

Virtual Incredible Science Day at the University of Auckland Extending Our Brand

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***Linda Thompson** has worked at The University of Auckland for nine years. Her current role is Faculty Manager for the Faculty of Science, one of the largest and most complex faculties in The University. In New Zealand, Linda has worked in both the public sector as a secondary school teacher and in the tertiary environment - and in the private sector - in Finance and PR. Her Finance career began in Germany. Linda's diverse experience provides an excellent background for working in the tertiary sector, particularly in a role of such breadth as Faculty Manager.*

***Rebekah Holmes** has worked at The University of Auckland for almost four years, as the Marketing Adviser for the Faculty of Science. Before joining the University, Rebekah worked in the corporate sector specialising in marketing communications. She has experience in a number of industries, including public service, finance and property. Rebekah's keen interest in multimedia solutions and branding has been fostered and expanded in her marketing role at the University.*

Virtual Incredible Science Day is an innovative, contemporary and highly efficient mechanism in establishing new relationships with our communities. It provides the platform to reach communities nationally, enhancing the brand and positively promoting science and The University of Auckland. Partly in response to resource limitations, and partly in response to leveraging on new teaching technologies, this event enabled an important connection with remote parts of New Zealand and extended the event's focus beyond Auckland based students.

Over the last years, recent market research has provided data suggesting that national communities outside of the greater Auckland area have a very limited and somewhat disaffected view of The University of Auckland. Numbers revealed that Auckland had less of the national market share of students outside the specific local area compared to other universities in New Zealand. Aiming at year seven and eight students, Virtual Incredible Science Day is an attempt to introduce the university to distant communities and to build a working learning relationship. For many of these communities, this event would have been the first awareness of Science at The University of Auckland. As a faculty, we were able to promote our science and staff to teachers, parents and young prospective students, as well as provide the opportunity for continued engagement with the University.

Virtual Incredible Science Day is primarily a web-based activity. The generation of young people currently in our schools use web-based tools to interact with their world. The event provides the opportunity for a learning experience using a channel new generations prefer and introduces them to a new outside world. The potential for development and the range of interactive activities is endless. Virtual Incredible Science Day has determined a new, less labour intensive way for the Faculty of Science to engage with the community.

Virtual Incredible Science Day was by no means the first or only attempt at The University of Auckland to connect with targeted communities via the web. The distinction lies in the promotion and delivery as a finite event with interactive activities and live shows taking place over three days only. It is an excellent way to develop and market a brand. In the inaugural year, over 800 classrooms throughout New Zealand participated. We were able to showcase The University as a fun-based, innovative, student-friendly environment dedicated to the education of young people and striving for excellence.

This presentation will describe the background to Virtual Incredible Science Day, exploring purpose and desired benefits in terms of innovative developments, branding, community engagement and efficient use of resources. The framework and methodology of the event will be explained looking at delivery and outcomes. Finally, best practice and "where to next" will be discussed with a view to informed discourse.