

## Big Ben Bernanke strikes midnight for global economy

The US Federal Reserve has declared war on the rest of the world with devastating consequences, according to columnist Neville Bennett.

Repeatedly turning on the

money printing presses is weakening the US dollar, causing inflation across the globe, and destroying jobs in New Zealand, he writes in today's *NBR*.

For this Fed chief Ben Bernanke

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"should be tried for crimes against

the working class, the middle class and the elderly.

"Mr Bernanke is a fanatic who is also killing the middle class by denying them a yield on their savings. More broadly he has doubled

the price of essential food stuffs in a few years. He is raising the price of pork in China while destroying jobs every week in New Zealand."

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## China bashing hurts NZ, deters investors

Duncan Bridgeman

Chinese investors are already shunning New Zealand due to negativity over recent acquisition deals, a prominent advisor says.

And reaction to Haier Group's takeover offer for "Kiwi icon" Fisher & Paykel Appliances could fuel the irritation further.

"It's being mentioned," said Scott Brown, chairman of Kea China, a not-for-profit organisation set up to help New Zealand business succeed in China.

"Someone senior in government was telling me the other day

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they were aware of a number of large investors who were seriously looking at different things in New Zealand and may now not do so, because of the general attitude," Mr Brown told the *National Business Review*.

Most of the negativity stemmed from Shanghai Pengxin's hard fought purchase of 16 dairy farms in the North Island, he said, but the hostility was continuing following Haier's plan to buy out whiteware manufacturer F&P Appliances.

Mr Brown has spent 15 years in China and in his day job manages a Shanghai-based advisory and corporate services firm.

He told *NBR* the apparent xenophobia toward Chinese investment in this country was making his job at Kea much, much harder.

"We have a role to play in letting Chinese companies and business people know that they are welcome in New Zealand. But it hasn't been the best of messages in recent times.

"Quite frankly, it's a bit embar-

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**TAX AHOY:** New Zealand is cruising toward 'horribly complex' tax rules for boats, baches and other 'mixed assets'

## Tax rules not shipshape

Rob Hosking

Tax experts have lashed out at Inland Revenue for imposing harsh and "horribly complex" tax rules affecting boats and baches.

The IRD this week caused the controversy when it issued guidelines covering the "mixed use" of such assets.

KPMG tax partner Murray Sarelius said such rulings would be unnecessarily harsh and would result in "horribly complex" situations and could lead to double taxation.

However, PriceWaterhouse Coopers tax partner Geof Nightingale believes the complexity might be deliberate.

"While there is some justification for them, the complexity [of the rules] means taxpayers will take the mixed use assets out of the company – and it's possible that is what the IRD is hoping for," Mr Nightingale said.

And things could get even worse, according to Deloitte Associate tax director Robyn Walker.

"They haven't actually finished working this out – the regu-

latory impact statement which comes with the bill says, in effect 'here's what we've worked out so far, and we'll add a bit more as the bill goes through the House,' "she said. "This is hardly good policy practice – people are going to make submissions on the bill as it is and then tax officials are going to add a bit more after it has been through the select committee."

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## Silence of the landlords

Christchurch central city property owners don't know what to tell their tenants.

An Auckland-based owner of a property in Lichfield St is experiencing the same vacuum of information as locals whose properties are being compulsorily acquired.

He received a letter from The Property Group, which is employed by the government's Central City Development Unit, a division of the Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority.

The letter seeks information about the property with a December 1 deadline, ahead of price negotiations. "The letter contains words such as 'may' and 'if' but contains no details."

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## The PA is dead, long live the VA

Darren Greenwood

The PA is dead, long live the VA or virtual assistant.

Technology that allows remote working is fuelling a drive for office professionals to work for themselves and offer a growing range of services.

Ever rising demands for organisations to cut costs and be more flexible is another factor.

The New Zealand VA indus-

try staged its first conference recently to highlight the role of a growing "industry" that may have several hundred members.

In New Zealand, the VAs prefer to call themselves VPs or Virtual Professionals, due to their wider range of service offerings including outsourced web design, marketing, accounts and other office-related services.

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# Technology



**PRINTOUT**  
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## Cloud driving unified communications

Voice and video are the main applications driving the unified communications (UC) market, according to Frost & Sullivan. The research company said the New Zealand UC (voice and video) market grew 6.6% in 2011 and predicts compounded growth of over 9% from 2011 to 2018. Cloud based UC or UC-as-a-service is also driving such growth. Microsoft was considered to have the most complete UC offering – mainly due to growing demand for its Lync product and the convenience of adding additional UC capabilities to existing Microsoft infrastructure.

## People before technology

Customers still prefer dealing with real people and find wait times and dealing with overseas call centres most frustrating, a customer satisfaction survey has reported. The APAC Customer Index Experience Survey 2012 said many organisations appeared to be focused more on low-cost customer contact, which led to poor service, as call centre staff would often talk too quickly, needing to repeat themselves. Customers had choices and could easily switch to using organisations where human interaction mattered more, the survey warned.

## Hi-tech tsunami warnings

A new Auckland-wide tsunami warning will use smartphone technology, plus social media such as Facebook, Twitter and Google to raise the alarm. The system targets an estimated 500,000 Aucklanders with smartphones such as iPhones and Android handsets. Integrating with Facebook and Twitter further boosts warning capability. But users will have to register with Civil Defence and use its website to receive the warnings.

## Credit unions tackle laundering

More than 20 New Zealand credit unions and buildings societies are to use software to help root out money laundering. The New Zealand Association of Credit Unions (NZACU) has signed a deal with the Wynyard Group whose tools will monitor the 70 million transactions more than 200,000 NZACU members make each year.

# Office help goes virtual

Darren Greenwood

The PA is dead, long live the VA or Virtual Assistant.

Technology, with its ability to allow easy home working, is driving a trend toward the VA, whose roles are becoming so diverse, that in New Zealand, they prefer to call themselves Virtual Professionals.

Last month, the industry staged its first conference in Wellington, and though just 25 attended, participants believe virtual assistants or virtual professionals are the way of the future.

Virtual assistants developed from the original home-based secretarial support services but the advent of the internet allowed more people to work remotely and the humble secretarial service evolved into "virtual assistance," a term first coined in the mid-1990s in the US.

Since then, the constant pressure by business to cut costs has seen the development of independent contractors offering a range of outsourced secretarial and other services, including accounts, marketing and web-design.

"Having a virtual assistant allows the business owner/entrepreneur to focus on growing the business and gaining new business, doing what they do best," said John Palmer, chief executive of the UK-based BeMyVA.com, who judged the VA awards at the Wellington conference.

Debra Clark of AdminCorp, a Kiwi company of five staff offering a full range of business support services, was its organiser.

"In New Zealand we have a more savvy culture for freelancers and small businesses so virtual professionals encompasses many services. Demand has grown over the decade and businesses are seeking virtual professionals rather than an at-home secretary or freelancers. Virtual professionals are able to offer a wider scope of expertise and knowledge and they are internet-savvy," Ms Clark said.

Having being approached by an overseas organisation, the Wellington conference decided the wider range of work carried out by VAs here meant creating a collaborative group called Virtual Professionals was more appropriate.

Estimates of their numbers vary in New Zealand from 40 to 60 (Mr Palmer) to 400 (speculated by conference attendees). Though there are companies like AdminCorp offering such services, typically VAs are self-employed experienced office professionals, though they may also use subcontractors.

VAs also keep up to date with the latest technologies and will spend many hours at seminars or using the latest online training tools.

The rewards can be substantial. Many VAs find a satisfying variety to their work and, charging \$50 an hour or so, some enjoy six-figure incomes, and employ their own VA to service their own workloads, Mr Palmer said.

## AdminCorp a Kiwi pioneer

Debra Clark of AdminCorp claims to have launched the first Virtual Assistant service in Canterbury nine years ago. The business tends to use the term "business productivity specialists" for its five staff but since the August conference has been calling them virtual professionals too.

AdminCorp offers document management, transcription, bookkeeping, desktop publishing, office management, office policies, customer services, etc, using software set up in

cloud applications.

Ms Clark said clients enjoyed the flexibility of being able to turn on and off demand for her services as and when they wished.

The global financial crisis boosted business but, as it eased, demand tailed off.

However, Ms Clark said fluctuating business conditions were now driving further growth.

"I believe the biggest driver in the industry is that businesses want experts now. They have a need and they want to fill it quickly

and simply," she said.

"Technology plays a big part in this as online applications provide the collaboration which enhances productivity and minimises double or even triple handling. Some applications that we use are Xero for business accounting, Google Hangouts for video meetings, Zoho for a business suite of email/calendar/contacts, projects customer relationship management and more," she said.

## Lindsey leads the way

Among the most prominent of New Zealand's virtual professionals are Lindsey Carroll, Marion Jackson and Justine Parsons.

Lindsey runs Outbox, which the conference declared Virtual Service Provider of the Year 2012. Outbox offers administration and web-based services for SMEs and has operated since 2006.

Ms Carroll said businesses benefited from using virtual professionals because they didn't need to employ staff, pay related benefits, deal with their tax and so on.

Many businesses also liked the idea of making their operations seem bigger than they were and using virtual professionals in different time zones could boost productivity.

New software makes it easier for companies to share data and for virtual professionals to appear part of the company. The use of smart phones and similar mobile devices ensures easy communications, with one organisation having virtual professionals in five different countries and customers none the wiser.

Marion Jackson has run My Virtual Assistant since 2009 and was runnerup at the awards. Ms Jackson focuses on website creation and management, Powerpoint, word processing, flyers and social media.

"Because not all virtual professionals' skills are the same, to work with more than one virtual professional is not uncommon," she said.

But a virtual professional will be more dedicated than a staffer or office temp to help their clients as they are running their own business.

Ms Jackson advised anyone looking at becoming a VA to start working on promoting their business while they are still employed. It took her a year to gain enough clientele to gain sufficient regular work but she had not looked back since.

The use of new technology, she added, also meant it was easy to work for overseas firms, such as carrying out tasks for UK companies,



**LINDSEY CARROLL:** Many businesses liked the idea of making their operations seem bigger than they were



**MARION JACKSON:** Working with more than one virtual professional is not uncommon

receiving jobs at the end of their working day and having them completed for their next start of their working day.

Despite the touted benefits of virtual professionals, Justine Parson of Your VA.co.nz said just 5% of New Zealand firms knew about them when she surveyed 4000 Kiwi firms in 2010. But Google references to them are increasing and now Ms Parsons has six contractors who help out when needed.

"The future is looking brilliant, both for me and the VA sector. Technology for cloud-based programs makes online collaboration very easy. Outsourcing is cost effective, tax deductible and risk free. If you don't find a VA that suits you, then move on to another," she said.

## Customers say VAs are cost effective

Typically, virtual assistants or virtual professionals will post customer referrals on their websites.

Wayne Singleton, general manager of Jansen Professional Audio & Lighting has used Justine Parsons in place of a fulltime assistant for the past two and a half years. Ms Parsons does the bookkeeping, customer contact/debt collection and

some marketing tasks, which he finds more cost effective as, though her hourly rates are higher, other expenses like holidays are covered.

Ms Parsons also carries out graphic design, managing social media, customer surveys and other research tasks as needed.

Yoga Studio operator Louise Thompson has used Justine Parsons for six months,

finding her more flexible than inhouse staff for newsletters and website blogs. Ms Parsons also replaced a cheaper but less competent virtual assistance service from India.

Charging by the minute meant costs are quantifiable. Having a responsive virtual assistant as part of her team had meant her yoga business had grown faster, Ms Thompson said.

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CSNZ

## What major initiatives are required to develop the New Zealand capital markets?

Presented by

**Tim Bennett, CEO NZX**

MBA – University of Pennsylvania –  
The Wharton School  
BCA – Victoria University of Wellington



DATE  
Thursday 4 October 2012

VENUE  
The Northern Club  
19 Princes Street  
Auckland 1041

TIME  
5.30 for a 6.00pm start

DATE  
Thursday 8 November 2012

VENUE  
The Canterbury Club  
129 Cambridge Terrace  
Christchurch 8140

TIME  
12.00 for a 12.30pm start

Tim Bennett joined the NZX after 20-years financial services consulting experience concentrated in Asia where he was a Partner of Oliver Wyman and led the Boston Consulting Group strategy practice in Asia Pacific.

Tim sees the next few years as a once in a lifetime opportunity to accelerate development of the NZX and will offer pointers on what industry should focus on.

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