

What TechShop could do for New Zealand

Right now there are Kiwi innovators, entrepreneurs, inventors and students bursting with ideas that, if turned into reality, would be a boon for New Zealand business and the world.

But to do so, these risk-takers need a well-equipped space in which to work and experiment, have access to state-of-the-art tools and expert advice and support.

The answer is TechShop.

The concept of TechShop is simple. Provide an affordable do-it-yourself workshop and prototyping studio that gives designers, engineers and makers of all descriptions, ages and skill levels access to a wide range of tools, equipment and resources. Make it membership-based and flexible, so some may use the workshop for a day or two, while others use it for lengthy projects.

In the 10 years since TechShop was set up in the United States, what it has achieved has been jaw-dropping. It has grown to eight locations and partnered with universities, corporations and companies. This success hasn't gone unnoticed by politicians. United States President Barack Obama has visited TechShop and sung its praises.

But this isn't surprising when you consider TechShop's numerous success stories, big and small. A prototype mobile payment device called Square was created in a TechShop. Today Square is valued at US\$6 billion and revolutionised peer-to-peer transactions.

Another member took a handful of TechShop classes and used the skills gained to build a prototype of a luxury iPad case. Within 90 days he had sold US\$1 million in product.

Two TechShop members created Embrace, a portable infant incubation blanket. Using TechShop's resources they increased the blanket's incubation period from 1 hour to 4-5 hours. The blanket has now saved the lives of more than 87,000 babies in Third World countries.

Just think what Kiwi innovators could achieve if a TechShop, which provides access to more than \$1 million worth of equipment and software, was established here. Its potential would be limitless.



Hutt City Council sees Lower Hutt as an ideal location for New Zealand's first TechShop. The city has one of the highest numbers of people in New Zealand employed in medium-high tech manufacturing and the largest industrial-commercial zoned land area in the region.

A TechShop in Lower Hutt would open up new avenues for existing businesses and enormous opportunities for new ones. Lower Hutt's location is also ideal for the region, with easy access for Wellington-based businesses and elsewhere to use the facility.



TechShop is already very familiar with Lower Hutt. TechShop Global CEO Paul Duggan and colleagues visited the city in March and held workshops on the viability of a TechShop in the city. The feedback was overwhelming positive.

It would cost about \$1.5 million to fit out the Lower Hutt TechShop.

But before a decision is made, Hutt City Council has been undertaking a market assessment.

To make access to TechShop affordable TechShop needs companies, universities and other organisations to commit to long term bulk memberships so 75-80 per cent of memberships are secured prior to the facility opening. Those organisations involved in establishing what would be the first TechShop in New Zealand would contribute to its design and governance, including securing preferred access.

Council has a target of 450 members from a variety of sources, locked in for a period of time before it can commit to establishing a TechShop. The current deadline towards securing this commitment is 30 June, with the aim of opening the facility by 2018.

Council's Strategic Services General Manager Kim Kelly says a TechShop in Lower Hutt is not only an exciting prospect for the city, but the region and the country.

Lower Hutt has a long history of innovation in science, technology and manufacturing. Its importance and potential for growth has been marked and celebrated in recent years with initiatives including the Hutt STEMM Festival and Technology Valley Awards, she says.

"TechShop gives opportunities to not only locals, but anyone regionally or nationally who has a bright idea. If businesses and educational institutions get behind TechShop and commit to memberships, the benefits for them will be enormous. Dreams will become reality."

For more information on TechShop, including the benefits of taking long term bulk memberships, contact Hutt City Council Sector Development Manager Irwin Munro Irwin.Munro@huttcity.govt.nz

