Maori Language Strategy

Microsoft New Zealand is grateful for this opportunity to provide feedback on the proposed Māori Language Strategy ("the Strategy"). Microsoft New Zealand's role is to bring Microsoft technologies to New Zealanders. We have been working with Kiwis to get the most of our technologies for more than two decades, with the help of more than 180 staff working from Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch. We aspire to help New Zealand to be smart, connected and competitive, and we act on that aspiration by being active participants in public policy discussions in New Zealand.

Microsoft strongly supports the Strategy's endorsement of ICT initiatives as a useful tool for promoting and supporting te reo Māori. We agree that access to, education, and use of modern communications technology are all very important to te reo Māori revitalisation. Microsoft's vision is that technology can offer opportunities for immersion into te reo Māori, helping to keep the language vibrant with the community leaders who know it well, and then growing and revitalising language use among children and learners. Microsoft has been working on initiatives to implement this vision and is committed to expanding them and otherwise supporting Te Puni Kōkiri (TPK) and Te Mātāwai as the Strategy is implemented.

In particular, Microsoft has been collaborating with Te Taura Whiri i te Reo Māori and language experts for ten years to bring free te reo Māori interfaces to the technology that New Zealanders use every day in the home, at school, and in the office. Last year, in conjunction with Maori Language Week, Microsoft made available updated te reo Māori interfaces in some of our most widely used consumer products, including Windows 8, Office 2013, Outlook.com, and Internet Explorer 10. (*Screenshots of te reo Māori enabled in some of these products are included below.) The Māori language pack goes across our consumer cloud services (outlook.com and Onedrive) and the business/education cloud services (Office 365). Free te reo Māori language packs have previously been developed for other Microsoft products including Windows XP, Windows Vista, Windows 7, Office 2003, Office 2007, Office 2010, and these Windows 8 apps: Mail, Calendar, People, Music, Camera, Video, Maps, Weather, News Reader, Store etc. All of this means that consumers of these products can communicate and work in te reo Māori, and many other languages.

Microsoft has complementary initiatives that promote access to these te reo technology products from an early age. Student Advantage, a program recently launched by Microsoft, makes early access a reality by allowing New Zealand students at participating schools to use Office Pro Plus (with te reo Māori interface) on up to five devices in the home without charge. The Student Advantage Program directly supports the Māori Language Strategy which focuses on Māori language learning in the home.

Microsoft recommends a digital inclusion programme for students in te reo Māori immersion schools to lift student achievement and support the growth of te reo Māori. The digital inclusion programme would be a catalyst to enliven the learning process, link with modern workplace needs, and help collaboration amongst the language community. We also recommend investing in professional development programmes for te reo Māori educators to help them effectively incorporate technology into their teaching practice.

Microsoft New Zealand has recently announced that it is facilitating the establishment of a new charitable foundation in New Zealand for te reo Māori language experts and advocates to help bring free te reo Māori translations to the Internet. Microsoft is making available use of the Bing Translator Hub technology to the foundation. The Translator Hub is a free translation tool powered by Microsoft technology (see http://www.bing.com/translator/) which can translate any text or website.

The automatic translation capability that the Translator Hub provides enables communication, collaboration and empowers communities. This capability further demonstrates how te reo Māori can be used in modern contexts, like Tweets, and support the revitalization of the language. In other parts of the world, evidence shows that the Translation Hub is being used to help preserve and promote indigenous languages. Microsoft New Zealand is proud to support the foundation and bring te reo Māori translations to the Internet.

In sum, Microsoft is firmly of the view that ICT initiatives that enable access to technology, and the availability of te reo Māori within that technology, are important for promoting and supporting te reo Māori – and Microsoft is working actively to implement such initiatives.

Looking ahead, Microsoft welcomes the opportunity for continued dialogue with TPK and Te Mātāwai on the Strategy and related ICT initiatives. We would be pleased to share our insights into how to build an effective ICT strategy, and how Microsoft's existing and future investments in te reo Māori may be leveraged as part of that.

► The following screenshots illustrate the experience that people can have on their computers today by using the free te reo Māori language packs.













