

What do you stand for?

Supporting social causes once used to be on the periphery of business dialogue. It's now centre-stage says CEO of Robinhood Foundation.

Four years ago, Jude Mannion said goodbye to a glittering corporate life. With a team of like-minded business professionals, she bravely set about launching the Robinhood Foundation (www.robinhood.org.nz) – a unique foundation that helps businesses do the right thing from a social perspective. Today, the company boasts over 40 business partners and a large network of media owners – all of whom share the aim of making a positive contribution to society.

Jude, a Takapuna resident, has held senior international roles for huge global brands such as Kelloggs and Elizabeth Arden.

"During this time, I'd noticed that American companies seemed more grown up when it came to developing social partnerships. Back home in NZ, I was struck by how differently non-profit sectors and businesses were communicating with each other," says Jude.

"I could see that if these two sectors could learn to talk to each other, then what a powerful thing it would be: business could stand for something more than the bottom line, but also, business could help non-profit groups with more than just a cheque – with their brains! Think how valuable that is to get both groups around a table saying how we can solve this."

World-first research developed on the Shore

One of Robinhood's first clients was AC Nielsen – a global leader in market research with offices based on the Shore. "Together, we worked out what the business stands for i.e. why it exists – not what it does. In their case, it was 'to give businesses what they need to make the right decisions,'" explains Jude. This clear definition enabled AC Nielsen to utilise their expertise to help social causes. As a result, AC Nielsen undertook world-first research that explored whether it's good for business to be seen

to back a social cause. Jude continues, "Up until that point, most social research was intentional research i.e. instead of asking 'Would you buy this brand of coffee if it stands for something?' ask,

"Have you bought this brand of coffee because it stands for something?" The results were amazing: "Six out of ten of us have. We do give a damn!"

"The research was immensely powerful, not touchy feely stuff. It shows that consumers prefer to do business with you if you stand for something socially rather than stand for nothing," states Jude.

So far, 80% of Robinhood's business partners are global companies – many of whom are sharing what they're innovating here in NZ with their offshore branches. "Across the world, the head offices of some of the world's biggest brands are using this unprecedented social research."

Greater resonance for SMEs

Adopting this fresh stance in business offers tangible, measurable benefits – particularly for smaller businesses according to Jude. "Companies are forever trying to express their point of difference. Showing your support for a social cause is a cost-effective and highly distinct way of doing this – particularly for smaller businesses who rely heavily on reputation and typically don't have large advertising budgets," explains Jude. "Let's say you're a furniture manufacturer on the



"You don't have to be a big fancy corporate to make a social difference," says Jude Mannion, CEO, Robinhood Foundation.

“ Research shows that customers prefer to do business with you if you stand for something socially, rather than standing for nothing at all. ”



Half of the Robinhood Foundation board reside on the Shore.

Back row (L-R): Nick Jones, Nick Jones Research; Jane Drumm, Executive Director, Domestic Violence Centre; Jane Sweeney, CEO, Porter Novelli NZ Ltd; Jude Mannion, CEO, Robinhood Foundation; Lynley Kirk Smith, Marketing Consultant;

Second row (L-R): Alison Sykora, Regional Corporate Affairs Manager, Coca-Cola; Sharon Hunter, Director, Hunter Powell Investments; Sandra King, Group Sales & Marketing Manager, Fairfax NZ Ltd;

Front row (L-R): Alison Roe MBE, Director, Alro Events Ltd; Gary Browne, CEO, Omni Group.

Shore, competing with lots of other big brands. You're thinking, 'who can we help? Well, we could put our furniture into Women's Refuges by donating one bed for every six we sell.' Or you're an accountant. Why not help a non-profit organisation with their books. Your business logo, website, marketing material etc. can then communicate what you stand for. These are simple, inexpensive ways that help demonstrate your company's values while achieving competitive differentiation without buying it through advertising."

As well as consumers wanting to know what a company stands for, staff do too. For Takapuna-based insurance company, Sovereign, research implied that staff loyalty has been greatly enhanced as a result of the company's engagement with the social sector through its community-enhancing programme entitled 'Sovereign Spirit'.

Jude cites other examples: "When Vodafone responded to the "why do you exist?" question, their answer was "so we can all

Robinhood's latest initiative, AdAid - where charities have access to pro bono advertising, including production and media placement - has already rocketed: "We've received over a hundred registrations from non-profit groups who need help with their advertising, and have 25+ live briefs on the go," enthuses Jude. For more information, see (www.adaid.org.nz)

be part of the conversation." Consequently, we introduced them to Foundation for the Blind. As blind people can't read texts, Vodafone introduced an audible text service so that this group can now be part of the conversation." For Fairfax, whose brief was "to enable kiwis to have an informed opinion about the world we live in through reading newspapers," it wanted to fight illiteracy (one in four New Zealanders can't read properly), so they launched Fairfax First Books which are being used in kindergartens throughout the country." In fact, many North Shore groups have directly benefited from Robinhood's partners' charitable contributions, right across the social sector, including youth, health and welfare.

Jude concludes, "Delivering social change used to be on the margin of business dialogue, now it's right in the middle."