



Exporter Profile

Michael Putt, Marketing Director, NZ Liquor Resources Ltd.



NZ Liquor Resources Ltd is based in Auckland. Established in 2007, the company is in the early stages of exporting New Zealand wines to China.

Michael Putt has always been something of an entrepreneur, making and selling hacky sacks whilst still at Auckland Grammar. His management skills were honed at Auckland University, graduating with a BCom in Management before working for an interior design and decoration company as a laborer. The business was quick to discover his talents and soon Michael was also doing the accounts.

The heady mix of paint and balance sheets inspired Michael to set up his own business – painting houses: “*the goal was to get enough money together to see the world and travel*”, and he did just that in 1997, working his ticket in London’s finest finance

departments to ski resorts in France and Italy; teaching top business executives English in Japanese multinationals, and running his own cocktail bar in the Japanese Alps in Nagano.

On returning to New Zealand, Michael’s plan was to establish another business – but what? He began a small business course through NZTE and developed a plan for a decorative ceramic tile business.

Michael had learned the necessary skills and made connections to sell the product whilst living in Japan but the plan highlighted the labour intensive nature of such a venture and the cost of importing materials was prohibitive.

Keen to make a living that would involve travel, Michael surfed the internet for opportunities and before too long, overseas requests for milk powder started coming in, enabling Michael to better understand world prices and the power of internet communications.

Cue Andy – the partner of a work colleague and fellow entrepreneur. Soon the two discovered a mutual interest in international trade with China and classic wines; Andy had

family living in China and his long term plan was to return to his native Hong Kong; Wine was something New Zealand did very well – could this be the business opportunity they had been waiting for?

After much research and weekends visiting wineries, it was evident that this was a viable opportunity. In April 2007 NZ Liquor Resources Ltd was established, although it will be of no surprise that Michael continues to multi-task.

By day, he works as a senior teacher at an International Language School and the rest of his time is spent developing the business, in which he describes himself as *“an instigator and also the glue trying to hold it together. I would describe myself as the all rounder a general manager who has creative input into marketing and research as well as PR”*.

Having travelled extensively, Michael is generally sensitive to cultural differences, but his first trip to China was a *“real eye-opener”*. The visit was part of an NZTE organized mission and *“One thing that struck me was meetings ... I came out thinking that they went really well but Andy would say the opposite. It was tough to gauge where people’s interests were and how strong the interest, if there was any. It wasn’t just the language as one or two were conducted in English and Chinese.”*

To get NZ Liquor Resources more ‘export ready’, Michael is enrolled in the Diploma of International Trade with

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the New Zealand School of Export: *“Deciding to set up a business in international trade I realized there was a lot to learn so attended a number of Gosling Chapmen international marketing seminars and my interest started to grow and develop. The more I learned early on, the more I realized I needed to know if we were serious about getting the business up and running”*.

Participating in the School’s distance learning programme has brought many benefits: *“From developing an International trade research project on potential markets I was introduced to areas of importance to consider before entering a new market. I was then able to produce parts of my research assignment with potential partners to show them we had done our research and that the graphs and figures we had arrived at spelt real potential. This research reinforced my initial market perception and added credibility to my pitch. Likewise the International Marketing Plan I created added credibility and weight to my sales pitch and to my own confidence and belief in myself and NZ Liquor”*.

Michael’s major challenge is having enough time to focus on the business and generating enough sales to drive the NZ Liquor Resources Ltd into the next stage of development. Studying does consume valuable hours, but

“time spent doing course work and study, is actually time in which I am constantly thinking of how this relates to my business, how can I use this to improve our chances of success”.

Michael points out that the government and NZ wine do a lot to raise the profile of our wine industry in the international arena, but in an ideal world, a free trade show for new comers to the market would be helpful. Trade shows are expensive and Michael is aware it can take months and a lot of following up before the benefits of exhibiting become evident. This ‘blue sky scenario’ would give foreign markets a chance to see some of the smaller companies, rather than more dominant players.

Looking back, Michael acknowledges his family and friends as the greatest influence on his life, and makes special mention of his grandfather who ran a successful small business. y with ranch sliders that open onto an un-obscured walk to the surf.

Looking forward, Michael hopes to be running a successful business which operates globally, employs several people and allows him enough creative freedom for it not to feel like a job. He also has a dream - to own a bit of beach front property.

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