clients and we firmly believe that's where the real value in our agency/client partnerships lie.” she says.

She cites one recent programme of work for Flexigroup, which helped to grow their marketshare by 11 percent against the cards category which grew by only two percent while growing the customer base by an additional 50,000 customers in one year. Brand ideas like the launch of Qubee have contributed too. This big, pink furry fictional character has generated cut-through and brand love at a time when competitors in the category, and other brands outside the category, tend to align with traditional financial services or corporate

brand metaphors. Flying against the tide and celebrating ‘Q-uniqueness’ Qubee has very successfully tapped into an emotional connection between brand and customer. The character development was the result of a highly successful collaboration between Federation, Flexigroup and long-time agency production partner, Toybox.

Henderson says Federation has one, unified planning model from which it devises business-changing strategy, creating and producing end to end campaigns and customer journeys that leave nothing on the table. “We invent, cross-pollinate and ▶

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Right: OOH campaign for Elemental Festival AKL, Auckland Transport One by One behaviour change campaign
Below: Auckland Council's long term plan consultation with Auckland



Left: Samoa Tourism
Below: Sharon Henderson, founder and managing director of Federation



Henderson says, 'For a brief like this, it's critical to respect and connect with New Zealand's diverse cultures. That means understanding both ethnicity-based and regional differences, as well as attitudes to individualism and collectivism; and the relationship between human beings, self, society and nature. She says, "the results are something our whole working group were very proud of, with nearly triple the number of submissions from Auckland's Maori and Asian communities.'

In February this year, Federation also launched one of the most important behaviour change strategies for Auckland drivers in recent times with the roll out of the global mission of Vision Zero, the globally supported, ethics-based transport safety approach, (originally developed in Sweden in the late 1990s), that aspires to a New Zealand where no one is killed or seriously injured in road crashes. Working with behavioural science specialists and Auckland Transport, the agency's planners and creative directors are influencing the social and personal norms of New Zealanders and how the cultural context of shared values can positively impact their driving beliefs and behaviours.

Henderson says that global clients are also seeing network and distance as increasingly irrelevant. Federation recently created and delivered a global campaign into 52 markets, knocking out international network agencies

for the campaign project. Its own team is a local and global United Nations of talent, with multi-discipline, multi-industry expertise, from brand development through to human insights, digital innovation and data-driven CLM automation in financial services, retail, tourism, FMCG, not for profit, technology, agribusiness, utility.

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Henderson likens the Adlandia debate on New Zealand independent vs networked agency to the gender debate in the agency industry. The value of women in business and especially the agency business is unquestionable and our industry still needs to put more women in true leadership roles.

She insists there's no longer a 'glass ceiling' for 100 percent New Zealand agencies either.

We have come of age and live in a global digital economy. Candidates for a client's marketing business are now generally being considered for the role based on their inherent personality fit with a client's organisational culture and brand, their experience, skills, and the strategic business value they're able to deliver. It shouldn't be based on an archaic roll call of global network execs that rarely front up, or vanish when the proverbial hits the fan.

"What really matters is the partnership you can rely on at all times and especially the tough ones. By nature of their own structure, New Zealand's independent agencies have a unique resilience. These are the people who will fight in the trenches with you when you need them to, living and breathing your business goals to make sure you win. As a 100 percent New Zealand agency, Federation feels a deep duty of care to its clients and their business. □

Sharon Henderson is managing director of Federation and vice president board member of Variety, the Children's Charity. Contact her at sharonh@federation.net.nz



knowledge transfer between products, categories and industries. And just as our name suggests, we bring a Federation of specialist experts into the mix."

It's critical to recognise that clients have leaner marketing departments than ever, with increased financial targets and greater responsibilities right across their business. At the same time, the ever-increasing complexity and choice of marketing and media channels means there's a lot more moving parts. Complicating everything ever further is the importance and reliance we all now have on data and insight.

Henderson says it's why Federation has made itself renowned as collaborators. "There's an easy, respectful relationship with our specialist partners that lets great ideas grow organically and we're really proud of what we achieve together. Our relationships and ability to include innovative specialists is a proven hallmark of our ideation process that our clients trust implicitly. There's lots of buzz about 'integrated thinking', and in a digital world it is incredibly important,

but there is a lot more to it than just ticking boxes on a media schedule; you need to work with people who can see the big picture, add to the process, with a real interest in coming up with the best possible solutions to a business challenge - whether it falls into their specialist remit or not."

As the only NZ independent agency to be appointed to the Auckland Council Group roster alongside Ogilvy and Colenso, Federation won the challenge of delivering to the intercultural communication objectives of Auckland Council's Long Term Plan consultation. This brief to consult Aucklanders was about the next 30 years, and specifically, the 30 days of March. This was an opportunity for Aucklanders to 'have their say' on the Long Term Plan for Auckland over 30 days of submissions.

Federation created a single, unifying rallying cry for the campaign - AK HAVE YOUR SAY, together with a design and communications framework that allowed the campaign to be individualised and personalised to key audiences.