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Community connection

NZSCA on the importance of communication through COVID-19 in the coffee industry.

The New Zealand Specialty Coffee Association has been mindful of the “pandemic effect” which created many obstacles, such as the severing of connection. It’s been a business minefield as we navigate new landscapes of lockdown, separation of bubbles, level changes, social distancing, masks, border controls, and a rampant infection that kills.

Prior to our August 2021 level four lockdown, NZSCA member companies had been building business cases around trading legalities should we reach another lockdown. Previous foresight had seen us save all important government links and discussions. This would prove fortuitous.

A relatively “new normal” Tuesday in mid-August saw the NZ Cup Tasters Championship for 2021 sell out. Several people who missed out contacted us but “be in to win” has always been the catch cry. In the past, a small selection of tickets had been available right up to the day, but this year was something different. We’d opened the tickets a few weeks before and they were slurped up faster than an 8/8 final round.

Full of fresh ideas so the community can get to know our entrants, our Instagram campaign introducing cuppers along with some information about them (two tastes and a lie). Support is crucial to competitors. It takes a lot to enter a competition. This campaign was a great way to recognise the competitors and, in turn, for them to get their friends, whanau, and companies supporting them too.

That night we were plunged into level four and it looked less likely that the planned September events were going to

go ahead. Even the scheduled Latte Art workshop which was due to be held online the next night was moved. The shock of an abrupt lockdown where attendees’ heads might not be in the right learning space physically or mentally meant that we postponed it a week.

During the first lockdown of March 2020, we acknowledged that information is gold. Unfortunately, the information keeps changing as do the “goal posts” with the Delta variant, however, community safety remains paramount. Rather than add to the noise of another email avalanche, we adapted a cautious approach to see how the levels would develop. Often our decisions cannot be made in a snap due to so many parties being involved. Once the Auckland levels changed, we would know more about when the events could be rescheduled. We also created an email with the business links previously mentioned and simply asked “are you ok?”

Connections through online creative outlets like the Ultimate Fluffy challenge, the Christmas-Chino, and the Catto-Chino have seen people smiling in a world where hospitality is struggling. Worldwide interest saw some really cool cats come in.

Engagement on social media was fun and our judges loved seeing all the cool cats and kittens.

Success of the online Latte Art workshop and planning the next one for Barista will hopefully create another way to reach our people interested in education about championships. A great learning experience for all, we are excited to be creating an online workshop complete with goodie tasting bags for attendees. This event will potentially go ahead in January.

At a board level, we have continued to have regular online meetings. Rather than every three months, we’ve been able to shorten this time between meetings with increased quality and quantity involving less travel time and expense. Our weekly WIPs with gentle agendas have kept everyone in the loop.

From AGM feedback, the new communications subcommittee has boosted the messaging. The mission of this group is to help spread the message of “there’s a lot in that cup”. As such, there’s been an increased interest from the media with attention from all the major media outlets. This clear messaging of what variables are in the cup is now reaching the consumer so they understand why their daily luxury brew costs what it does and possibly why we could be paying more.

Mental Health Awareness week and International Coffee Day were recognised in October. The simple messaging of korero (chat) over a coffee, sums up what we are all about. What better way to connect with someone in the disconnect than sharing coffee?

At time of print, the NZ Cup Tasters Championship and Meadow Fresh NZ Latte Art Championship are due to run in Auckland in December on Friday 3 and Sunday 5 respectively. We can’t wait to meet our community in person for a coffee and a chat.

Stay safe, be kind, drink NZ coffee. ☑



For more information on the New Zealand Specialty Coffee Association, or to join, visit www.nzscA.org