

Nick Dromgool – “I’m driven by a passion to succeed”

You could say Nick Dromgool’s career has evolved from engineering to events, with the help of some logistics training along the way. This is his story.

I’m the general manager, commercial, for the New Zealand National Fieldays Society, a not-for-profit organisation independently mandated to advance agriculture nationally and internationally. The society owns the iconic annual Fieldays and Equidays and, every four years, the Transport & Heavy Equipment (THE) Expo, which it hosts at the 115 ha Mystery Creek property adjacent to Hamilton Airport.

I started my working life with a trade qualification in farm machinery engineering, and being based in the small rural town of Morrinsville I eagerly jumped at an opportunity to work in the kiwifruit industry. It was here that I found my affinity with storage, packing, transport, distribution and shipping, although in those days they were quite independent of each other.

During my eight years in the kiwifruit industry, the crop production grew from 2.7 million trays to 72.5 million trays. The rate of change was mind-boggling and led to new technologies like barcode data capture which revolutionised inventory management.

I managed some of the largest kiwifruit post-harvest facilities in the industry, working with FruitTranz Services and the Kiwifruit Marketing Licensing Authority (the forerunner to Zespri) which together provided a fully coordinated service of dispatching and scanning kiwifruit from the primary cool store through a transit facility (usually adjacent to the wharf) and finally into the refrigerated holds of the ships destined for the international markets.

Packaging innovation

After my stint in the kiwifruit industry, I worked in the food

production and processing sector with Turners and Growers, and I am proud to say that alongside a small group I developed the ‘salad in a bag’ concept. To encourage supermarkets to take a chance on this new product, I imported two upright refrigerated open-shelf display cabinets from Europe and convinced Woolworths 277 in Newmarket, Auckland, that this was the future of added-value retailing. As the saying goes, the rest is history.

Moving from crop to dairy, I took up a position with Anchor Products who sponsored my enrolment in the CILT UK Diploma in Logistics delivered by Walter Glass through Massey University. I had only completed my first module of study when I moved my young family to Christchurch to take up the position of operations manager of Wrightson Seeds, who thankfully had a robust training policy which enabled me to continue with my study extramurally. During this time I gained confidence, being challenged by Walter in the classroom and bouncing ideas and projects off fellow students, and during this time I designed and led significant change in the entire seed production supply chain.

Seed innovation

My first project with Wrightson seeds was to develop a traceability programme that controlled product from signing a grower contract, the allocation of stock seed, registering the paddock with the certification programme, infield checks, harvest sampling, pre-prescribed documentation, through to certificate of authenticity supplied with the product to the end customer. This programme was called SeedTrac and has become the foundation quality and traceability system used in the seed industry 15 years on.

I also led a project to rationalise our seed storage and transport. The industry unit of measure was a single 25 kg bag of seed and all stock was transported



Nick Dromgool, general manager, commercial, for the New Zealand National Fieldays Society: “I look back at the defining moment in my career as being willing to invest in myself”

either stowed in a container or bulk stacked on the back of a flat-deck truck. We had a seed store in Christchurch that could store 5000 metric tonnes of seed, though we could only access 90 individual lines. Stock-taking would take weeks and you could never achieve a clean cut-off as product was always on the move. My elective paper for the diploma was on warehouse design so with an opportunity presenting itself I set up a project that has revolutionised the seed industry. We designed a pallet that was efficient for transport and could host volume and weight of seed that were in keeping with the traditional trading terms of the industry. After a number of trials, we settled on a 1.45 x 1.2 m pallet that could accommodate modules of seed ranging in bands of 500 kg, 750 kg and 1000 kg. We also developed a storage racking system that, whilst it decreased bulk storage capacity, gave us access to 3000 pallets. Now, a stock-take could be done in two days, order picking productivity increased by 50%, and we were finally able to control rodents.

New business model

I departed PGG Wrightson in 2009 and reverted to contracting for a couple of years. In 2011 I was contracted by the NZ National Fieldays Society to review their ticketing and access management system, ‘stream ticketing’. This role

was focused on the movement of people, not freight (though the principles remain the same) and included ease of access to purchase a ticket online for the appropriate category (public, exhibitor, international). This resulted in driving revenue and creating a valuable database of customers.

My role with the society was soon cemented when I was appointed general manager, commercial. Under a new CEO we changed the principal foundations of the organisation to a business model that relied on skilled people in business and relationships, supported with solid information to make informed decisions.

In 2017, the society has hosted Fieldays, Equidays, THE Expo, and other smaller events that, combined, have had a positive impact of over \$200 million to the regional economy and over \$600 million to the national economy from a total of nine days of exhibition.

I look back at the defining moment in my career as being willing to invest in myself and signing up for the Diploma in Logistics. Thanks Walter!

The Professional Diploma in Logistics and Transport is offered in New Zealand by the Logistics Training Group; for further information, visit www.ltg.co.nz

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