

Kea Wins Supreme Award: Vero Excellence in Business Support Awards 2007
Acceptance Speech by Ross McConnell, CEO, Kea New Zealand

Thanks to Vero and tonight's other Sponsors, Sarah Trotman, and the Business Excellence Foundation for this wonderful recognition.

More than anything else tonight, I'd like to acknowledge the significant contributions that have been made to our organization by Kea people from all over the world. From our founders who have put their money and reputations on the line – to our hugely committed staff who have worked tirelessly for non-profit wages – to our directors and volunteers who have worked for nothing more than the privilege of contributing to New Zealand's future – thank you all so very much.

Thanks also to our sponsors and partners – many of whom are here with us tonight. I'd especially like to thank HSBC for the significant leap of faith that they made with us 18 months ago.

I've recently been giving some thought to what it is that keeps driving Kea forward – and for me it comes down to one key idea: the opportunity to make NZ the most globally connected nation on earth.

New Zealand has a greater proportion of its most talented citizens living overseas than any other developed country. In today's global economy – and in this export year in particular - we need to be finding more ways to turn this national characteristic to our competitive advantage. NZ businesses need to compete and succeed on the world stage – and who better to help than our own people who are doing just that.

The whole "brain drain" debate is really holding us back in this area. I cannot understand why we use such a negative term to describe one of the most empowering experiences many of our people will ever have. New Zealand enjoys a fantastic reputation around the world – and this would not be the case if it wasn't for the great Kiwi OE. We really need to change our tone if we truly want to engage our expats in New Zealand's future.

Making NZ the most globally connected nation on earth is a huge challenge – and one that a small non-profit organization like Kea cannot hope to achieve by itself. Connecting NZ with the world needs to be a true team effort – so if you do share our vision for a better connected and more prosperous NZ, we'd love to hear from you.

Thanks again – and congratulations to all of tonight's winners!