



THE UPDATE

Captain's Blog

Market perceptions of New Zealand in a COVID-world

New Zealand Story has just released a comprehensive report on how the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted perceptions of New Zealand amongst our key trading markets.

The researchers completed online consumer focus groups and business interviews in Australia, China, the United States, the United Kingdom and Germany, with all participants active consumers or buyers of New Zealand products, mostly food and beverage.

Interestingly, while there have been some common themes in how countries reacted to the pandemic, there has not been a single unified response. Of the five countries, all except Germany saw a shift to national protectionism and all countries except the United States switched to a 'collective good' attitude as opposed to individual freedoms.

The world view of New Zealand changed from 'that place with the great scenery where Lord of the Rings was filmed' to an increased awareness that New Zealand was effective in dealing with COVID-19. Our government's response to the pandemic was seen as uniting rather than dividing.

In other words, we were different, and we were desirable.

While New Zealand followed most of the rest of the world in choosing protectionism over global teamwork, and the collective good over individual freedoms, where we differed was by choosing what was good for humanity over what was good for the economy.

The study's authors say that story of a united people who care about others is a unique story that we should use to our advantage when marketing.

They also say that selling our products by focusing solely on the environment is no longer good enough. A pristine landscape is not unique to us. It is used by marketers in equally beautiful countries such as Sweden, Norway and Iceland.

What was important to those surveyed was integrity, ingenuity, and increasingly our culture. Knowledge of the Maori culture is growing in the US and the UK and already strong in Germany and China.

We have the attention of the world through our COVID response and our status is not currently impacting on global food safety perceptions so now is the time to take advantage of that.

Global consumers and buyers of New Zealand food and beverage want the 'local' accentuated, whether that be an emphasis on family-owned businesses or carefully sourced ingredients.

The study showed an increase in consumer awareness of health and said we should focus our efforts on our low input methods of growing and producing. Few products are better placed than seafood in this respect.

And online buying is here to stay. Consumers forced to purchase online because of the pandemic are unlikely to change this habit in a COVID-free environment.

The key country-by-country take outs of the study varied. For the UK, maintaining a focus on quality to make it easier for consumers to accept New Zealand's price premium was deemed critical.

In Australia, the handling of the COVID crisis has seen the perception of New Zealand as a little cousin shifting to become more of an equal sibling. The rivalry is changing to being one of a collective force.

In the United States, New Zealand, which was always seen as desirable, has just become more desirable. They see us as having authentic leadership and as a safe global haven.

And in China, they see us as reliable, dependable and safe. They are also looking for support at a time when others are increasingly negative. The study suggests trading on trust, rather than scale is the key – as is building relationships with end consumers.

The study concludes that we need to recognise our global audience no longer think the way they used to.

New Zealand's handling of COVID-19 has made the world reassess who we are as a nation. It has also seen us gain an identity that is different from Australia's, and it has seen the country viewed as compassionate and caring through its leadership.

It has also made our remoteness an asset, not a liability, and safety in primary produce is a powerful marketing tool.

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CONTACT

Email info@seafood.org.nz

Phone [+64 4 385 4005](tel:+6443854005)

Physical address

Level 6

Eagle Technology House

135 Victoria Street

Wellington 6011

New Zealand