



RIK ATHORNE

Rik is the design studio manager at Weta Workshop in Wellington, a company best known for its design and effects work on award-winning film projects, including Lord of the Rings Trilogy, King Kong, Avatar, The Hobbit and Elysium. Having moved from the UK in 2006, Rik runs a team of conceptual thinkers and artists. He provides us with view inside one of New Zealand's talent hubs.

1. In the context of your professional background, what does 'talent' mean to you?

Talent is something that can be learned and taught. But gifted, you are born with. It doesn't mean that the talented individual can't achieve anything that the gifted individual can, just that someone who is a gifted individual may be able to do it easier.

2. Are you aware of any talent gaps that exist or might arise within the next ten years?

Over the last few years the landscape for how audiences want to be entertained has been shifting. Content is everywhere – in the theatres, film, tv, online, print, video games, events etc etc. We are very much in the transmedia world and it doesn't appear to be getting any smaller.

To keep up with the ever changing landscape we'll of course have to continue growing our knowledge base so that we continue to stay relevant. I don't see us as having talent gaps right now in the design studio but looking forward I'm

sure there are job descriptions in the future that don't exist today that will need to be filled.

3. How do successful organisations attract, keep and grow talent?

I can only comment for the organisation I work for. We've got an industry here in Wellington that has grown over the last 25 years and from that point of view,

then want to stay because it's a great place to work and live.

Like any other service provider in New Zealand, we (Weta Workshop) ride the peaks and troughs of the creative industry. Over the years Richard [Taylor] and the company have had to innovate to stay relevant because of the changing environments we live and work in. Budgets get tighter, deadlines get shorter which means we have to constantly grow and adapt to ensure that we can continue to deliver, which is one of Weta Workshop's strengths. We have to remain flexible and creative to ensure we are able to ride the wave of change. So when finding new talent to join the team it's important to ensure we remain flexible.

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that itself acts as a beacon to attract talent at a global scale and a domestic scale. The Wellington film industry is a creative mecca that attracts talent that

4. Think about talent hubs around the world, what is cool and why?

Lots of cities and communities around the world have their own talent hubs or fashion hubs/art quarters or whatever.

What's my definition of a hub. A definition of a hub is a group of people all enjoying a similar thing. That's a hub. A hub is the beginning of something special and then it grows and becomes its own thing that attracts like-minded people.

5. Can you assess New Zealand's performance in attracting talent on a global scale?

I think we're pretty successful. From my perspective New Zealand has definitely attracted a lot of talent from around the world and is keeping it. I can't speak on behalf of other industries, but in our industry, if you go to the coffee shop up the road you'll hear New Zealander's, Americans, South Africans, Chinese, Europeans, the list goes on. They're all here on the Miramar peninsula. One's an actor, one's an artist, one's a costume designer, one's a VFX expert, one's the cinematographer and on and on, it's a talent hub. All these different skill sets from around the world are in the same queue getting a coffee – and (hopefully) they like being here, because it's unique, because of the opportunities and the lifestyle's good.

6. What does New Zealand need to do in order to attract, keep and grow talent?

We've just got to keep doing new stuff that excites and attracts new people to come and join and be part of growing our collective creative industry. What I'm really excited about is how we start to navigate our way on to the

new platforms from New Zealand, I'm very excited by that. So much has been achieved already through what Peter [Jackson], Richard and all of the other creative leaders that we've had on the peninsula and throughout New Zealand. I'm looking forward to what the next generation is going to be doing.

One place I'm particularly interested in is what does success look like at an interactive/online level for New Zealand. The new platforms where content can be consumed on mass global level direct to the audience through the

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internet. We must continue to think in new and different ways for how we change and be flexible and adapt to creating new forms of content. We're definitely talking and working in those areas right now with our overseas colleagues and I'm really excited about what's going to come from all of that.

I feel that New Zealand has the ability and opportunity to once again make change in this world and influence others. In my opinion New Zealand has great influence at an aspirational level, plus it's a great place for opportunity, where things are possible. I genuinely

think that if we continue to push that message out there then others will only be inspired and good can only come from that.

If the vision is New Zealand is *a place where talent wants to live*, how do we get to that next step and how do we start getting people to believe in that vision. No doubt that is the challenge.

I believe we have a window of five years maybe whilst New Zealand has this opportunity to ride the crest of the wave of staying relevant in this digital age. We have the ability to be a driving wedge in the world of influence right now and we need to continue to grow, foster and adopt that entrepreneurial spirit in to the younger generation.

7. Any final thoughts for young people?

The advice I can give to a young person wanting to get into an industry is learn as much as you can and work really hard. Nothing's easy, you have to work for it and understand how to work within a team or with other people. Make sure you choose the right role models to be influenced by and understand what it means to become an enabler. It's good to have vision but it's the enablers that make it happen. One feeds the other.

Interviewed by Charlotte Greenfield at Weta Workshop in Wellington, on 2 June 2013. Photograph provided by Rik Athorne.