

Invest in IT: What the Election Means - NZ's Tech

Investment in IT What the election means for New Zealand's Technology Sector



In case you haven't been following the news, this year is an election year in New Zealand. As industries continue to become more digitalised, technology is a major policy point for parties in the lead up to voting day (and not just in relation to hidden cameras). With these policies having a significant potential impact on both employers and professionals in the IT and technology field, we thought it'd be a good idea to dive into each party's plans and find out what they have in store for the IT sector – without telling you who to vote for of course!

National

As the incumbent, and current odds on favourite to come out of the election as winners, National's key focus is on achieving surpluses and building a stronger economy. Naturally, technology is a big part of that, and the sector is a key area for business innovation which leads to growth – with the likes of Xero, Vend and TradeMe being some shining examples of that. Their 2017 Budget has **significant investments** in the technology and science fields, and their commitment to free trade could be a win for Kiwi startups looking to make waves abroad.



They also have a plan in place to update the education system and introduce children to digital technology as early as possible, earmarking a \$40m investment to ensure that children are digitally fluent. With digital disruption being such an important topic in the world of employment, making sure that the next generation is prepared for these changes is key to success in this field. This could open up opportunities for businesses aimed at integrating technology into the education system.

Labour



As National's main opposition to power, the Labour party's main message is about providing a fresh direction after 9 years of National-led government. When it comes to technology, Labour's key policy points are their Young Entrepreneurs' policy and their involvement in the Future of Work commission.

The Young Entrepreneurs' plan is essentially a way for young New Zealanders to dedicate themselves to a business idea instead of pursuing further education. In their words, any New Zealander aged 18 to 23 will be able to apply for up to \$20,000 to start a business based on an innovative idea; provided they have been through an accelerator business training programme, have engaged a business mentor, and have their plan approved by an independent panel of experts. This grant could be a massive incentive for young technology entrepreneurs and would give them the support to see their ideas through.

In December 2014, Labour leader Andrew Little announced the Future of Work Commission, aimed at understanding our changing workforce and putting a plan in place to ensure sustainable employment. The commission had input an independent, external reference group, comprised of economic, tech, and employment experts; with the committee also involving members of other parties. You can read the report [here](#). Whilst not an immediate investment in the technology sector at the surface level (although their plan to turn Dunedin into a digital hub shows that they are prepared to do this to some degree), the report recognises the changing employment landscape, and the need for a long-term investment in technology to get it right.

Greens

The Green Party have been the perennial dark horse in the past two New Zealand elections, growing in profile and moving away from strictly environmentalist policies in favour of providing a broader left-leaning alternative to the Labour Party. However, as the country's third largest party, a Labour and Greens' coalition government isn't out of the equation as far as election outcomes go.

For the technology sector, that may also come with some benefits. Technology and environmental sustainability are often closely intertwined, and investment in clean energy will create opportunities for innovative New Zealand businesses. However, the most interesting tech-related Greens policy, is their plan to institute a **Minister for Manufacturing in cabinet**. This would provide leadership across the sector and continue a push towards technological innovation, whilst still looking to preserve jobs. To this end, the Green Party have also been involved with Labour's Future of Work plan.

Fringe parties

However, there are more than three parties contesting this election, and some may have significant influence depending on the result: with NZ First, the Maori Party and a resurgent ACT likely to have the most significant impact on the coming campaign. Unfortunately, the Maori Party's 2017 manifesto wasn't available to access at this time, but we'll likely have further insight on that closer to the election.



New Zealand First (another party that contributed to the Future of Work) commission, are focused on changing the way the telecommunications sector operates, with the aim of dividing infrastructure more evenly between providers. Another key point for them is to ensure that New Zealand businesses are given the first opportunities for Government ICT tenders, as well as introducing stricter immigration policy which could impact access to overseas talent. ACT, on the other hand promise support for businesses in the form of free trade agreements, as well as wanting to review regulations to ensure the viability of autonomous vehicles.

In Closing

There are a variety of other parties, all of whom will have some kind of outlook on tech (including the very much tech-focused Internet Party!) – but each of them has one thing in common: the understanding that investment in technology is crucial to the future of New Zealand. While they have may have different ways in which they will make that investment, it's certainly an exciting time for the New Zealand technology sector.

For now, it's up to you.