

# Choose your friends

It isn't enough to be sustainable in isolation.  
By **LESLEY SPRINGALL**

**THE CARBONZERO** Programme has taken its offering and its message international, becoming accepted in 50 major world economies and ranked as one of the top two schemes of its type in the world by Oxford University.

But it was a partnership with London-based Achilles Information, a leading provider of supplier management services, which caught the Sustainable 60 judges' attention. CarboNZero was chosen as Achilles' preferred greenhouse gas measurement programme for its 30,000 clients, spanning 23 countries.

To meet Achilles' needs, CarboNZero developed a new tailored product called CEMARS (Certified Emission Measurement and Reduction Scheme). The product was licensed to Achilles and Kiwi employees were seconded to England. "For a global organisation like Achilles to come all the way down to the Antipodes and select our programme is testament to the credibility of the programme and the skills of our staff. It also shows a commitment from Achilles to search out the best business solutions for its clients around the world," says CarboNZero business manager Mike Tournier.

CarboNZero stood out as an organisation that had put sustainability at the heart of its operation, both internally and externally, says Sustainable 60 judge Justine Munro. Its work with Achilles showed how a project can be used to communicate a much broader message about sustainability, she says.

"We wanted to see authenticity around the learning. This is a hard space, this is new and there is real importance in actively learning from what you are doing and refining and getting back out there.

"Clearly CarboNZero's alliance with Achilles is a really strong partnership and to achieve that there was a huge amount of relationship work required."

Ask Kokako's Mike Murphy about his business and the first thing he talks about is his suppliers. The Auckland coffee roaster, cafe manager and snack food producer even lists some of his suppliers on his promotional fliers despite the limited space — Omaha Organic Berries, beef and lamb from Ngaruawahia's Te Akatea Station and chicken from Heuvels, a certified organic poultry farm in Invercargill.

Murphy also refers to them regularly in conversation with the familiarity of old

mates. "Kevin" from Friendlypak gets several mentions as he's behind the company's new compostable wood cellulose coffee bags.

The right suppliers are vital to Murphy's business, and to his sustainable ideals. But it's not always easy to find people willing to play your game, he says. Many larger suppliers aren't interested in working with a smaller company to develop new products.

Kokako's biodegradable coffee bags took two years to develop, and the company still hasn't nailed a potato starch packet for its salads. It isn't surprising to build up strong supplier relationships, says Murphy. "We also grow at a similar rate. When you get quality brands working with other quality brands, which might start out quite boutiquey, you start to get momentum in certain parts of the market, and consumers connect with that."

For a sustainable business, it isn't enough to be sustainable in isolation. How companies research, design and produce their products, the relationships they build and how they communicate with suppliers and customers is equally important. It was important entrants in the marketplace category knew how to build relationships and communicate their messages, says Justine Munro.

"We wanted to see a really strong degree of partnership and alliances because in this type of space, if you're just doing it on your own, your impact is very limited."

Initially finding suppliers was hard, especially when it came to sourcing uniforms made from sustainable textiles, says Russell Werry from commercial cleaning franchise Clean Planet. But two years later, he has choices. "There has been quite a shift in the market in the last 18 months." His business has also benefited from others wishing to add cleaning to their sustainability checklist, with the number of Clean Planet franchisees jumping from just three to 26 in a year.

All those questioned in the marketplace category said they selected suppliers based on a range of values, sustainability being one alongside price and service. But finalist Sinclair Knight Merz (SKM) and category winner CarboNZero also said it was equally important to communicate their values to customers and potential customers, even if that meant losing some.

Michael Shirley, New Zealand regional manager for international engineering and science consultancy SKM, says the company walked away from a multimillion dollar

## MARKETPLACE FINALISTS

■ **CarboNZero Programme (winner)**

■ Corporate Express

■ IAG NZ

■ Kokako

■ Moxie Design Group

■ Sinclair Knight Merz

■ Westpac



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hydroelectric project when it became clear the project had less to do with power and more to do with deforestation. Though the decision may have hurt in the short term, in the longer term the benefits far outweigh the negatives, both for staff attraction and retention and customer relationships, he says. “As long as our clients are open to new ideas and are thinking about the longer term, then those are projects we’d do. But if you pick up a whole bunch of projects that no one wants to work on, you’re instantly picking up a whole lot of problems.”

Not long ago it wasn’t uncommon for companies to approach certification body CarboNZero wanting a carbon neutral stamp, but without the hard graft of reducing their emissions. CarboNZero’s Tournier says he walked away from one large, multinational customer because its procurement team wanted elements of the carbon footprint assessment removed — “as it might make them look bad”.

“WE’RE NOT TREE HUGGERS, WE JUST THINK IT’S GOOD BUSINESS BEHAVIOUR”

**PETER SALMON**

A couple of days later, the chief executive of the company phoned Tournier and asked CarboNZero back in, no strings attached. “We won that work on the basis of excellence and sticking to our principles,” he says.

Peter Salmon, from Wellington-based design strategy consultancy Moxie Design, says sticking to principles, proving them and pinning them to the rafters for all to see has got to be good for companies wanting to thrive in the long term. “The issues we need to look at coming from the future are issues we need to get seriously sustainable about, so energy is an issue, fuel supply is an issue, water is an issue, and there are a whole lot of social things coming through too.”

Moxie Design launched its NextPlays strategy tool for businesses wanting to learn to think differently about the future at a sustainable brands conference in Miami last December. Since then it has been picked up by Air New Zealand, Procter & Gamble and the World Bank, which uses it to explain what climate change means for ordinary people. “It’s about helping people find their own solutions. And that’s not really about developing new stuff, but about redeveloping what you do now, in a better way,” says Salmon. “We’re not tree huggers, we just think it’s good business behaviour: why wouldn’t you want to cut costs and be really innovative?”