

Transcribe Me!

Transcription details:

Date: 18-Apr-2016
Input sound file: Moxie Session Podcast 36

Transcription results:

- S1 00:00 Two one. Hello and welcome to another episode of the Moxie Podcast. This is episode 36, recorded in February, on the 9th of February, 2016. A special thanks to Alcatel-Lucent, whose sponsorship helps to make this podcast possible. This is the companion web show to the Moxie Sessions, an internet economy discussion group held once a month in Auckland, New Zealand. The Moxie Sessions bring together a small group of business thinkers to discuss how New Zealand can take advantage of the internet to boost its national competitiveness.
- S1 00:36 I'm Andrew Patterson with you here in Auckland, and before I introduce our guest panel, first let me tell you a bit about the topic for this session. In a world where the internet is now an integral part of our daily lives and who could possibly consider a world without it these days, have you ever stopped to think about what the internet is really for, and perhaps more importantly, how are we going to transform our lives or how are we going in transitioning our lives to it here in New Zealand? Are we more or less into the internet than other countries, have we got the networks right, what do we actually do with it, and are we perhaps unwittingly conducting a massive experiment on our cognitive capabilities?
- S1 01:20 Well, joining me today to discuss some of these important questions I have with me Dr Phillipa Smith from AUT University, who's been involved in New Zealand's part of the World Internet Project, a multi-country longitudinal survey of the use and attitudes towards the internet; Dr Jane Cherrington, a founder of communications agency String Theory, former head of the Mental Health Foundation, researcher, and creator of good books; and Vaughan Baker, CEO of MyRepublic, a fibre-forward ISP founded in Singapore, long history in the telco sector including as CEO of the Regional Fibre Group, the coalition of electricity lines companies that competed for the UFB contract with Chorus. Welcome to you all. Vaughan, to you first. Perhaps let's define what exactly a fibre-forward ISP is. That's a new one on me.
- S2 02:12 [chuckles] It's really sort of recognising our focus on fibre, Andrew. As you've outlined, we were founded in Singapore on the back of Singapore's NBN, their next generation broadband network, which is the equivalent of our UFB network here in New Zealand, the ultra-fast broadband network that the government and Chorus and the local fibre companies are rolling out. So we launched in Singapore the beginning of 2012, and very successful there. Basically on the back of the network we're able to compete with the large incumbents. And we were always looking at the markets of New Zealand and Australia, and bided our time, really, in order to work out what the right timing was to come down here. And we launched here in New Zealand in October 2014, so we've been around just over 12 months. And we've got plans to launch into Australia later this year. So two thing, really: sort of focused on delivering fibre broadband in particular, and also leveraging the separation of the incumbents and the partially government-funded fibre infrastructure.
- S1 03:26 So given the UFB roll-out, which we've all heard a lot about and we know it's happening at the moment, do you think that we've really begun to think as a country about the world of possibilities this will open up for us?
- S2 03:40 No, not yet, but it's coming. Like anything, there's little pockets of it. You've got businesses and some of the smaller cities in the country that are really leveraging UFB infrastructure, but it's not mainstream yet. We've got many people at a consumer level who are jumping on, so many of those early adopters. They maybe work in the technology sector or they maybe gamers or they could be professional people who've worked elsewhere overseas and had high-quality broadband infrastructure. And they're jumping on the bandwagon from a consumer perspective, but it'd be fair to say that businesses in New Zealand haven't yet taken advantage of UFB.
- S2 04:25 So we're certainly, as our organisation, making a concerted effort this year to really promote UFB as a fantastic infrastructure for small to medium businesses to leverage, particularly with the advent of cloud technologies and the types of services that are available there and the benefits to a business in adopting that technology. But the cloud doesn't-- you're unable to sort of unleash the true benefit of the cloud without decent underlying infrastructure. So UFB's perfect for that. So I think I'd argue that small to medium business has the most to gain from this investment in the infrastructure. But they're yet to really take advantage of it.
- S1 05:07 Jane Cherrington, if I can bring you in here. In the discussion you noted that, "The challenges around the UFB network are what we do with it. This is reflected in the Network Readiness Index from the World Economic Forum where New Zealand rated ninth for infrastructure but only 17th for use." What do you think is going to change those metrics?

Transcribe Me!

- S3 05:32 That's a good question. I think my kind of focus is more on [chuckles] I guess how the impact of use and how we might want to think about moderating that use rather than increasing it. But I think as it becomes increasingly normal to go online to solve problems and to engage with information search and to purchase, its ubiquity will become such that we stop thinking about how we're using it very much. And so I guess the questions I have around it are how might we have conversations a little bit more around being critically aware of the impact of its use rather than stimulating it.
- S1 06:26 And what do you believe - just on that point - is the most important conversation we should be having?
- S3 06:33 I think the crux of it is the ability to understand the implications of creating space to think more deeply about things and to consolidate information effectively. So you've probably found yourself doing it. If you're trying to do a piece of work and you're researching online, it's really easy to get seduced and drop down into rabbit holes. Hyperlinks seem incredibly useful until you realise you've spent half an hour exploring them and you've got off topic and actually forgot what you were trying to research or write about or do study for or develop an article about. And it's that ability to derail our focus that starts to also undermine the effectiveness or the depths to the work we're producing if we're not very careful.
- S1 07:25 Absolutely. I think we can all relate to that, and I certainly can [chuckles] as a case in point. We'll come back to that. Phillipa, let me bring you in here. How does New Zealand compare to other countries when it comes to internet usage, and do you believe that it's perhaps undermining social interaction?
- S4 07:44 Well, first of all, I have to say that New Zealanders seem to have been keen adopters of the internet and various ICTs for some time with our World Internet Project, which surveys New Zealanders every two years about their internet use. We've seen massive and [a?] change in the way people use the internet, and I think from a point that Jane was making, sometimes not realising how much time we're spending doing something. But if we think what New Zealanders are doing on the internet - and it's so much part of our daily lives - and in comparison with other countries, we're way up there in our internet use. So sometimes it's hard to stop and reflect on the impact that it is having. But I think if we see how we have gone from dial-up to broadband and how we've gone from desktop to a laptop to all these wireless devices, this is having a huge impact on the way we live.
- S4 08:50 Certainly regarding social interaction; I mean, I think that's the biggest thing when it comes to internet use. It's the communication channels. So not only are New Zealanders-- in comparison with other countries, they text a lot. We make and receive phone calls online, like [Skype?]. Social networking is huge. In 2009, 51% of New Zealanders in our survey belonged to a social networking site, but more recently, we've found in 2013, 81% of people belonged. And we've got a new survey results coming out in the next month or so, and I would expect us to see perhaps a bigger jump, and because we've got apps like Instagram and Tinder. All this stuff is just happening all the time. So from the perspective of a researcher of the internet and seeing how we compare with other countries, this is really just the beginning of what we might call the Internet Revolution.
- S1 09:54 Indeed. And Vaughan, on that point, you noted in the discussion, "Nobody watches broadcast TV anymore," which was a quote from Ziggy Switkowski recently. Of course, when TV first came out, we were kind of clued to it and fixed on it, and now we don't. Do you think our relationship with computers is going to change significantly that way as well? Or is this something we're all hooked on for life?
- S2 10:25 Oh, look, I think Ziggy's right that you've got a fair degree of disintermediation occurring across sectors, and then ultimately it'll all come together again. You've got the media companies and the entertainment companies all trying to access us different ways because we're not all sitting down at 6:00 together to watch the news or 7:00 or 8:30, sitting down as a family to see what movie or what show's on. So we're living very differently and I think the industry's sectors, such as media, entertainment, and telco, are trying to work out what that means, how do they continue to interact with consumers. The advertising industry as an example is having to change how it targets and how it accesses consumers because there's a whole couple of generations now who just will not and do not watch broadcast content.
- S2 11:29 So, yeah, look, how we interact with our devices. I think we've got people with multiple devices. We've got on average across our network to be-- each home connected, even in New Zealand, would have well over ten connected devices. Many of those are connected simultaneously. So I think there's certainly a change in human behaviour: the ability to do multiple things at once. Definitely when you look at some of those younger generations, you're starting to see that. And definitely what Jane and Phillipa are talking about. And there's different skills and coping mechanisms and strategies necessary in order to exist in that environment.
- S2 12:22 It's an interesting one in the sense that-- I mean, I'm encouraging everybody to get the best quality connection they can and to consumers as much of this as they possibly can for their own benefit, but there's definitely a change going on in the home. And what I alluded to earlier is there's a change that businesses are going to start to make as well, that somebody who's coming into your organisation just thinks it's natural to use all of the different types of technologies. And they'll just move into their role and start carrying out their tasks in that manner. And it's in a manner that many of us who started work a few years ago would never have envisaged.

- S1 13:16 Yeah, agree. Jane Cherrington, can I come back to you? In the intro there, I mentioned about this idea that perhaps we are unwittingly conducting a massive experiment on our cognitive capabilities. What are the concerns that you have, particularly from your time at Mental Health Foundation, that really we have no idea what we're taking part in here, do we? And so if we look at youngsters for instance, if you give them an iPad or laptop, they would happily set there the whole night just doing that. How are we having to learn to moderate our behaviour and our engagement with technology in a way that perhaps isn't altogether obvious at the moment?
- S3 14:02 Well [chuckles], a lot of the time we're working against our humanness. We evolved a lot of how we are a long time ago, and life on the Paleolithic Plain, when you needed to be alert to all sorts of information to stay healthily alive-- [such as?] life today are very different places. And some of what you're talking about, I think some of the most important area to focus on is with our kids and we learn to parent them. Because ultimately, that - what you're describing as that compulsive, almost, use of time with technology - is a habit piece. We get into the habit of reading our newspaper in the morning once upon a time. We get into the habit of playing games on our computer in the evening.
- S3 14:44 And I think as parents, we need to think about that cycle of engaging with something, the rewards that that triggers for you, and the habit that that sets up. Our kids aren't equipped to think critically about how they're using technology, and a lot of us as parents aren't really equipped to think about how to have conversations around that. So I think we're sort of a bit like now we're kind of getting sugar as an issue with our sometimes-- how it's affected young people and how to understand, "No, you shouldn't have that. It's not good for you." We now know that. I don't think we've got the tools or conversation yet to feel equipped to manage that very well.
- S1 15:27 Yeah, that's it.
- S3 15:28 And the other side of it--
- S1 15:29 Yeah, carry on.
- S3 15:30 The other side of it is, what young people are consuming. So kids, in terms of getting their sense of self - how to behave, what's appropriate, particularly around things like how to be sexual, how to be intimate with other people - their first port of call is now the internet. Now, that's a shedload more information than we were thinking necessarily as parents of giving them to engage with. And yet, the reality of it is they're engaging with an awful lot that we're not even beginning to have conversations about with them. So I think we're right at the front end. In terms of how we deal with it? I think it's up to us who are-- I guess us that are more involved with the research and tool development and to say, how can we give people some really practical tools, but also, how can we put some metrics around this because people actually need something tangible to feel that they can respond to.
- S1 16:27 And Phillipa, on that point, what are the trends suggesting from the World Internet Project about the attitudes that Jane is describing, and therefore, how we are perhaps having to think about things wider than simply gaining information from the internet?
- S4 16:50 Well, I guess it's as I said before: it's so much part of our daily lives, and the trends just see people accepting it more and more. I think perhaps what an important point to make - this follows on from what Jane says - is while we use the internet a lot, we need to become smart, adaptive of the technology. So it's not just a matter of watching YouTube videos of cats or having an app that tells us the best time to go to the bathroom and a movie or sending photographs by text which may be inappropriate. I mean, all of this stuff is going on and as I say, with younger people, it's just becoming the norm. I think it's important that somehow we get a sense of using the internet in meaningful ways.
- S4 17:45 And if I can quote from an article that I read at the end of last year, the head of Google Europe, Matt Brittin, said that, "The world's online population will double to five billion in the year 2020," which is an astounding concept because we'd be going from a minority of people on the planet being connected to a majority. And I guess the issue may become more and more, and it's very hard to predict exactly what is going to happen in the future. Keeping track of it, seeing what it's done is very important. At the same time, we've also got to think about the communities that might not be connected, who may be low-level users who cannot devices or who lack the skills in using the internet. So goodness, this is just such a huge area to observe, but we're also part of it. And I think we just need to be mindful of the different ways that internet is used and making it meaningful.
- S1 18:56 And Vaughan, do you believe that we have reached peak app yet?
- S2 19:03 No, no, no, far from it. So I think Jane and Phillipa are quite right in the sense that there's a lot of nonsense out there. So there's a lot of stuff out there that isn't actually enhancing our lives. So in that respect, maybe we are starting to reach peak app. But I think this technology gives New Zealanders and us as a nation incredible opportunity, that, yes, we need to responsibly use the technology. And some of that technology may lead to saturation as far as the cat videos are concerned. But if you think about the investment in UFB and you think about New Zealand having the best quality broadband infrastructure

Transcribe Me!

it could possibly have, and us as a nation being as connected as we possibly have, there's an ability there for us to use that technology in order to enhance our trading routes. These are trading routes that we've had in place since the '50s, when we were Europe's farm.

- S2 20:18 Now, people look at milk prices and meat prices and so forth, and other primary industry and kind of go, "Well, where does that end up? What's New Zealand's role?" Well, there is that weightless exports, and the weightless are exported. You know, the container ships are now these international cables and our ability to connect with the outside world. And you're seeing a lot of new business models. You're seeing the advent of Google and its sort of domination, if you like, of the internet driving more and more businesses to think a bit differently. You've got the Ubers and the Airbnbs and the Xeros of this world that are leveraging internet technology to then go and achieve something very different in their respective sectors and then drive disruption and change. There's no reason that the next Uber couldn't come out of New Zealand.
- S1 21:15 And do you think-- well, certainly it's my sense that this connectivity that we have now has kind of given New Zealand a new-found confidence about what it might be capable of doing, just to your point on that. Is that your sense?
- S2 21:30 I think so. I think when you look at our cousins across in Australia, they've made a bit of a mess of their infrastructure upgrades, and if you look at the respective economies and where we're placed, I think we have a tremendous opportunity to move out from under the coattails of our large neighbour. And I mean, obviously I working in the sector so my confidence in our ability to leverage this is obviously high. But more and more people and organisations and business leaders that I talk to actually recognise the opportunity that this presents. I think these governments of the day had tremendous foresight to invest in this.
- S2 22:13 As an organisation that entered the New Zealand market, we were confident that there wasn't going to be a change to the UFB infrastructure deployment, that eventually it was almost like an apolitical sort of policy. So the Labour government were equally keen on enhancing our infrastructure. They might have had a slightly different view as to how it was achieved, but ultimately, they still wanted to achieve it. So as far as new entrants into a market, we had political certainty that this was going to happen. So I think there's sufficient political leadership. I think there's starting to become some business leadership around actually taking this thing and actually making the most of it.
- S1 22:59 So Jane Cherrington, just focusing in on one aspect of the opportunity that the internet and UFB is going to provide - which is something that we haven't really perhaps thought about enough - is this concept of lifelong learning, this recent stat that two and five-- so something like 40% of Australians are now doing course online, mostly learning musical instruments or languages. But this idea that we can become lifelong learners. We've always had libraries of course, to do it. But the ability to engage in the learning and the way that the digital environment makes learning a whole lot more attractive now, doesn't it?
- S3 23:40 Oh, [I'm in?], completely. I'm a huge advocate, and I think it's the egalitarian nature of what gets opened up through massive online open courses, and looking at some really amazing teachers who give people who otherwise would have no access to them. There are lots and lots upsides to what's obtainable and the different forms in which it can be served up, and I think we've barely began to think about how to do that in really smart ways. And the other side of it's going to be the feedback loops - the data that gets generated through how we use it. And as soon as we start to really see the Internet of Things take off, I think we will see a very different order of things emerge.
- S1 24:32 What amazes me is the speed at which kids particularly can pick up stuff. You know, they can teach themselves through YouTube an extraordinary range of skills in an incredibly quick time. And that must be incredibly empowering obviously to those individuals. Phillipa Smith, when we think about the implications of that, obviously that has quite a paradigm shift for countries like New Zealand but all countries, ultimately, in the future, doesn't it?
- S4 25:02 Well, I guess that's correct. I mean, to some extent, you can sort of say this is information overload. So much is out there; we're spoilt for choice if we're connected to the internet and if we can access all of that. And certainly New Zealand in comparison to other countries. As I've indicated, we're similar to Australia, the UK, other countries in Europe in the way we use the internet. But there will be other countries that use it in different ways and it's always interesting to see those transitions. But I guess it places New Zealand in a good position as far as its internet use goes. And as Vaughan says, the opportunities economically and business-wise are huge. So education-wise, obviously there's great opportunities for New Zealanders as well. So again, this comes back to what I was saying before about being smart users of the internet. We've got a very utopian view of using it the best we can. There's obviously a downside in the way we think, in the way people use it, and we need to be mindful of that as well. So it's a matter of making sure that we use it in the right way.
- S1 26:19 Indeed, and just in the time that we have left, I wonder if perhaps each of you could direct your final comments to where you think the opportunity is for New Zealand and perhaps the conversations that we should be thinking about as we prepare for this ultra-fast world with the broadband network fully being operational in the next couple of years. Vaughan Baker, perhaps kicking off with you just to wrap this up. What's your message, I guess, to New Zealand about where that opportunity lies and where those conversations should [be?] being had in the future?

- S2 27:04 I think, Andrew, the conversations need to be across the spectrum. I think whether you're talking to a teenager who is spending a large amount of time on the internet, or whether you're talking to a small to medium business, there's opportunity across the entire spectrum. So that individual there has enormous potential where we are right now to leverage the information available to actually start thinking about how to do business, how to do work in different ways. And if we as a nation don't constrain those people and they're willing to think and look at what's possible, who knows?
- S2 27:45 They may become a young entrepreneur and they come up with a business model that really takes off and is the next Xero or the next Uber and puts us on the map. Equally, our small to medium businesses leveraging this infrastructure can now actually take on the large competitor across town, the large competitor up in the big smoke, or the large competitor in San Francisco. The world is now their marketplace. So as a nation of traders, as a nation of inventors, who's better placed than us to actually take advantage of this revolution that's going on at the moment?
- S1 28:29 Jane Cherrington?
- S3 28:33 I think ultimately, with any radical change across human history, there are opportunities to stop and have some really intelligent conversations about not only what we think might be going on, but as Vaughan was just saying, about how we might use things or do things differently, rather than just kind of ride along on a wave of inevitability. And so just to create spaces for those conversations to happen. Even in running a business, if you create a certain amount of time in a week or a fortnight to have conversations about what might we do differently. Or as a parent, sitting down with your kids and saying, "Hey, what are some of the beliefs that we have about this" - and obviously in slightly more child-friendly language [chuckles] - "and how might we think about this as a family, and what are some of the implications and are we okay with that?" So I guess it's finding ways to engage with each other and to be more critically aware about what it is we're engaging in and where the opportunities and risks are.
- S1 29:36 Yeah, absolutely. The point that you make is an important one. Because we are living in a world of constant disruption, we are discovering things, we're understanding, we're interpreting things differently. But the benefit of being able to talk about that openly and converse has got to be the flip side of this benefit, and yet, in many ways, as we've spoken about, the internet is almost shutting a lot of conversations down. So finding ways to continue to maintain that dialogue with each other is obviously going to be important in the future.
- S3 30:09 Critical.
- S1 30:11 All right, and finally, Phillipa Smith. Just some concluding thoughts from you.
- S4 30:15 Sure. Well, as a member of the World Internet Project, all the international partners believe that the pace of digital change will only continue to accelerate. And if I was looking for the perfect world, I think we would be aiming for equal access and opportunity for everybody when it comes to the internet. It's easier said than done, of course. We would have to think things along the lines of accessibility, whether people are connected with broadband, UFB; whether people can afford device and equipment; whether people have the skills, because devices keep changing and so do the skills, and some people get left behind. So I guess as an advocate for research, I believe in tracking the trends and the issues, and making sure that we can be inclusive as much as possible because there's lots of groups out there that might get left behind, and I think that we want to make sure that everybody has the best opportunities when it comes to the internet.
- S1 31:15 Thank you all for joining us today. I've been speaking with Dr Phillipa Smith from AUT University, involved in New Zealand's part of the World Internet Project; Dr Jane Cherrington, founder of communications agency String Theory; and Vaughan Baker, CEO of MyRepublic. This has been the Moxie Session, and it's produced in association with Alcatel-Lucent. Thank you for joining us and we hope you join us again in the future. I'm Andrew Patterson. Enjoy the rest of your day.