

5 minutes

Richard Wheatley, managing director at Think Red.



Louise Lawton \\ Who are you, what do you do and why did you pick Devonport for your office location?

Richard Wheatley \\ I guess you could call me a 'born-again designer'. In a previous life, I built a design business in Brighton in the UK, providing design to mainly London clients. But it took me 14 years to realise that whilst I was running the show, everyone else was having the fun. So I asked myself: 'Do you really want to be doing this for 10 more years?' and the answer was 'no'. When, as a family, we decided to come to New Zealand, I swapped Excel for InDesign and became a designer again. That was a few years ago now but I still love it. I consider myself fortunate to have had a second chance at the same career, and with the benefit of life's experience.

Think Red is currently a team of four. We are graphic designers with a range of clients from emerging businesses to known brands. We are ambitious and growing, but we're evolving in a way that enables me to retain a creative role. Getting the work in, producing good design solutions and managing clients is a bit of a juggling act, so I'm working with Portfolio to help us achieve our optimum size. Why Devonport? From our studio we look across the harbour to Mission Bay. There are plenty of places to go and have a think (we do a lot of that here) as well as have a drink (we do a bit of that, too). A stone's throw from the CBD and Albany within easy reach, it's a holiday at the heart of Auckland. Clients enjoy coming to us so it's just perfect.

LL \\ What are you working on right now?

RW \\ Building brands is what we really get a buzz from and we have several of those at different stages of development. We are at the naming stage for one (a copywriter - which is a bit ironic), carrying out some market research for another, and at the production stage for yet another. We're also right in the middle of a large report for JRA, who produce the Best Workplaces in New Zealand survey. We have a few websites on the go and a reception interior for a city law firm. We are also updating our own website which is exciting, but it's also taking a lot of time. We all know what it's like doing your own work - the client can be a pain! Like most small design firms, you never know what you're going to be doing next

month and that's half the fun.

LL \\ Do you have a stand-out piece of work you are immensely proud of?

RW \\ A tricky question. If I say 'yes' it implies that we're not so proud of the rest of our work; if I say 'no', then I'm saying all our work is 'stand-out', which would sound very big-headed. We are continually being creatively stretched into things we haven't done before. At the end of last year we were asked to apply a brand that we had previously designed to a work environment: a challenge we rose to and the client loves.

LL \\ Are you embracing the digital age?

RW \\ I guess I first embraced it decades ago, investing the equivalent of \$30,000 in one of those Apple Macs, hoping they'd catch on. The opportunities provided by current-day applications are very exciting and push us technically. However, whilst the choice of tools for creative expression are near infinite, slick presentation is no substitute for sound solutions. Good design only needs a pencil! Knowing what software to invest in and train on has always been an issue for designers and we are no different. Not many years back some found migrating to InDesign from Quark scary. Now, there are so many applications it's hard to keep up. As screens become thinner and cheaper, so the ability to get seductive and moving messages on them is greater. If we need technical help for something beyond our knowledge, we'll buy it in. Certainly we must embrace the

opportunities the digital age presents for our clients.

LL \\ What do you think are the greatest issues that small design agencies face?

RW \\ I think the same principles as apply to the larger design outfits. High standards are a given. Having a good team sounds obvious, but everyone has to know where they fit in and what the objectives are. This means that some people may have to do more than one role, but that's part of the fun. Making sure to have a broad client base reduces vulnerability. It also means more variety of work across different sectors. Working with clients who truly value your input in their success. This fosters long-lasting relationships that you can really put your heart into. Ultimately, keeping a watchful eye on sales. Without sales not much else matters.

LL \\ What do you think the future holds for print design?

RW \\ Technology, and possibly also environmental concerns, are increasingly eclipsing print in many areas, especially promotional material. As people's reading habits change so design must adapt. Screens are constantly improving but some information is still best read in print. Ultimately, print will become more exclusive and quality led; design will remain a vital part of this. This could create new design opportunities.

Louise Lawton is a consultant at Portfolio Recruitment, an Auckland-based recruitment agency that specialises in the advertising and design industry. See portfoliorecruit.co.nz or contact Louise@portfoliorecruit.co.nz