

Getting an edge

Cathy Heath is just the type of person we need more of in Hawke's Bay. Her business is her brain. Her product: intelligence. Her footprint: small. Her income: big city.

Cathy is a marketing insights researcher. Asked if she is a spy, she agrees she is, sort of: "But I don't go through rubbish bins!"

Tucked up the back of Onekawa, Heath Research Services has clients all over New Zealand. Eight years she has been working from Hawke's Bay (after a move from Auckland) and only a handful of jobs have come from local businesses.

The majority of her clients are medium to large businesses who are looking to grow, predominantly into new markets with new products. Cathy is the research arm of the R&D we know is key to the future growth of New Zealand's economy.

Her work includes competitor intelligence, consumer gap analysis, and geo-specific purchasing habits.

"A lot of it is psychology – what motivates consumers," she says. Research



will often include specifics like portion sizing, packaging, how a product is used, even what flavour is most popular in a particular location.

"It's about seeing what is out there and using that knowledge to benefit NZ."

Cathy gives an example of how New Zealand has to stay on its toes, even in areas where traditionally we've had an edge.

"Australia is looking to diversify, and agribusiness and food processing offer economic growth. We have a target on our backs and we need to protect our market share by being smart and acting fast," Cathy says.

Sometimes clients come to her with a good idea, but they are often years too late. Technology and trends have moved on.

"It's better to spend money on research first, because exporting is very expensive and unless you know there is a market for it, don't do it. People can get so invested in their business idea that they really need to take a reality check, and that's what I help with." Through Cathy's research, clients can make decisions based on intelligence and facts rather than gut instinct.

"It's really worthwhile work, it's got rigour behind it," she explains.