

# TOGETHER, MAKING A DIFFERENCE TODAY TO SUSTAIN LIFE TOMORROW.

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"WE THINK OF IDEAS AND SOLUTIONS THAT OTHERS DON'T, AND WE KEEP BREAKING NEW GROUND. IT'S WHAT SETS US APART."

**Tim Strachan** 

# AN INTRODUCTION: TIM STRACHAN

In the 1850s, the Strachans of Strachan near Aberdeen, Scotland sailed to New Zealand and became the Strachans of Ngatimoti near Motueka. They were settlers, blacksmiths and farmers. They were also coopers. Just like the Strachan family of today, clan Strachan of yesteryear forged a name in the field of liquid storage. They used their skills in coopering and engineering to make wooden kegs and butter churns for neighbouring farmers and large buckets for local growers taking their berries to the Motueka wharf for shipment to far-flung markets.

"I'm a Strachan of Northland. My parents moved to Northland when I was around three years of age, and we lived on my grandparents' farm. The company I founded in Whangarei in 1992 saw Promax become modern-day pioneers in water storage and transport solutions. Our beginnings were suitably humble - a kiwifruit packing shed was our first factory but we were keen to expand and do things our way from day one. So, when I talk about Promax being pioneers, this is what I have in mind. We've never been afraid to go in directions untraveled by other companies. We think of ideas and solutions that others don't, and we keep breaking new ground. It's what sets us apart.

The word Promax, as a brand and a business name, has its roots in our determination to make every post a winning one. Promax equals maximum performance. Doing the best you can has always been important to my family, and now it is crucial to the company. It's all about pushing it to the limit in coming up with solutions when others say they can't do it.

I retired in 2010 and handed over the reins to my sons Walter and Hamish. I felt comfortable in doing so. Spend any time in their company, and you'll see that both men are very down to earth. Ego doesn't drive them. Constant improvement does. That is something that motivates everyone at Promax. Our products have innovation built into them, but the people responsible for those ideas have kept their feet on the ground and are never satisfied. If there's a better way, they want to find it."

As you'll read, Promax have a knack for coming up with a better way of doing things. Not because it makes us look good but because it makes life easier for our customers. That's how our story started in 1992 and, in every new chapter we write, it will always be the case.



Left: Tim Strachan Right: Tim and his grandfather Norman Rountree 1950's

# DURING A SASE

RIRY



At about the same time that Auckland was running out of water in the early 1990s, Tim Strachan started making water tanks in a kiwifruit packing shed in Whangarei. By May of 1994, Auckland's water supply reservoirs were hovering at just over 30%, so his timing was good. People living in the parched city and surrounding regions needed more tanks to harvest whatever water fell from the sky during those dry years. So, with Tim's help, the City of Sails became the City of Tanks. Tim's new enterprise provided what many in the Auckland region needed; water storage. The first product manufactured in the packing shed/factory was a 3000-litre above-ground water tank. It was the first and prime example of a phrase used a lot by Promax: "We don't sell tanks. We sell solutions."

Tim brought a problem-solving product to a thirsty market. At the same time, he gave meaning to these words:

### Together, making a difference today to sustain life tomorrow.

This is how Promax describes their raison d'etre; their reason for being.



Left: Whangarei Kiwifruit Packing Shed Right: Promax Staff mid 1990's



The stock market in other nations eventually recovered, and it became business as usual (or close to it, anyway), but the situation wasn't as clear cut in New Zealand. The effects of the market collapse spilled over into New Zealand's small and fragile economy, contributing to a recession that extended from 1987 until 1993. And because it never rains but pours, the drought started to bite in the Auckland region at about the same time. Working on the principle that every cloud has a silver lining; Tim took a leaf out of his personal history to create a brighter future for his family. He did so by placing as many tanks under as many clouds as he could.

With liquid storage in his blood and a background in engineering, Tim began to manufacture rainwater tanks for rural and residential customers just crying out for water storage. The demand was there,



and with need came opportunity. Tim grabbed it, and Promax hasn't looked back. Company director and North Island factory manager Hamish Strachan remembers working day and night alongside his father to fulfil customer orders. He didn't draw a wage, and when he wasn't making tanks on the factory floor, he was working with Tim in the sales team, hitting the phones or knocking on retailer's doors.

### "We made them in the morning and sold them in the afternoon"

as Hamish recalls. The hours were long, and the pay packet was as empty as a brand-new tank on a delivery truck. However, it was a start, and in their way, the Strachans, and their company, were making a difference.

Together, making a difference today to sustain life tomorrow. It has another meaning too. For Promax, making a difference means being different. It might be a case of adapting an existing product to fit into a unique situation or coming up with an inventive solution to boost drought resistance on a farm, home or business. Innovation is often their inspiration, whether it's a rainwater tank, a colostrum tank, or a stormwater tank. If a novel approach is needed to support life for anyone - be it farm creatures or human animals - the company's collective mindset is clear: let's make it happen.



Promax is still a relatively young company in comparison to most of its major competitors. But it is widely regarded as New Zealand's premier manufacturer of polyethylene water storage and transport solutions. Managing Director, Walter Strachan, nominates five critical years that best signpost this short but successful journey, from packing shed to market leader:



The founding of Promax in Northland, manufacturing small rainwater tanks for rural and residential customers. Expansion of the product range to provide bulk storage for four key markets: Build, Civil, Industrial and Rural. This included the launch of larger water storage tanks ranging between 25,000 litres and 30,000 litres in capacity. The opening of a factory in the Canterbury town of Rangiora to better serve the needs of Promax's growing South Island market and become a genuinely national supplier in the process. The construction of a world-class 1500 square metre manufacturing operation and warehouse in Kerikeri. The year Promax installed compounding lines and began producing more of their raw materials. This reduced the reliance on external material providers, allowing Promax to take more control of the supply chain, enhance efficiency and boost output.

Top Left: First Promax Big Tank Top Right: Original Oven early 1990's Bottom Left: Whangarei Factory early 1990's Bottom Right: Kerikeri Site mid 2000's All of these milestones have guided the company to its current position, but the events of 1999 are particularly significant. During that year, Promax went from being a manufacturer of small rainwater tanks for the rural and residential markets to delivering large-scale storage solutions for four distinct sectors: Build, Industrial, Civil, and Rural.





In part, this diversification came about when Promax increased the capacity of their tanks. Over the years, clients had made it clear that they would prefer to deal with just one company for tanks of all sizes instead of going to Promax for a small rainwater tank and elsewhere for something bigger. This call for convenience was heard loud and clear by the Strachan family. They'd been thinking along the same lines themselves. So, they expanded their operation to include tanks up to 30,000 litres in capacity, big enough to satisfy bulk storage requirements across building, civil, industrial and rural markets.

#### It was an age of invention as well.

Promax was the first (and only) company in New Zealand to manufacture corrugated water tanks. The continuous sidewall corrugation and one-piece moulded construction with a heavy ribbed dome give this tank unique strength. It's a bit like a flat sheet of iron; as soon as you mould it with a profile or rib through it, the material becomes much more rigid and able to sustain increased pressure from both sides. The corrugated tank is just one example of Promax innovation. Hamish Strachan says the company was not afraid to try things when bringing new products to the market in the early years. Back then, it was about "moulding anything out of plastic". Hamish says that while Promax still sees innovation as its point of difference, they have refined their product range, and the company now focuses on where it all started in 1992: liquid storage.

Above: Culvert Deliveries Mid 1990's

# PROMAX WAS THE FIRST (AND ONLY) COMPANY IN NEW ZEALAND TO MANUFACTURE CORRUGATED WATER TANKS

# POSITION & PERCEPTION

Promax serves clients working in four distinct sectors throughout New Zealand: Industrial. Build. Civil and Rural. For all that diversity, it's fair to say the people who started the company have a particular affinity with the rural community. The Strachans worked land near Motueka when they immigrated from Scotland in the 1850s. Tim Strachan grew up on a farm in Northland, and he and his family own several properties on which they fatten livestock.

As Hamish Strachan likes to say:

"We aren't afraid of getting our bands dirty." New Zealand's agricultural and horticultural industries have always faced challenges. It's no different today. For a start, the country is drier than ever. According to Stats NZ, the average annual rainfall for the five years to 2020 was 3.1% below the previous fiveyear average and 10.7% below the five-year average for 1996 to 2000. Between 2016 and 2020, New Zealand's average precipitation, including rain, snow, and hail, was 504,988 million cubic metres. Compare this to 520,890 million cubic metres in the previous five years and 565,691 million cubic metres between 1996 and 2000.

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NZ'S AVERAGE 2011-2015 5200,890 million m<sup>3</sup> NZ'S AVERAGE PRECIPITATION 2016-2020 Rain 2016-2020 Rain 2016-2088 Source Hall 3000 8000 Million M<sup>3</sup> Million Mil On top of all this, seven of the nine North Island regions endured drought-like conditions in 2019 as they recorded the lowest precipitation over the 25 years to June 2020. Northland, the home of Promax, saw the most significant decrease: only 64% of the region's average annual rainfall was recorded in the year to June 2019.



Besides the weather, there's a torrent of ever-changing government regulations for rural stakeholders to overcome, e.g., introducing new stock exclusion regulations to keep livestock out of certain waterways. These tightened regulations came into effect in September 2020 and apply to anyone in New Zealand who controls livestock other than sheep. "Exclusion" from a waterway is defined as the requirement for a setback of at least three metres from any lake, river, or natural wetland that is more than one metre wide with an effective barrier so that stock can't get into the waterway.

Throughout a changing climate and wave after wave of modified legislation, Promax does what it has always done: delivers solutions. It could be a collection of large tanks to capture rain and increase drought resistance on rural properties. Or the provision of tanks for reticulated water systems on farms affected by the new stock exclusion regulations. Whatever it is, Promax is the company people call when things become a bit challenging in the country. They also field enquiries from three other sectors facing their own issues: Civil, Industrial and Build.



**Promax Build:** ENDURO tanks on site Karikari Peninsula



Promax Industrial: Customised tank installation at the Kerikeri Wastewater Treatment Plant

Liquid Transport System

## INNOVATION CONNECTS ALL FOUR OF OUR SECTORS

Promax's square-shaped underground water tank is just one example.

The shape of the tank reduces excavation and backfill requirements. At the same time, the unique solid-filled rib design can withstand all the ground pressures that will be applied over the long lifetime of the tank: a deceptively simple idea but a smart one.

Here's another one. Increased accommodation capacity at Cardrona Alpine Resort, located between Queenstown and Wanaka, meant the resort required 200,000 litres of water storage for firefighting purposes. Easier said than done in alpine conditions where water can freeze and become stuck solid within the tank. Hardly ideal for fighting fires. Plus, the weight of snow settling on top of a standard tank compromises the structure's integrity, making a collapse a real possibility.

Promax's solution was to create what the company calls "a chilly bin on steroids": an insulated water tank ribbed in design for enhanced strength. The insulation helps to guard against water freezing in alpine conditions while the internal snow frame combats snow loading on the tank's dome. Smart thinking is applied to more than the manufacture of the tank. By burying the tank and pipework deep into the ground, its visual impact is reduced, and freezing issues are alleviated.

When talk turns to how Promax is perceived in the marketplace, products like the insulated tanks are what the team point to as examples of what makes them stand out. They're inventive responses to challenging and complex situations. These are people who aren't afraid to "give it a shot", very much in the pioneering spirit that Tim Strachan brought to that kiwifruit packing shed in 1992. As a result, there's a quiet confidence that Promax can come up with a customer-focused solution thanks to some creative thinking, impeccable engineering, and clever design.



#### CASE STUDY: CARDRONA ALPINE RESORT



#### Products:

7x Promax 30,000 litre insulated tanks with internal snow frames

#### Where:

Cardrona Skifield

#### Why:

Business was booming at Cardrona Alpine Resort, located halfway between Wanaka and Queenstown. Increased accommodation capacity was required as was additional water storage for fire-fighting purposes. Storing 200,000 litres of water in an alpine setting poses unique challenges but, as always, we put our thinking caps on and came up with a solution that we dubbed "chilly bins on steroids."

#### What:

To strengthen the tanks and to help protect the water from freezing conditions at Cardrona, Promax was inspired by the humble chilly bin. Specifically, the insulation inside the bin. By insulating the water tanks, the water would remain in a liquid state and be ready to flow if required for fire fighting purposes.

As well as insulating the tanks, we buried them one metre into the ground to minimise visual impact and to further reduce freezing issues. An internal snow frame combats snow loading on the tank dome, while anti-vortex suction plates inside the tank meet fire storage criteria. Plus, seismic stainless flex coupling connections allow for movement in a seismic event. We worked closely with Queenstown civil and structural engineering experts Hadley Consultants and with their help we were able to provide Cardrona Resort with the water storage they need thanks to our "chilly bins on steroids". Being seen as a sustainable company is also important. In this age of ethical consumerism, when customers want to know where products come from, the greener the source, the better. It's something Promax pays more than lip service to:



By the very nature of what they produce, Promax is boosting sustainability throughout New Zealand as well. We're all being urged to reuse and recycle. There's no recycling programme more worthy or essential than capturing water and using it to sustain life. To harvest that water, you need tanks. Promax now produces thousands of tanks every year, with most of them going to regions where drought is an ever-growing issue. These days, that issue is a nationwide concern.

While they help to mitigate New Zealand's water shortages, Promax tanks also incorporate qualities that make them sustainable in their own right. Innovation means little if their products can't perform their most basic function for many years. The key to that is the ability to exceed performance standards in the most demanding environments. The use of durable and robust resin ensures high resistance to impact and abrasion, greater tolerance to environmental stress cracking and long-term resistance to UV degradation.

Obviously, the better they're made, the longer they'll last. Promax Enduro tanks are so strong they are the only plastic water tanks in New Zealand that can be buried up to one metre and still retain a 20-year warranty. This strength gives them an extended life cycle with a bonus; tanks can be recycled when/if they reach the end of their life span. Compared to other materials, high-grade polyethylene is planet-friendly plastic, and to Promax and their customers, that means a lot.







# THE PEOPLE OF PROMAX



### "A COMPANY CAN ONLY GROW AS FAST AS IT CAN ATTRACT AND RETAIN NEW TALENT. CAPITAL IS RELATIVELY EASY TO COME BY. FINDING GOOD PEOPLE IS MUCH MORE CHALLENGING."

These are the thoughts of Walter Strachan. He insists one of the company's most notable achievements has been its success in assembling a high-quality team in their Kerikeri and Rangiora facilities. Walter sees people as a more valuable asset than anything on a balance sheet. He identifies the qualities he looks for when recruiting new employees; a hunger for success, fearlessness when faced with challenges, and the ability to make things happen. The company built its culture upon these attributes, and it is something they're determined to preserve.



### The factory floor was the first rung on the career ladder for a number of the Promax team, including Walter and Hamish Strachan.

Not everyone working in the factory will ascend to executive level. Not everyone wants to. But Promax allows every employee to map out a career path that takes them to where they want to go. A robust training system and tiered remuneration are incentives to keep the core of the 45-strong team intact. They're well paid, encouraged to take ownership of their respective roles and given the freedom to speak their mind. If they believe the company can improve in some way, why not say so? After all, Promax has a reputation for intelligent solutions and lateral thinking. They're known for coming up with answers for projects that others toss into the "too hard" basket. You don't reach that status without being open to ideas.

Attracting the best people to smaller towns like Kerikeri and Rangiora might seem a challenge. The bright lights of the big city draw the most brilliant minds, don't they? Not necessarily. A good number of the company's Northland-born employees have come home. Their careers have taken them around New Zealand, but the laidback lifestyle and temperate climate of the Far North are compelling magnets when you're stuck in traffic on a cold day in a grey, crowded city.

Promax is a warm "welcome home" for them - small enough to be agile and flexible yet big enough for employees to utilise their skills to their full extent.





# The people of Promax don't just work there.

The company has a strong presence within their respective communities in the Far North and Canterbury. Promax sees itself as a caring corporate citizen, and in the spirit of everybody needing good neighbours, the company gives generously to the local community. It could be gifting a discontinued line of plastic dog kennels to the RSPCA or donating a rainwater tank to a local marae. Or, it might be an act of kindness as unconventional as the company itself. A good example is when they gave a tank to families in a small rural community; the recipients gratefully cut a big hole in its side and turned it into a shelter for kids waiting on the side of the road for the school bus.

On a larger scale, Promax is a gold sponsor of the Northland Emergency Service Trust rescue helicopter. They also lend financial support to the Cancer Society, Autism New Zealand, and the Rapid Relief Team (RRT). RRT is a global organisation that, to quote their website, "displays care and compassion to people in crisis, providing free catering assistance and tangible support to emergency services, government and charitable organisations."

The people of Promax are a varied bunch: employees, neighbours and beneficiaries of the company's good deeds. But there's another group we need to discuss. Without them, Promax wouldn't be the company it is today, and there'd be no story to tell. In many ways, these people ARE the story. They're the customers who rely on Promax to deliver the liquid storage solutions their livelihoods depend upon.



Above: Kerikeri Primary School, tank donated to Garden to Table program.

Below: Northland Emergency Service Trust rescue helicopter

Above: RRT NZ fire emergency event

# "WE MAKE IT EASY"

# THE PROMAX CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

# "VERY HAPPY WITH MY NEW PROMAX TANK. ORDERED ON TUESDAY, DELIVERED ON THURSDAY - THAT CAN'T GET BETTER."

Tom from Kerikeri

When asked to sum up the Promax customer experience, Walter Strachan puts it like this.

# *"We make it easy for our customers. Nothing is a problem."*

Walter's comments are echoed by this happy Promax customer, Sean Allen of Tokomaru Bay, north of Gisborne: **"Dealing with Promax was a breeze. The pricing was** more than competitive, the sales people professional and very obliging and the communication regarding delivery, choice of colour and sizes was second to none. For people in rural areas of New Zealand Promax goes the extra mile with free delivery and warranties/guarantees that equal their competitors."

The words from both men speak volumes about Promax's uncomplicated customer service philosophy; listen to what the customer requires and make it happen for them. That means taking care of everything while following one of the company's golden rules: all compliant, no complaints.

That means providing a liquid storage solution for a customer that's compliant in every respect, so there are no nasty surprises in the future. "No nasty surprises" is defined as delivering a reliable and durable product that won't fail before its time and avoids the high financial price of non-compliance. With fines ranging from hefty to extreme, few customers can afford to pay that price. Thanks to the company's design service, technical knowledge, and engineering experience, customers are delivered a product that fits, both physically and legally.

You can't sell compliant and effective liquid storage solutions without a good sales team to promote them. Hamish Strachan praises his team as one that "doesn't just read out a price list over the phone." Instead, there's an understanding that every client is different, and the sales representatives take a genuine interest in what each customer requires. Some needs can't be met with an off-theshelf solution. There are times when you must think outside the square because not every project is shaped like a plane figure with four equal straight sides and four right angles.



Challenging projects, like the Cardona Alpine Resort and those "chilly bins on steroids", require something a little more complex than products you order straight out of a catalogue. Anyone can make a tank. But not everyone can build a tank smart enough to do what the customer requires. Promax can.

### Take, for example, the Nelson-based earthworks and civil contractor who could not attain optimum moisture content in his cut to fill operations.

He was using a traditional water cart with a spray bar to add water to the fill area, but there was too much water at times, which made the compactor feet clog up with overwet material. At the same time, the contractor realised that having the water cart on the fill area was a significant hazard due to congestion and slippery ground conditions.

The contractor started adding water at the cut source as he was loading out and found this achieved a much better result and was easier to control. He also realised that safety concerns were eliminated by not having the

water cart crawling around on a congested fill site. This convinced him that a water cart with a remote-control cannon was the best way to do the job. The contractor approached several companies who failed to grasp his concept - until he came to Promax. In doing so, he finally found a company on his wavelength. The rest, as they say, is history. Thanks to Promax, the contractor has sharpened his operation with a water cart equipped with a remote-control cannon. At the same time, Promax can point to yet another example of answering a question that others didn't know how to.



#### Products:

DSU10000 - Custom Dust Suppression Skid Unit with Water Cannon

#### Where:

Nelson

#### Why:

Darryl Gibbons owns Nelson Civil Construction, an Earthworks and Civil Contractor servicing the top of the South Island. Darryl and his team were unable to attain optimum moisture content in their cut to fill operations. They were using a traditional watercart with spray bar to add water to the fill area, but the results were less than desired. Darryl and his crew started adding water at the cut source as they were loading out and found this achieved a much better result and was easier to control.

They also realised that by not having the watercart crawling around on a congested fill site, a big safety risk was also removed. Darryl worked out an innovative solution: a watercart with a remote-control cannon that could be operated from the excavator operator. An added benefit would be the freeing up of the watercart driver allowing him to be utilised in other areas on the site.

#### What:

Darryl approached several companies in the hope they could provide this off-the-shelf solution, but none could produce what Daryll was looking for. Promax was the only company that embraced the concept and put together a watercart with remote-control cannon that Nelson Civil Construction and others now classify as the "Ultimate Civil Construction watercart."

For Darryl, the new watercart "ticks all the boxes" and is yet another example of how Promax can create a custom-made solution when others can't come up with the answer.



As far as Promax and their customers are concerned, liquid storage products are needed more than ever. New Zealand is becoming a drier country, yet everchanging laws and compliance regulations will never slow to a mere trickle. Some of them are necessary. There's little doubt that New Zealand's water infrastructure is long overdue for an upgrade. Droughts in our regions and ageing (and failing) water networks in our urban centres are just two of the factors that will drive central and local government reforms in the years ahead. How we manage our three waters - drinking water, stormwater, and wastewater - has taken on a degree of unprecedented urgency. Reforms in any shape will put a greater onus on individuals and organisations to store and manage these three waters more effectively. As you'd expect, many of them will turn to Promax for the rainwater, stormwater, and wastewater tanks they need to achieve this.

Not every tank will fit neatly like a piece into a jig-saw puzzle. Some settings are more challenging than others and require a tailormade resolution. A tank may need to be adapted, modified, or rethought. You get the feeling that the team at Promax relishes the opportunity to put their thinking caps on and work alongside a customer to straighten out a curly situation.

This solution-focused approach is why over 80% of their customers said they would recommend Promax to others because of their customer service alone. But irrespective of that glowing endorsement, it's easy to envisage the company looking at ways to lift that figure closer to 90% or higher. If Promax means maximum performance, as mentioned by Tim at the very start of this book, then anything less than 100% just won't be good enough.

# WHERE TO FROM HERE?

Tim Strachan had the first word in this story. Walter and Hamish have the last. When invited to paint a word picture of what Promax will look like in the next five to 10 years, Walter delivers a response more direct than colourful. "We're not proud. We're learning. Every day we bave something to learn. No matter bow much we expand and bow big we become, our core motivation will always be the same: to try to be better so we can make things even easier for our customers."





Walter isn't sharing any grandiose blueprint for the next five to 10 years. Instead, it's developments within the next 12 to 24 months that hold his immediate interest. As the economy rebounds after the initial shock of the COVID-19 pandemic, it makes sense that he is concentrating on short-term aims rather than long-term goals. Walter says the company's immediate priorities are to invest in production capacity, people and systems. The objective is to design and manufacture an even better product and deliver it to the customer faster. Promax is already well down that road, thanks to the installation of in-house compounding lines that lets them grind and colour raw materials themselves without relying on external

suppliers. This gives Promax greater control of the supply chain, makes the production process even more efficient, boosts output and allows the company to set a cracking pace when delivering the completed product to the customer. It's yet another way that Promax stands apart from its competitors.

Hamish Strachan is as coy as his brother. He acknowledges the company will always seek out new markets and capitalise on the growth opportunities. But he is keener to discuss water as an increasingly rare resource and how Promax can continue to help their customers conserve it. There is a sense that by looking after the people who need to capture water, the company's ongoing growth will look after itself - but only to a degree. It's impossible to imagine anyone at Promax taking a seat and watching it all unfold without their input. This company is known for innovation and bright ideas, but it was established on old-fashioned toil and getting stuck in. As Hamish says:

"Everything started from zero. There were no golden spoons in our mouths. It's all down to bard work."

# **"WE DON'T SELL TANKS. WE SELL SOLUTIONS."**

Walter Strachan

Promax was born during a period of drought, and it continues to serve New Zealanders by capturing wet stuff during dry times. Auckland's latest water crisis saw restrictions imposed across the region following two dry summers that left the supply dams 25% lower than usual. This prompted a wellknown service station chain to use harvested rainwater in their car wash machines. The tanks they use to catch and store that water came from Promax. Given the company's history, that seems fitting. As Walter Strachan says: "We started as a company providing liquid storage solutions in the early 1990s. At heart, we still are. While we have grown as a company and refined our product range to meet the needs of our clients better, we will never stop trying to improve. It all comes down to helping our customers overcome any challenges they face. As such, our philosophy remains the same: we don't sell tanks. We sell solutions."

Right: Rangiora grinding plant



**Promax - Kerikeri** 389 Waipapa Rd, Waipapa, Kerikeri T: 09 407 3575 **Promax - Rangiora** 279 Flaxton Road, Rangiora T: 03 313 3675 promaxplastics.co.nz