

Auckland

Rachel Clacher, co-founder of telephone answering service Moneypenny, talks about growing her company in New Zealand's commercial capital



Twelve years ago Rachel Clacher and her brother Ed Reeves had £15,000 between them and a big idea to launch a company. “Ed and I had our own small businesses – I ran a marketing consultancy and Ed had a graphics firm designing flags and banners for sports events,” she explains. “He needed someone to look after his telephone calls because he had to be out of the office sticking up banners.”

After a difficult search, the pair found a company that would respond to calls while he was on the road. “Ed would just divert his



Inspiration: a sabbatical year gave Rachel Clacher the idea to take Moneypenny to New Zealand

call to a number where people would answer in his company's name, take a message and email it to him,” says Clacher.

Everything worked well until Reeves went on holiday and a key client was unable to fax through a reorder of a graphic. “The fax machine had run out of paper so the client phoned to ask if it could be replenished. But the call was diverted and the person taking it replied, ‘I’m just an answering service’.”

Unfortunately, Reeves lost the order but the incident inspired him and his sister. Why couldn’t there be a telephone answering

service staffed by people whom you knew and trusted? Moneypenny was born. “Today we employ 250 people and we’re looking after millions of calls on behalf of thousands of businesses across the UK,” says Clacher.

NEW HORIZONS

Despite a growing demand from global clients to provide a 24-hour service, Moneypenny resisted extending its 8am to 8pm opening hours because it was concerned about the effect it would have on service quality. “Our clients use us because they have a relationship with one particular PA or receptionist, and you can’t have a PA working 24 hours,” says Clacher.

One solution was to hire staff to work overnight but Clacher didn’t believe service levels could be maintained. A sabbatical year in Australia in 2010 gave her the idea about taking the business abroad. “I was looking after calls and working from there, and it was all so seamless so we

thought, let’s look at New Zealand,” she says.

As well as the 11- or 13-hour time difference working in their favour, the response of staff sealed the deal. “We asked everybody at Moneypenny whether they wanted to work overnight, or work in New Zealand?” says Clacher. “Four people said they would be interested in night shifts and 40 people said that they’d be happy working in New Zealand.”

Clacher went to Auckland last September to set up the new office. “I was there for 10 days and chose the beautiful suburb of Takapuna because it was easy for us to find accommodation, an office and a beach all in the same place,” she says. “I found the office and rented a house for our UK staff.”

The next step was to register Moneypenny in New Zealand and look into taxation. “We had to see how the taxation works for people employed by Moneypenny here in the UK but are working over there,” she



City life: Auckland's cosmopolitan vibe persuaded Rachel Clacher to introduce non-standard hours at Moneypenny, so staff could explore attractions such as Viaduct Harbour, top, and Waiheke Island

says. Luckily, Clacher didn’t have too much trouble with laws and regulation. “A solicitor in New Zealand cast his eye over our documentation and made any amends that had to be made.”

FLEXIBLE WORKING

Although setting up the business was straightforward, there were a few surprises in store for Clacher. “In New Zealand it’s not common to have furnished rental accommodation. Things were also really expensive. I went to buy bed linen and a Laura Ashley set cost around NZ\$349 (£182), and I thought, how can that be?”

Fortunately, she had a contact who was on hand to offer advice. “We were very lucky to find a fantastic person in Auckland to act as our contact out there. Silly things like that could have been a bit of a nightmare, but she was amazing at sorting that kind of thing for us,” she explains.

Moneypenny then set up a secondment scheme for UK staff. “We invited people to come

forward if they would be interested in going to New Zealand for a six-month placement. We’re going to have a rolling scheme where every six months another team of people goes out and the other team comes back,” she says.

But Clacher thought it was important to employ local staff as well. “I’ve recruited two people in New Zealand because I felt that the company needed somebody there who is consistent,” she explains.

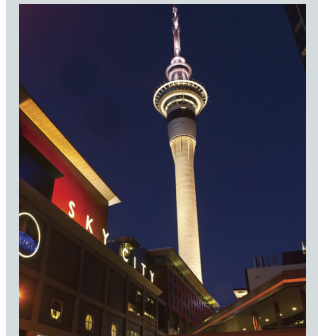
The office opened last October and operates between 8pm to 8am UK time. Clacher says that everyone she dealt with during the launch was charming, and relaxed. “We’re bringing opportunity to Auckland so we’ve been made to feel very welcome,” she says.

Clacher’s love of the Auckland lifestyle led her to introduce non-standard working hours. “Staff work four days on and four days off, so there are lots of opportunities to explore,” she explains. “It’s very different to a working week at Moneypenny in the UK, but we organised it so staff have the opportunity to make the most of this amazing place,” she says.

The addition of an office on the other side of the world has boosted the company. “We’re now able to answer more needs so we have more clients, which is fantastic,” says Clacher. “Previously, there were times when we’ve had to say, ‘I’m sorry but we can’t do that’ – but now we can. The move to Auckland has been a welcome addition to Moneypenny for both our staff and clients. We’re very glad that we’ve done it.”

Behiye Hassan

AUCKLAND FACT FILE



Population
Around 1.4 million

Currency
New Zealand dollar

Language
English and Maori

Sightseeing
Clacher’s highlights include Sky Tower, above, Waiheke Island, Rangitoto Island and Auckland Art Gallery. “I went wine tasting on Waiheke Island and it was just beautiful,” she says.



Where to stay
“Hotel Debrett (above) is an elegant, boutique place to stay in the heart of the fashion and business district. It offers a more personal experience than the large corporate hotels,” says Clacher. www.hoteldebrett.com

Food
Ebisu on Quay Street is a modern, lively Japanese restaurant with stunning food and even a DJ. The award-winning Cibo restaurant in Parnell is described as one of “Auckland’s best-kept secrets”. ebisu.co.nz cibo.co.nz

Getting there
British Airways, Air New Zealand, Cathay Pacific, Emirates and Virgin fly from Heathrow. Alternatively, book through WEXAS at www.iod.com/travel (020 7838 5989).

Useful contacts
For information on visas, business networks and employment law, and practical advice, visit: www.newzealandnow.govt.nz www.dol.govt.nz/infozone



Surf paradise: Piha Beach on Waiheke Island, a favourite weekend escape for Aucklanders. Clacher says the New Zealand lifestyle suits many of her British staff