

Ethnic voices – and ears



Katie Chan



Jennifer Lian



DOMINION RD

Trilingual communicators Katie Chan and Jennifer Lian help local business associations engage with hard-to-reach Chinese business and property owners, and their Mandarin and Cantonese-speaking customers.

The Chinese-born, AUT University-educated duo play pivotal roles in overcoming cultural, as well as language, barriers.

Katie was introduced to the world of BIDs in 2015 when fellow AUT alumnus Gary Holmes identified in her the communications skills required to help get a second bid to expand Dominion Rd over the line. Katie now supports Chris Sutton at neighbouring Panmure.

Jennifer is a part-time member of Gary's current Campaignz team, supporting the ethnically diverse Dominion Rd and Northcote business associations.

Panmure Business Association Communications Co-ordinator Katie Chan says the English-speaking abilities of the town centre's Chinese business owners vary from fair to non-existent.

"Most (of the business owners) can speak English, maybe not very well, but just OK for general communication. Speaking their languages would make them feel more comfortable and more likely to seek for help from us because of convenience as well," she says.

"For example, an owner from one of our businesses cannot speak English at all. Before I came on board (at Panmure), he always needed to wait until his (English-speaking) son's day off and came along with him to see Chris (Sutton, Panmure's Town Manager). Sometimes he needed to wait for days and weeks to report his issues, and sometimes would make the issues too late to be reported.

"Now, he can always pop in by himself or catch me on the street. I can fully understand his questions and get the answer from Chris, and get back to him in Chinese. Chances of the communication breakdown would be smaller, and the issues can be sorted quicker.

"Besides, some of the businesses understand our promotions better, they didn't engage any of our town promotion before because they didn't understand English, and they didn't know what to do.



Local children enjoy a popular Panmure event.

“Talking about cultural aspect, I sometimes would tell Chris, Chinese do this, Chinese do that, which would make more sense for Chris to understand the reason why they are doing certain things and seek for the better way to offer services to them.”

A common issue for town centres is crime – and the reluctance of migrant business owners to report it.

Chris Sutton says there is a great deal of frustration at the lack of willingness of Chinese business owners to see themselves as part of the community – especially when it comes to reporting crime.



International Food & Moon Festival 2017

Katie is pivotal to helping overcome the language and cultural barriers.

“Whether or not they are new businesses in Panmure or new owners, the first time I talk to them in person, I will give them my business card and explain what we do and what we can offer them,” she says.

“This covers such things as promotions, newsletters and the business directory. I also let them know about our CCTV cameras and what they should do to report a crime. I then introduce them to our Security Liaison Officer who they would see patrolling the town centre.”

While at “Auckland’s international precinct”, Dominion Rd, Katie played an influential role in the business association getting Chinese support for expanding its BID boundary.

Her former boss, Gary Holmes, says Katie translated the expansion materials into Mandarin.

“This ensured that those Chinese members making the decision were able to understand what it was all about. It was critical to our success,” he says.

Katie also helped Dominion Rd to collect, confirm or update information on Chinese businesses for its membership directory.

“I went into those Chinese businesses, primarily to check with them their details. While doing that, we would do some chatting as well, and that would be the chance for them to tell me what was concerning them. I would pass on this information to the BID manager, Gary, afterwards. After getting the answer from Gary, I would get back to the business if I needed to.

“I also told them that they could get in touch with me via phone or (Chinese social media channel) WeChat if they had any further questions,” she says.

Jennifer Lian liaises with both Chinese and Korean businesses. As most of the Northcote Town Centre is Chinese,

Jennifer has a key role in member engagement with these businesses.

“We keep them up-to-date with what we are doing



and translating when required. When we produce communications such as newsletters, we create English, Chinese and Korean versions,” she says.

Jennifer’s ethnic liaison work extends to Dominion Rd, dubbed “the world within a street”.

“Working with our Chinese members, I have a menu translation project currently underway,” she says.

“I’m also available to assist during seminars put on by Chinese New Settlers Trust for Chinese businesses and am putting together our Shopping Directory which we translate into Chinese.”

Ethnic diversity on business association boards (executive committees) is encouraged in the BID Policy 2016.

“We have one Chinese member on the Dominion Rd Board and four on Northcote,” says Jennifer who, like Katie, utilises a diverse range of communications channels to reach its Chinese-speaking audience. These include WeChat, Chinese website Skykiwi.co.nz and various local Chinese-language media.

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We asked Katie Chan what advice she would give to Auckland's BID programme managers who wish to engage with their own Chinese business communities and shoppers – but don't know how to begin.



“Maybe look for someone who is at least bilingual and can read and write Chinese. He/she must be an outgoing person so he/she is willing to talk to people. I would say having a sales background would be a bonus, just my personal opinion, and I know it is funny, but a position of sales would train a person to talk in a nice manner (not being offensive etc.), think more carefully before talking.”