

Kea New Zealand

Kiwi helping Kiwi via Kea Connect

Insights from a year of global connections

A retrospective review of Kea Connect projects through 2021

February 2022

Celebrating Kea Connect 2021

**606 Kea community members
from around the globe extended a helping hand
in support of 373 Kiwi entrepreneurs, founders
and business people**

CEO FOREWORD

Welcome to the Kea Connect 2021 retrospective

Kia ora tātou,

As we take a look back on a year of Kiwi helping Kiwi via Kea Connect, I want to take the opportunity to say a heartfelt thank you to our global community. It's because of your support we have been able to make a meaningful impact on more than 370 businesses in 2021.

Last year was a highly challenging time for businesses with the pandemic causing disruptions in markets around the world. It's during times like these that the true value of a service like Kea Connect is recognised.

Our global community were able to offer Kiwi export businesses valuable in-market support and advice when it came to making business critical decisions during a global pandemic. As restrictions eased and countries began to reopen we were in a unique position to offer lessons and learnings from markets that were reconnecting ahead of New Zealand.

Over the past year Kea Connect delivered a 91% successful connection rate and an NPS of 77.5. We also initiated a range of programmes to support businesses, including proactive outreach to New Zealand based companies in the technology and food & beverage industries. As a results of this outreach the Kea team spoke with almost 100 businesses new to Kea Connect and initiated 25 new connection projects.

Before I go I would also like to acknowledge the tireless work from our Kea team around the world, especially from our Regional Directors in the UK, the USA and China.

Sincere thanks for your ongoing support,

Toni Truslove, CEO Kea New Zealand



About Kea

Kea was founded in 2001 at a time when many of our best and brightest Kiwi minds were heading overseas. Sir Stephen Tindall and Professor David Teece recognised that for a nation as small and geographically remote as Aotearoa, offshore Kiwi are crucial to our ongoing global connectedness. 20 years after its inception, Kea continues to focus on keeping our extraordinary offshore Kiwi part of Aotearoa.

Each month Kea supports 30+ Kiwi businesses to compete on the world stage by extending the helping hand of our offshore community via our Kea Connect service. We highlight inspiring Kiwi doing world changing mahi offshore, we profile the successes of Kiwi export businesses to educate future entrepreneurs and we showcase to broader New Zealand the significant opportunities in connecting with both offshore and returning Kiwi.

Kea has a community of almost half a million Kiwi, across 185 countries. We are funded by government agencies including NZTE, MBIE, MFAT and selected corporate partners.

Acknowledgements

Our global Kea community

We would like to first and foremost acknowledge our **global Kea community**. This community spans 185 countries and consists of individuals who willingly offer up their time, advice, experience, and support to help grow and inspire Kiwi export businesses and entrepreneurs.

Our government partners

We gratefully acknowledge the support for the Kea Connect service from **Kea's government partners**: New Zealand Trade & Enterprise [NZTE], Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade [MFAT] and Ministry for Business, Innovation and Employment [MBIE]. Without the encouragement and support of our partners we would not be able to deliver this service.



**MINISTRY OF BUSINESS,
INNOVATION & EMPLOYMENT**
HĪKINA WHAKATUTUKI



ABOUT KEA CONNECT

Kea Connect is Kea's flagship free service

Since 2013 Kea Connect has been connecting businesses with our extensive, international community of Kiwi, helping to unlock export potential. In a year characterised by disruption on all fronts for businesses, making connections and having conversations with people on the ground and in the know was more important than ever before.

No matter where in the world Kiwis want to take their business, its industry or size, Kea connects businesses with experts who are ready to provide market intelligence, connection or guidance. Through Kea Connect, business people can unlock conversations with industry experts, thought leaders, and all-round amazing Kiwi who will help shape growth offshore. It doesn't matter where the business is in its export journey, Kea's connections can help.

31

Businesses connected
on average every month
in 2021

91%

Successful connection
rate

185

Countries with experts
ready to help

77.5

Net Promoter Score
[NPS]

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

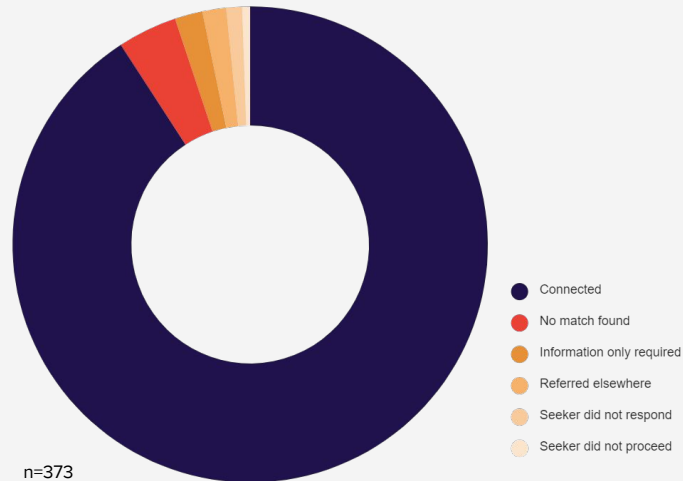
Analysis and insights from 2021

ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

2021 - a year of outstanding connection success

Despite countries around the world being in ever-changing stages of lockdown throughout 2021, one thing that didn't change was the willingness of Kea's community to offer a helping hand to Kiwi businesses.

Illustrating the true power of a global network, Kea Connect delivered a **91% successful connection rate** and an **NPS of 77.5**, with the team unable to find a match from within the Kea network just 4% of the time. 3.5% of projects closed due to information only being required, or onward referral, usually to NZ Inc partners such as NZTE or MBIE.



"I would highly recommend the Kea Connect service to anyone looking to expand their business offshore. The Kea Connect team is incredibly friendly and professional and they were able to effortlessly match me up with two excellent marketers who provided valuable insight and advice on expanding into the AU market."

Head of Marketing, natural health skincare company expanding into Australia

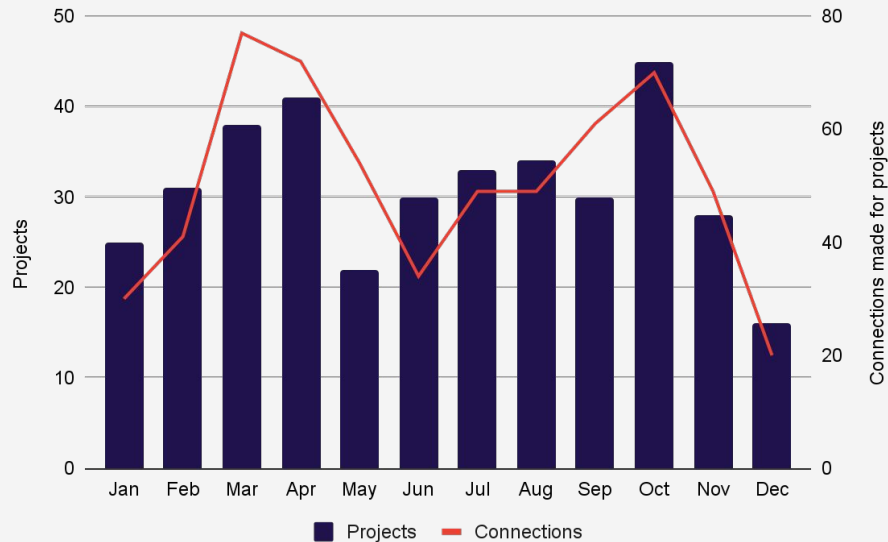
"Really welcoming response to reaching out. Kea instantly helped us to make some really great connections and took time to understand where our business is at and what support we need. THANK YOU!"

Operations Manager, consumer goods company expanding into the UK

ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Kea Connect by month

Global lockdowns impacted the number of connection projects, down from 2020 average of 40 per month to 31 per month in 2021. As New Zealand's business community navigated the unknown, there was a shift towards businesses seeking not only export connections, but also domestic connections to help with emerging domestic lockdown challenges.



Kea responded by initiating a range of programmes to support businesses, including proactive outreach to New Zealand based businesses in technology and food & beverage industries. Through this initiative the Kea team spoke with almost 100 businesses, and initiated 25 new connection projects to support emerging needs.

The team also re-engaged businesses that had worked with Kea in 2020 to identify what additional support Kea might offer.

ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Kea Connect regional leads - supporting business connections around the world in 2021

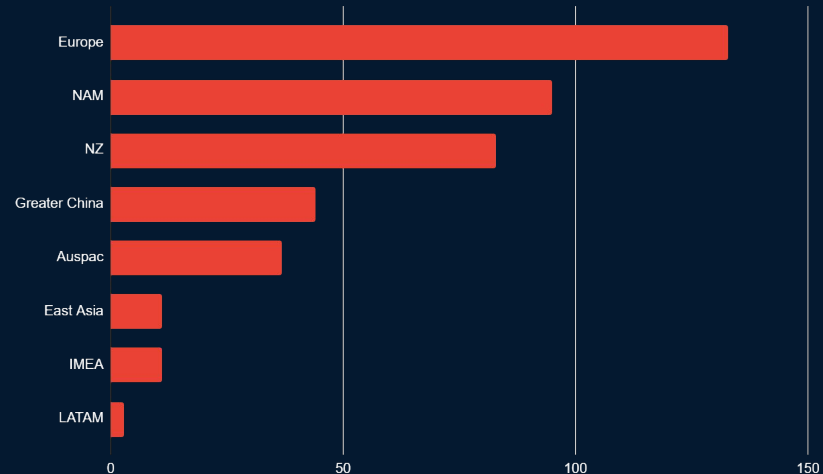
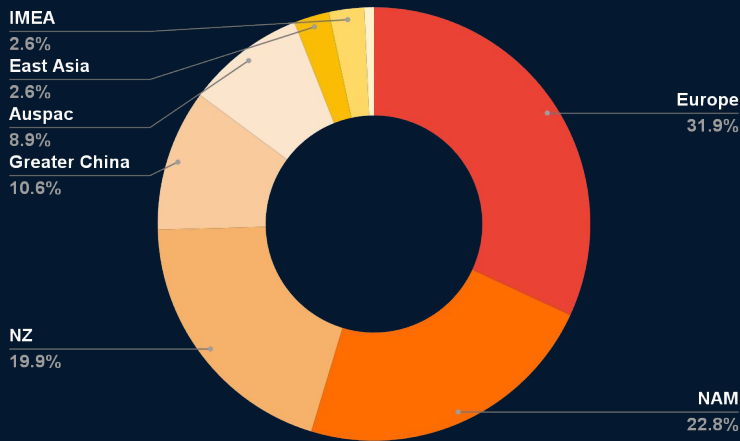


ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Around the world - Kea Connect by region

After working with thousands of exporters, NZTE’s customer team highlights the important relationship between market focus and business success.

It is a positive sign therefore that **91% of Kea Connect projects hone in on just one region**, and 86% on a single country. A mere 4.5% engage Kea Connect to explore 3 or more countries concurrently.



NB: Total number of projects seeking connections in this region. As 34 projects sought connections in >1 region, this number adds to more than the total number of projects.

ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Around the world - Kea Connect by country

There is strong alignment between the countries with the highest number of connection requests and New Zealand's largest trading partners, with three of the top five trading partners ranking in the top five Kea Connect. Japan and South Korea, our 4th and 5th largest trading partners, did not feature frequently in Kea Connect requests, with only 4 projects seeking connections in those countries.

	Kea Connect rank	Kea Connect project total*	Export partner rank**	Export value**
United Kingdom***	1	114	6	\$986.29M
United States***	2	95	3	\$4.30B
New Zealand	3	83	NA	NA
China***	4	43	1	\$10.79B
Australia	5	35	2	\$5.29B
Netherlands	6	10	18	\$450.21M
Germany	7	9	12	\$608.40M
UAE	8	6	14	\$530.96M
Singapore	9=	5	8	\$708.72M
Italy	9=	5	28	\$148.32M
Canada	9=	5	16	\$515.30M

* Total number of projects seeking connections in this country. As 51 projects sought connections in >1 country, this number adds to more than the total number of projects.

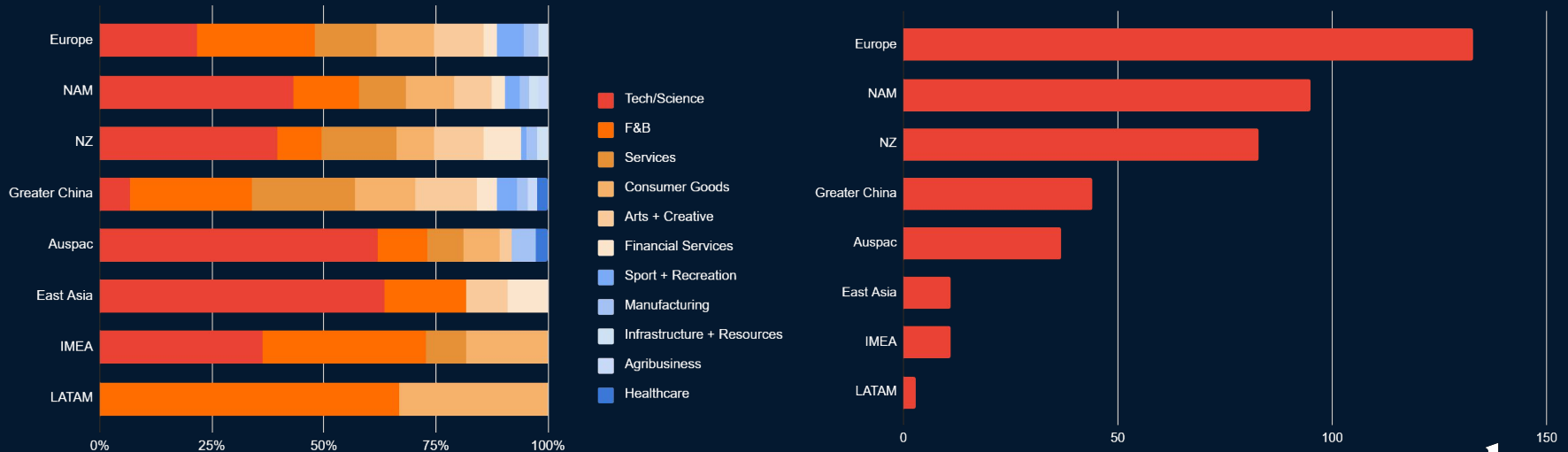
**<https://tradingeconomics.com/new-zealand/exports-by-country> 2020 data, New Zealand exports, USD

***Kea Regional Director locations.

ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Region focus - projects by sector

The relative volume of the top four sectors seeking help and connections is clear when viewed with a regional lens. Food and Beverage is the only sector with projects spanning all eight regions, and Tech features strongly in all except LATAM and Greater China.



Adidas x Allbirds – a collaboration of kaitiakitanga

When Allbirds co-founder Tim Brown was introduced to fellow Kiwi and President of adidas North America, Zion Armstrong, a collaboration between the two companies was the last thing on his mind. In fact after being introduced through the Kea Connect service, Tim says he was just honoured the ‘bloke would have lunch with him’. Fast forward several years and the two companies have worked together to create a running shoe with a minimal carbon footprint, a project which embodies their shared Kiwi values.

For Tim Brown, Kaitiakitanga, or the guardianship and protection of the environment, is key. So when it came time to hang up his boots at the end of his successful New Zealand football career, he saw an opportunity to create a better future.

“I realised there was an opportunity to bring natural and sustainable material and innovation to the enormous category of footwear, through a different type of direct to consumer business model. Off the back of a grant in 2014 I created an innovation platform based on merino fibre, I spent \$1000 NZD shooting a video to showcase the fibre on the farm of a family friend and launched it on Kickstarter. It was really successful. Following that success I partnered with my co-founder Joey Zwilling and in 2015 we launched Allbirds from the garage of his mother-in-law’s house in San Francisco.”

In the past five years, Allbirds has become a global phenomenon and a huge Kiwi success story. The company, which once consisted of Tim, Joey and Joey’s dog Walter, has now grown to more than 750 employees worldwide and has expanded their offering beyond both merino and footwear. Time Magazine named Allbirds the “world’s most comfortable shoe” and its

investors include superstars like Leonardo DiCaprio. Most recently, Allbirds successfully listed on the Nasdaq Stock Exchange.

Tim says Allbirds has always used carbon emissions as their ‘north star’ but it wasn’t until after meeting fellow Kiwi Zion Armstrong, who was the President of adidas North America, that the two brands realised they shared similar values and had a unique opportunity to do something special.

Zion was introduced to Tim through Kea Connect and says right away he was impressed with Tim’s passion for sustainability and innovation, something adidas is also heavily focused on.

“Tim and I met for lunch in Portland. It was a positive connection right off the bat. I asked him if he wanted to come up and see our campus. I took him to our Innovation, Research & Development space so he could see some of the things we were working on. At that point it was just two Kiwi guys having a yarn and talking business and discussing how we could do things better. When Tim left I reached out to our Executive Director of Global Brands and said you have to meet this guy, the founder of Allbirds. For me it was about the personal connection and really understanding what both brands were trying to do. We knew at adidas we didn’t have all the solutions, but potentially putting the two brands together we could really create something special. It certainly started off as a Kiwi connection but more importantly it became about what we could do for our planet.”

Tim was also impressed by the work adidas were doing in the sustainability space and says meeting Zion was ‘the New Zealand network in full force.’ However at the time of that first lunch he says a collaboration was the furthest thing from his mind.

Adidas x Allbirds – a collaboration of kaitiakitanga

“Zion is a little bit of a legend, in fact a lot of a legend. I just wanted to meet him and learn from a guy who had been in the category for a long time. I had no expectations and was honoured that the bloke would have lunch with me. That meeting through Kea Connect was the initial connection but it was a long time until we really started to think about working together. Zion introduced me to some other people at adidas and we hosted some people, and slowly things started to form. I think in this age of LinkedIn it’s easy to add a contact but it’s much harder to build a relationship. I like to take the time to get to know people deeply, there is no fast track in this sort of work.”

Over time the Allbirds team forged a relationship with the team at adidas and together they started thinking about how the two brands could go further, together. Tim says it was around this time that the concept of creating a shoe with no carbon footprint was born.

“This idea that a big company that has been around for 70 years or more with all this market experience felt they could work with and in turn learn something from Allbirds, a business which was only five years old, was a huge compliment. I think all of us realised that we could achieve more if we worked together. We focused on this idea of the world’s lowest carbon running shoe and set ourselves the timeline of a year. We wanted to make the idea of reducing carbon emissions tangible for our consumers and give them something they could do right now. To be able to create a shoe using just 2.94kgs of carbon in a little over a year, was an extraordinary achievement.”

It’s hard to attach a carbon footprint to shoes as it’s not something that is traditionally measured and there is a lot of variation within the footwear category. However, early research by both companies suggests the average carbon footprint is somewhere in the low teens, therefore a shoe using less than 3kgs is a groundbreaking achievement.

So groundbreaking in fact that Time magazine has just given the adidas x Allbirds ‘cleaner sneakers’ a special mention on their list of the ‘Best Inventions of 2021’. But for Tim and Zion the shoe is just the start of what can be achieved.

Zion says if brands are serious about sustainability then the biggest learning is how to make a lower carbon shoe but how to move forward together for a better outcome for all.

“Traditionally in the footwear space companies don’t work with competitors, but from the beginning there was a higher challenge in play. Addressing climate change requires a major shift in thinking. Sustainability can’t just be the things we need to stop doing, it must be about the things we need to start doing as well.”

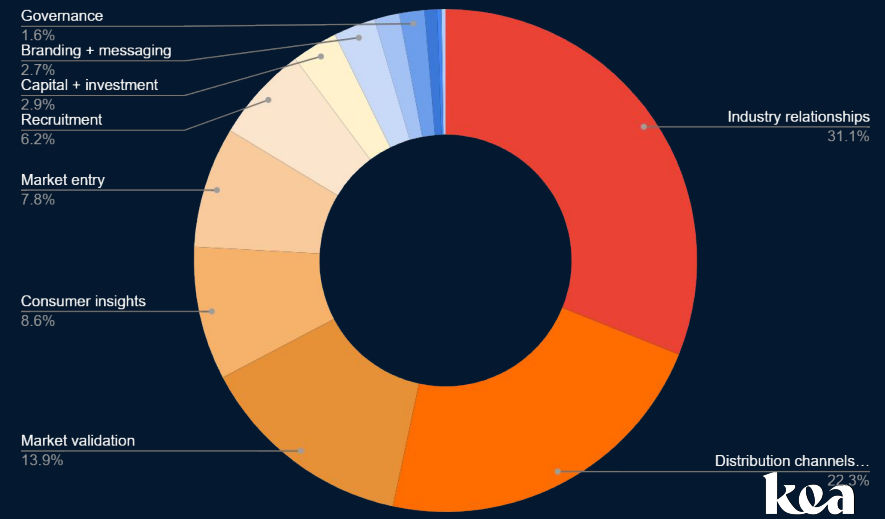
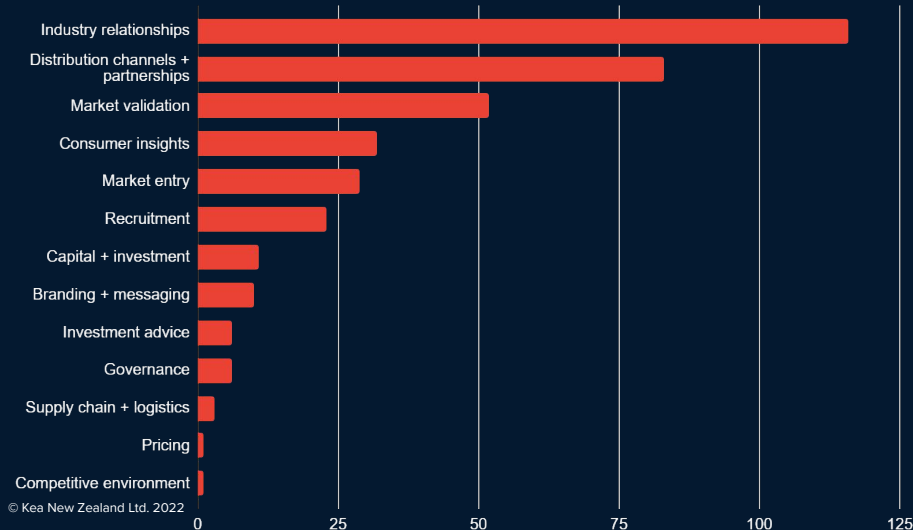
Read the [Allbirds release](#)

ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Primary connection purpose

Assistance with **industry relationships, distribution and partnerships, market validation** and **consumer insights** make up 76% of all enquiries.

Businesses are coming to Kea for help and connections most frequently prior to, or in the early stages of being active in a market. In these early stages conversations with those having deep in-market experience can make a meaningful difference to business strategy and can help businesses understand if it's the right time to make the leap into a new market, and what it would take to be successful.



ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Kea community supporting with market validation

Manufacturing sector

The Vice President Strategy of a US-based orthotic and prosthetic care clinic provided advice and insights on the US healthcare system to a Kiwi manufacturing company providing protection accessories for prosthetics.

Technology sector

The SVP Procurement of a top 10 US cheese producer, the SVP Global Manufacturing of a top 20 US dairy products company and the Vice President of a leading Canadian specialty dairy ingredients manufacturer all shared their time with a Kiwi transportation and logistics software platform business looking to expand into North America.

ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Kea community supporting with navigating channels and distribution

F&B sector

A newly launched premium cocktail brand with strong New Zealand distribution sought help to grow its small Australian presence exponentially and make the most of a new Singapore partner. The CEO of a specialist wine and cocktail consultancy, the founder of a digital consulting firm focusing on the alcoholic beverage market in Singapore and an expert in establishing branded alcoholic beverage distribution across Asia Pacific all offered their time and networks to the founder.

Consumer goods & retail sector

The co-founder of a premium possum and sheepskin footwear brand sought advice on distribution vs direct to consumer channels and wanted connections to US distributors and retailers. A Canada-based expert in premium D2C retail brand positioning and a US expert in positioning premium apparel and accessory brands offered to provide guidance.

ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Kea community supporting with market entry

Technology sector

The US-based founder of an analytics platform which allows educators to see and evaluate data about learner engagement and the US-based founder of the world's largest online library of subtitled classroom-use educational video shared insights ahead of US market entry with the CEO of an edtech financial literacy programme aimed at teachers and parents.

Manufacturing sector

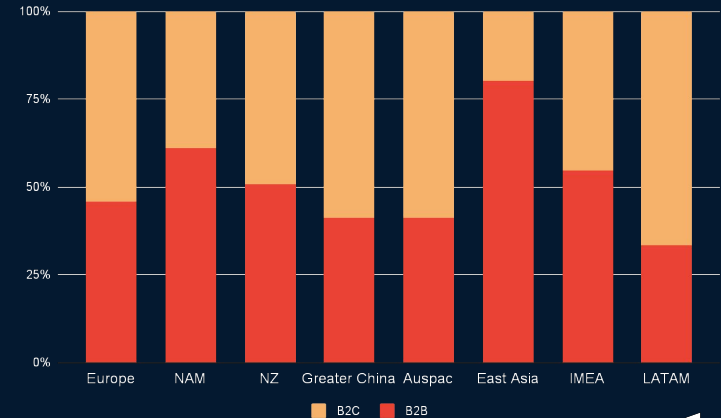
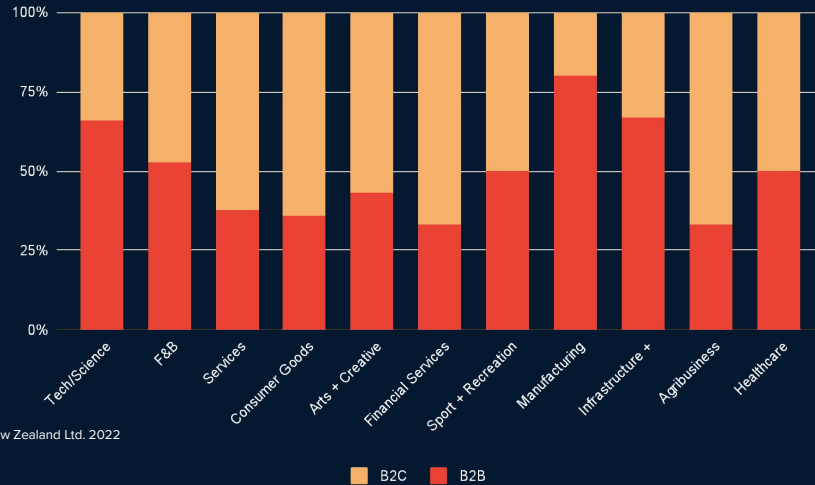
The National Director of an Australia-wide residential aged care group helped a New Zealand textile manufacturer about to enter Australia understand the local aged care market more deeply, and gave tips on how to be best prepared to enter the market.

ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Business model by region and sector

Overall, connection requests relating to business to business [B2B] and business to consumer [B2C] support were almost equal with 52.7% B2B versus 47.3% B2C.

The differences show more strongly when each sector is explored. The manufacturing sector has a strong history of going to market via channel partners and this is reflected in Kea Connect projects, with 80% B2B compared to the consumer goods sector at just 35% B2B. When we look at regions, we find businesses seeking connections in East Asia to have the strongest B2B focus, recognising the importance of channel partners to reach consumers in a region with such a broad range of language requirements, highly specific social media platforms, unique payment systems and fragmented channels.

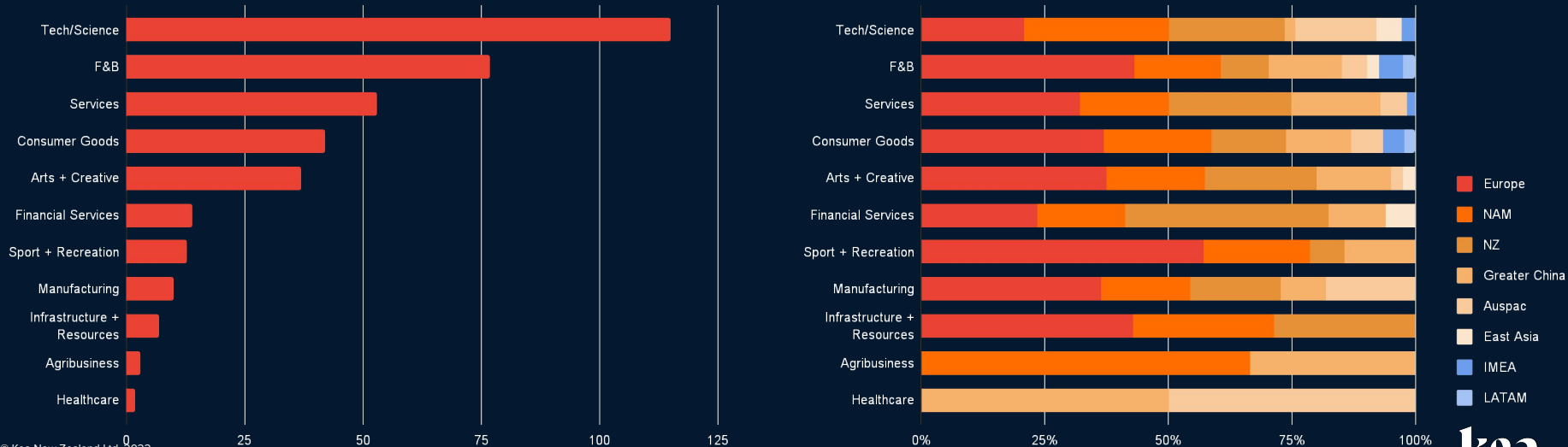


ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Projects by industry sector

Tech, Food & Beverage, Services and Consumer Goods businesses dominate Kea Connect with 77% of projects originating from these top 4 sectors.

In 2021 the Kea team initiated an active outreach programme focusing on Tech and F&B businesses, connecting with businesses featured in the media or with those recently receiving investment, to power up their growth using Kea Connect and to help address business disruption caused by the pandemic.



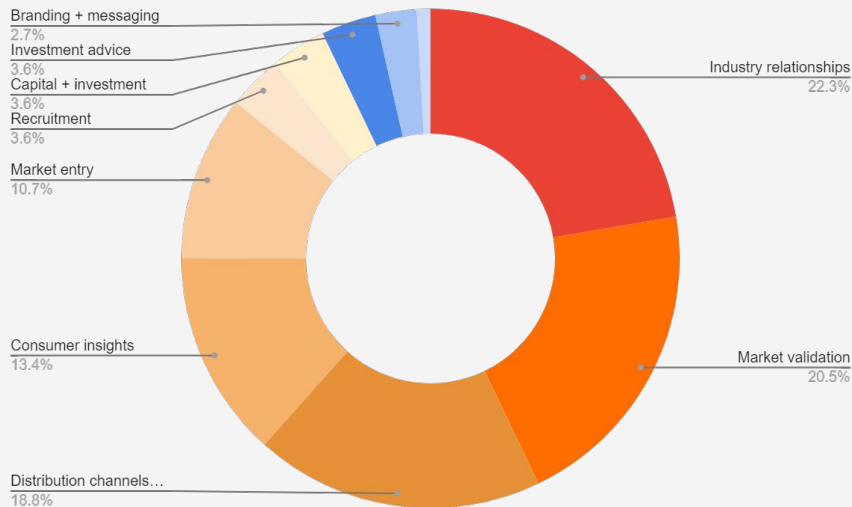
ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Focus on Technology sector

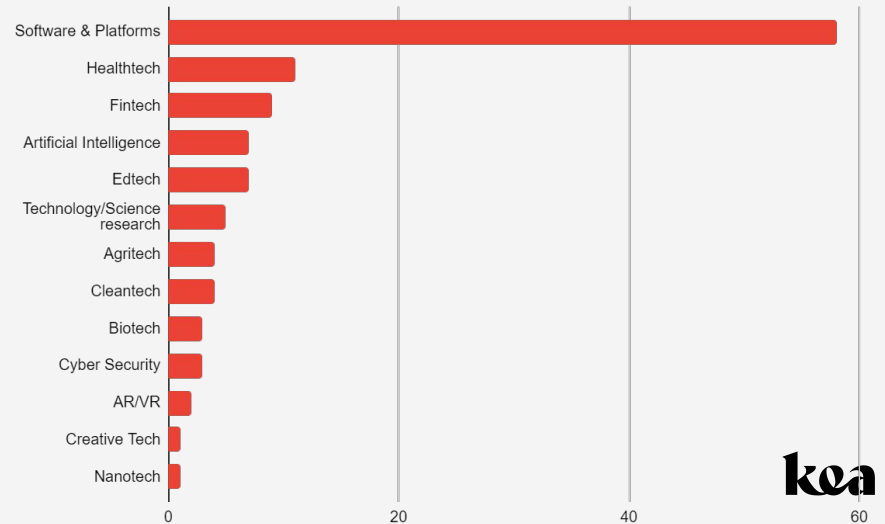
The tech sector is one of New Zealand’s top 3 exporters, and employment in the sector has been growing at almost twice the rate of the general economy over recent years.

Tech sector businesses understand the value of connections. With many being global or having global potential from day one, it’s no surprise that this sector makes up 31% of Kea Connect enquiries. Dominated by software and platforms companies, tech sector businesses research potential markets early and are hungry for connections, consumer insights and exploring partnerships right from pre-revenue stage.

Tech/Science by primary connection purpose



Tech/Science by subsector



ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Technology sector connection snippets

Artificial intelligence example

The developers of an AI tool designed for researchers were looking to connect with Kea community members involved in academia, science or industry R&D in the US to better understand how these areas differ from the New Zealand context. Kea connected them with a Research Associate in a US University and Postdoctoral Fellow in a US Research Institute to help the team with market validation.

"Thanks for the connection with [solver]. We had an excellent discussion yesterday. Lots of value. It looks like it's going to be an ongoing collaboration."

Fintech example

An established treasury management software organisation was seeking customer insights and market validation to inform messaging and positioning in the United Kingdom. Kea connected them with the Head of Strategy, Global Banking and Markets from the UK office of a global Tier 1 bank.

"A quick note to thank you very much for the hugely valuable introduction to [solver], who I spoke to yesterday evening. I had some very specific questions about how funding decisions are made, how solutions are developed by different departments with client value in mind and what fintechs should be highlighting to banks. [Solver] gave really detailed answers that gave a level of insight we are not usually privy to. This will help inform our approach and messaging going forward. Massive value add, thank you."

Tradify - bringing global perspective to a high growth tech business

Used by 25,000+ tradies & built in New Zealand, Tradify's all-in-one job management app saves hours of admin. The unique, end-to-end app is designed especially for trades businesses. It simplifies customer enquiry management, quote creation, job scheduling, job management, invoicing, and payments. The company's mission is to help tradespeople reduce their admin time and get their nights and weekends back.

With a solid base of New Zealand and Australian trades customers behind it, Tradify had expanded into the United Kingdom three years earlier, and was growing fast. The company secured \$10M Series-A investment early in 2021 and Tradify's CEO Michael Steckler contacted Kea seeking connections with specific expertise in trades in the UK, with a view to potentially bringing new members onto the Tradify board. As a tech executive with extensive experience in high growth companies in the US, UK and New Zealand, Michael was seeking someone with trades experience and deep knowledge of the UK market to help guide the approach to the UK expansion.

Kea introduced Michael to community member Anne Timpany, a Kiwi trades entrepreneur and recent returner to New Zealand who achieved global acclaim for her UK-based business.

During her 16 years in the UK Anne co-founded and built-up a large-scale trades business, receiving recognition including winning the prestigious National NatWest Everywoman Award in 2017, being named in the 2018 Great British Entrepreneur Awards and making F:Entrepreneur's list of top female entrepreneurs. She is also a Freeman of the City of London and was a Liveryman in the Worshipful Company of Plumbers, one of London's oldest liverys.

Michael says Anne's trades experience and market knowledge will help the company turn their philosophy of helping tradies make a life, not just a living, into reality for even more trades business owners.

"We had begun a search for a board member that had experience in the trades as well as the ability to hold an innate understanding of our customers and their challenges. Anne's understanding of how a trades business is run will really help to ensure we are building the best product for our customers' needs."

Learn more about [Tradify](#)

Segna - Workplace culture crucial for startup success

When the owners of data wrangling startup Segna contacted Kea Connect they weren't looking to speak to experts in the tech or data fields. Instead they were after help to create a strong workplace culture. CTO and Co-founder Aryan Lobie explains why he thinks a positive office vibe is a must to ensure success for any startup.

Aryan was grappling with a problem, working as data scientists he found they spent more time preparing the data rather than analysing it. After looking around her realised there was no easy solution available on the current market and that he wasn't the only person with the same problem.

"I started talking to people and found that this was a problem for the whole market, and it was especially tough on small to medium sized companies. I was discussing it with a colleague of mine, Will, and that's when we decided to launch Segna. The product uses machine learning to take multiple dirty data sources and output them to a single clean data source.

We essentially automate data cleaning through machine learning to make it much quicker and more efficient."

Aryan and Will created what Aryan describes as a 'questionable pitch deck' and went out and hit up investors. They were lucky enough to gain some money out of a venture fund in Australia which ended up being more than just capital.

"When this fund originally backed us we thought they were just nice guys who believed in what we were trying to do but it turned out they were quite big investors who have helped us a lot along the way with advice and problem solving."

After securing capital Aryan says they spent around a year building their platform and working out how to best tackle the problem and optimise their time. After deciding to focus on a better data wrangling tool that would be driven by AI, they applied to Silicon Valley based company Y Combinator (YC), which has helped companies like Air BnB, Dropbox and Stripe. After two unsuccessful attempts they were accepted into the programme.

"YC gives you a little bit of money to start, mainly to just pay your costs and then you undertake a three month training program to prepare for 'demo day' where you essentially raise money for your seed round. Most of the YC partners are people who have exited billion dollar startups so they are really incredible in terms of advice and help."

Aryan realised that the investment from Silicon Valley meant their company was going to grow fast and they would need more staff, and that made him think about workplace culture and what sort of environment they wanted Segna to have.

Continued over...

Segna - Workplace culture crucial for startup success

“We knew we needed to be prepared in case there was any ground work to do before we expanded our team. It’s obviously very hard to change things when you have 15 people compared to when you have two, so we wanted to be mindful of that. I was also interested in understanding what makes a great culture. Both of us have worked in startups where there were points of friction and that definitely affected us. Realistically a startup is just the sum of its people and a good culture means you can hire the best people and give them an environment that they enjoy and thrive in. We may be a tech company but it’s our people who build the tech so if we want good tech we have to attract good people.”

Aryan contacted Kea Connect and the team put him in touch with one of our solvers who had experience in tech startup culture. As a result he says he now has a better understanding of the difference between values and culture and was able to take some practical steps such as changing the way he runs his one to ones.

“It was a good opportunity to figure out what we were doing right as well as what we could improve on. When you begin something like this you are walking in the dark, getting an idea of how others have done this and how they have done it well is really important. I think more than anything it’s about learning from the right people. It’s worse to get bad advice than to get no advice at all and that’s where Kea Connect really helped us, by connecting us to the right people.”

Segna’s team has grown from two people to seven people and is on track to double in size by next year. The company currently has 1000 people on its customer waitlist but Aryan says the focus remains on quality not quantity.

“We want to mature the product and get to a place where our current customers really love us and we are solving their problems quickly and efficiently. Once we are confident with these customers then we will scale up. Our next goal is to address those businesses on our waitlist and expand our product to fit their needs and address their problems, then in the long term we will look to new markets.”

His advice to other entrepreneurs thinking about launching a startup is to be very clear about the problem you are trying to solve.

“Always make sure you are trying to solve a burning problem, and once you are sure of that then make sure you persevere when necessary but also be able to change if needed. The greatest strength of startups is the ability to pivot, that ability to pivot sets you apart from those big corporations, they can’t do that, they need six months to plan for a small change, that’s why disruption is most prevalent in startups and that’s where we have the advantage.”

Learn more about [Segna](#)

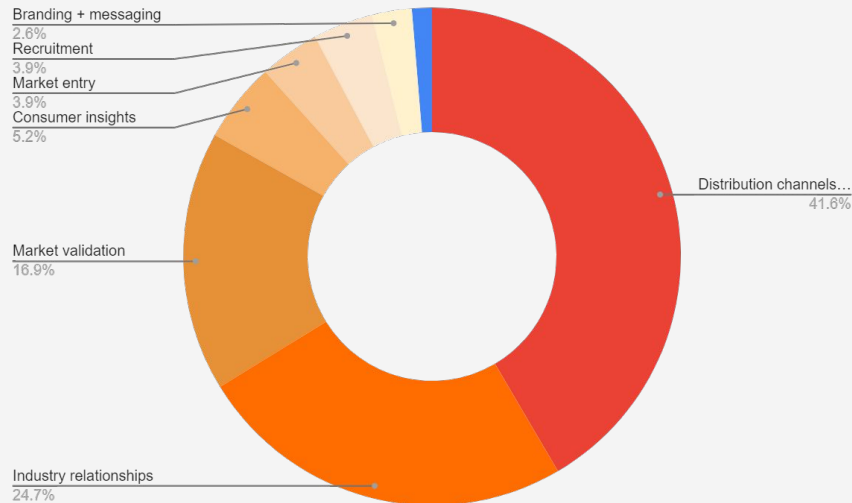
ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

Focus on Food & Beverage sector

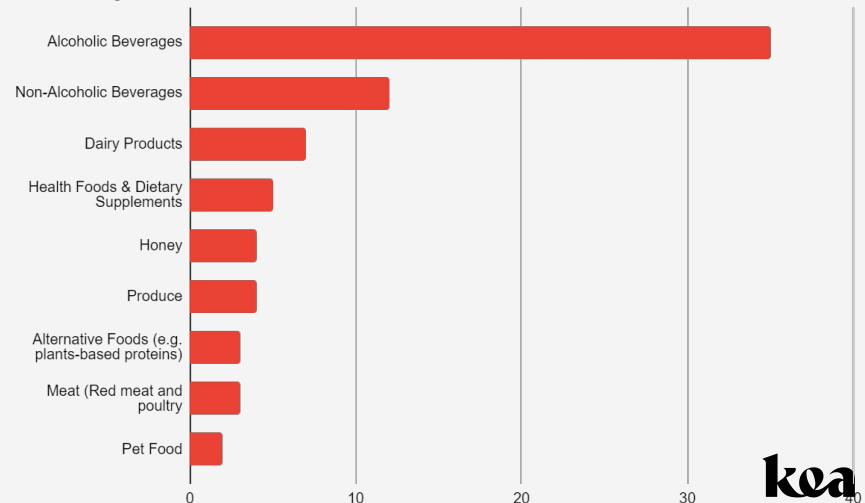
F&B businesses made up 21% of Kea Connect requests in 2021. Unlike Tech, F&B businesses are primarily coming to Kea for connections within distribution channels and to help identify partners.

Many F&B companies rely on channel partners to reach consumers offshore. With the pandemic disrupting traditional relationships and sustained closures in HoReCa around the world, businesses were searching for new ways to access consumers, and were hungry to gain real time insights from people on the ground.

F&B by primary connection purpose



F&B by subsector



ANALYSIS AND INSIGHTS

F&B sector connection snippet

Dairy products example

After successfully exhibiting at Shanghai's HotelEx conference, a Chinese producer of premium, internationally sourced coffee marketed in sachets contacted Kea's China Regional Director seeking connections with a premium dairy and goat milk powder producer that had clear product provenance to explore potential brand collaboration. Kea connected them with the China sales manager of a New Zealand milk powder brand and the connection resulted in a collaboration for the China market.

"We're signing our first brand authorisation and purchase and sales contract this week. For the first batch we'll purchase 50,000 sachets of milk powder to include in our new product".

Angel Food - sweet dreams are made of cheese

In 2004 Alice Shopland adopted a vegan lifestyle and in 2006 she started importing vegan cheese from the UK. For several years she and her husband Colin Woods struggled to develop their own vegan cheese recipe. But now Alice's dream of seeing their product sit on mainstream supermarket shelves has been realised. She spoke to Kea about her incredible journey and why it pays to sometimes put everything on the line.

Alice Shopland learnt the hard way that deciding to make vegan cheese and actually making it are two very different things. Despite this, the pioneer of New Zealand's vegan cheese market has never taken her eyes off the prize. Last year her company 'Angel Food' produced 150 tonnes of dairy-free cheese, which can be found on the shelves of big supermarkets and in fast food outlets across the country.

"A friend called me "pathologically optimistic" and I think that's probably true. I had a 'how hard could it be?' attitude. And it turned out to be very very hard. You're creating a dairy-like product that contains no dairy and it has to be flowable during manufacturing and then firm enough when set, to be sliced or grated and then after that it needs to melt again when the customer cooks it. The texture is the biggest challenge."

Angel Food started in Alice's kitchen and for a while she and her husband tinkered around with different recipes before admitting defeat and hiring a food technologist to help out. After a few years of perfecting the recipe they began working with fast food chain Hell Pizza, using their pizza ovens to test the performance of the cheese.

"I still remember the day our final product went on the menu at Hell Pizza. I ordered a vegan pizza to our house and the delivery boy saw our business logo on the gate and on the pizza box and he did a double take. That experience was really special.

Alice's journey to construct the perfect dairy-free cheese came from a desire to create a more sustainable food ecosystem not just for herself but for anyone who was interested.

"I adopted a vegan lifestyle in 2004 and one of the things people always said to me was, 'good on you for going vegan but I could never give up cheese.' I realised that one way I could make a difference was to help people make better food choices, ones that have less of an environmental footprint. Although veganism isn't just about food, food is important. We're choosing options three times a day so we can have a massive impact."

Continued over...

Angel Food - sweet dreams are made of cheese

Even though Angel Food is a success story these days, it was a long hard journey for Alice and her husband who put everything they had into the business. Alice says she has learnt a lot of hard and sometimes expensive lessons along the way and there were definitely times she was ready to give up.

“The day of our 10 year anniversary of the business, was actually one of the days that I wanted to give up. I was exhausted, and that was just part of working too hard, trying to do everything. In hindsight there were definitely times I should have worked smarter not harder.”

But it was Alice’s self-proclaimed stubborn nature and feeling she owed it to her shareholders that kept her going.

“We did two rounds of equity crowdfunding so we have 260 shareholders who have all invested various amounts of their hard-earned money, and I take that responsibility very seriously. I also believe in the business and the fact that we genuinely are making progress and having an impact.”

As Angel Food cemented its place on New Zealand shelves, Alice came to Kea Connect to explore the opportunities of moving into the US market. Kea was able to connect her to several of our solvers with experience in the US F&B space and Alice says the conversations were really valuable.

“In the end we decided not to pursue US markets right now, but it’s definitely something we will look at again in the future. Talking to other Kiwi in those markets has been extremely useful in setting the scene of decisions to be made and we are really glad we reached out for the advice.”

Alice says the future of her company is bright and they will continue to explore export options and will return to Kea Connect for more advice in the future. For now she’s happy focusing on her goal of giving Kiwi more sustainable choices.

Learn more about [Angel Food](#)

Appendices

METHODOLOGY

DEFINITIONS - SECTOR AND SUBSECTOR

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Methodology

Definition of regions

For this report Kea followed NZTE's definition of regions.

NAM [North America]; **LATAM** [South and Central America including Mexico]; **AusPac** [Australia and the Pacific]; **East Asia** [including Japan, Korea]; **Greater China** [China, Hong Kong, Taiwan]; **IMEA** [India, Middle East & Africa] and **Europe** [including UK].

Report methodology

For the purposes of this report analysis was carried out on completed connection projects from 1 January to 31 December 2021. Projects were extracted from CRM and each project was analysed relating to sector and subsector of business; countries and regions where help was sought; the business challenge[s] being addressed; the number and type of connections made; reason for project closing; business model [where relevant]; NPS; feedback from seekers. Resulting data was loaded into Airtable for subsequent analysis and generation of graphs.

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Definitions - sector and subsector

Agribusiness

Dairy
Farming/Agriculture
Fishing
Forestry
Horticulture
Mining
Viticulture

Arts & Creative

Architecture/Design
Art
Journalism
Marketing/Digital
Music
Radio
Television/Film

Consumer Goods & Retail

Consumer Electronics
Cosmetics & Health
E-Commerce
Fashion & Apparel
Food / FMCG
Furniture
Luxury Goods and Jewellery
Packaging and containers

Financial Services

Accounting
Banking
Capital and Investment
Insurance

Food & Beverage

Alcoholic Beverages
Alternative Foods (e.g. plants-based proteins)
Dairy Products
Health Foods & Dietary Supplements
Honey
Meat (Red meat and poultry)
Non-Alcoholic Beverages
Pet Food
Processed Foods
Produce
Seafood (incl. Aquaculture)

Healthcare

Dentistry
Dietitian
Health management or administration
Medical practice
Pharmaceuticals
Physiotherapy
Psychology
Residential /Aged Care services
Veterinarian

Infrastructure & Resources

Building & Construction
Electricity/Energy
Oil & Gas
Renewable Energies
Telecommunications
Transportation & Logistics
Water & Wastewater Systems

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Definitions - sector and subsector

Manufacturing

Animal Care
Astrospace
Automotive
Aviation
Consumer Products
Hardware/Electronics
Industrial Equipment
Marine
Metal & Plastic Manufacturing
Packaging
Pest Management
Pharmaceutical Manufacturing
Wood
Wool & Textiles

Services

Academia, Education & Training
Business Operations
Defence Forces
Emergency Services
Government, Trade & Relations
Health & Cosmetic Services
Hospitality
Legal
Not for Profit/Social Enterprise
Real Estate
Recruitment /HR
Tourism

Sport & Recreation

Coach/Management
Fitness
Professional Sports

Technology/Science

Agritech
AR/VR
Artificial Intelligence
Biotech
Cleantech
Creative Tech
Cyber Security
Edtech
Fintech
Healthtech
Legaltech
Nanotech
Robotics
Software & Platforms
Technology/Science research



**To the global Kea community,
thank you for your support of
New Zealand business.**

**Have questions about Kea Connect? Please contact us.
<https://keanewzealand.com/kea-connect/>**