



Kristin Ross, holding baby Te Uruhuia Tuahine, with partner Hohepa Tuahine



Reo Rua

PRONUNCIATION IS KEY

Hohepa Tuahine and Kristin Ross get pretty excited when they hear people “having a really good crack” at pronunciation of Māori words.

The creators of the first range of Māori speaking dolls, who won this year’s Rotorua Business Innovation Award, live and breathe the language. It’s their children’s first language and is central to their business success.

The Rotorua couple are the creators of the Pipi Mā – Māori speaking dolls and won the Holland Beckett Law Innovation category at the Westpac Rotorua Business Excellence Awards last month. The judges were impressed by how creative and driven the couple are in business and their unwavering commitment to raise awareness about te reo Māori.

“It’s really awesome not just to be recognised for innovation within business but more so the language gets recognised because it’s a part of the foundations of what we actually do in terms of what we sell as a product,” says Hohepa.

The inspiration for the range was sparked by a desire to produce a Māori language animation programme of the four doll characters.

The couple say many cartoons in Māori which were on television in 2011 were existing overseas animations translated into te reo rangatira (Māori language), but the concept wasn’t widely supported back then.

“We had a concept, we had a Māori world view and we had four characters. We had an idea that maybe we should just make Māori speaking dolls first, because we can achieve that at this point in time and maybe that will convince people that there is a bit of strength there and then we could get social support and other Māori speaking families too because that was at the forefront of the whole design idea,” he says.

His partner, Kristin explains their journey into business came from their individual choice to learn Māori and enrich their personal lives.

Kristin encourages people to learn te reo and not to make excuses.

“It’s not until you make a decision as an individual to learn te reo Māori and not let anything be an excuse to you learning that you’re actually going to learn te reo Māori and fill that void.”

The pair is supportive of Bilingual Rotorua, saying it will help make it easier for their whānau/ family, whose first language is Māori.

“It makes us excited to grow speakers in the community so our kids can feel comfortable when they go to Pak’nSave and if someone says to them ‘kia ora, kei te pēhea koe?’ (kia ora, how are you?), my girl will just be rapt and will turn to me and say, ‘He Māori ia’ (They’re Māori), she gets really excited. She loves to hear the reo,” says Kristin.

One piece of advice Hohepa and Kristin offer to people wanting to support Bilingual Rotorua is to pronounce Māori words correctly because it shows respect for the language and culture.

“We’ve heard so many businesses are on board within Rotorua, there are so many schools and people and the community is really supportive of Bilingual Rotorua. So I suppose the next question is what are you going to do to show your support? I can’t stress enough that there is so much development in the expression to show effort in pronouncing local names correctly; Rotorua, Kuirau park and (most) of our street names are in te reo Māori and the bigger picture of that is that they’re tīpuna (ancestors) of the iwi within Rotorua,” Kristin says.

Pronunciation tips:

Vowel	Say it like:	Vowel	Say it like:
a	apple	ā	far
e	egg	ē	bed
i	eat	ī	sheep
o	awful	ō	pork
u	put	ū	boot

Syllable	Say it like:	Syllable	Say it like:
Ta	d-ah (about)	tā	d-aar
Te	d-eh (enter)	Tē	d-ee (bed)
Ti	tee (t-shirt)	ī	sheep
To	daw	Tō	door
Tu	two	Tū	too (boot)

Rolling the 'r'	'Rr' rolls off the tip of the tongue – like a cat purring or like saying the word 'judder.'
Māori has two digraphs, which are the combined sounds of two consonants.	
Ng	Is similar to saying the word singer.
Wh	Like the English sound 'f.'