

Driving Force

Why the new CEO is driving Kiwi Cabs back to the future

It's raining – bad for a person whose hair goes frizzy in the wet. And the cab has gone AWOL. When it finally does turn up, the driver parks on the other side of the street and beckons you across. You're already 10 minutes late for your meeting, so there's no time to make an issue of it. You bolt across the road and fling yourself into the back seat. Someone has had a mishap with a pie in here in the not-too-distant past, so you edge past it and try to hold your skirt clear.

English, it turns out, is the driver's forty second language, and neither is geography his strong suit. By the time you arrive, you're so frazzled you've forgotten what the meeting is about, to say nothing of grumpy.

Not the sort of cab ride you were wanting, then.

It's not the sort of cab ride Tim Simpkins is wanting for you, either. And happily, he's one person who is doing something about it.

He may be the new kid on the block – 12 months in the driver's seat of Alert Group – but this CEO has a passion for service and he's going to make sure you get it.

Since the beginning of the year he's been directing a lot of that passion towards the rebranding of Whangarei's Kiwi Cabs. You may have already noticed the difference – bright, white, late model cars with the distinctive red and yellow chequered logo and toplight.

And that's not the only change. Tim's proud of the fact that the Kiwi Cabs brand has been around Whangarei since the 1940s, and believe it or not, he's heading back down the decades to re-establish the service you got from taxis back then.

You probably don't remember it, but there was a time when the driver hopped out and opened the door for you, and produced an umbrella if your hair was



in any danger whatsoever. The cab was much, much cleaner than your own car, and smelled as if it had just had a \$100 valet. The driver spoke better English than you, and knew the city inside out. You arrived relaxed, and feeling, well, pampered.

"That's what we want our clients to expect when they see the white cab with the red and yellow chequers coming towards them," Tim says. "Reliability, consistency, safety, and service."

He concedes that clients who roll out

things possible, as well as enhancing route management and efficiencies, and providing customised business solutions.

Over the next several weeks, all of these changes will continue to be rolled out, right down to the drivers, who will be smartly dressed in uniform. They'll also be highly trained in driving, service and even first aid.

"We're really pushing the envelope with that one," Tim says, "as we service the health care industry, for example transporting dialysis patients, and clients



of the pub – night revellers, as he politely calls them – are probably not too worried about those things. They're happy to get into the closest thing to them. But they make up only around five per cent of Kiwi Cabs' client base.

Most of the remainder are business users. They use cabs because they want to reach their destination clean, dry, on time, with no parking problems, and without spending the journey on the edge of their seat with their eyes closed.

"And they also want a service that's tailored to their requirements," Tim says.

Payment is an example. While some clients still pay cash, others want to pay with eftpos, a credit card, or even a mobile phone. Some want a GST receipt with everything but the driver's dna profile on it. Technology makes all such

with disabilities. We have to have an understanding of their situation. They need to be confident that if something happens, the driver knows what to do until professional help arrives."

Taxi clients have, in the past, tended not to be brand specific, but Tim is confident that can be changed.

"Service can be tailored to the expectation of the individual," he says. "It's hard, but there are things we can do that clients will relate to. We want our drivers to pride themselves on pleasing people, on delivering more than is expected. If we can do that, we're really achieving something."

To order a Kiwi Cab, phone (09) 438 44 44, or hail a bright white car with a red and yellow chequered toplight.

Drive Yourself

If you're a great driver who enjoys providing exceptional service (and cares whether your client stays dry), Kiwi Cabs could be the place for you.

And if you think taxi drivers are either immigrants or those who can't get jobs anywhere else, you need to know that at Kiwi Cabs, that's a long way from reality.

Most of the company's drivers are mature folk in their 40s and 50s who have stepped off the treadmill to relieve stress levels, who have paid down their mortgage, and are looking for a small business that won't cost them the earth, but will return them a good income without taking over their lives.

And no, you won't have to work every hour that God sends, Tim says. "Smart drivers can earn in the region of \$70,000 to \$120,000, with the average in the mid eighties."

"Cab driving is an honest business in an honest industry but there have been perception issues," he says. "That's changing, and now there's a new respect for what taxi drivers do."

For more information on joining Kiwi Cabs, go to the section on driving careers at

www.kiwicabs.co.nz



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