



# Hivemind beekeeping technology starts new buzz

TESS MCCLURE  
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Dean Kozanic

Hivemind allows beekeepers to monitor their hives from afar. The Hoyt brothers, Berwyn, left, Bryan and Ben, install the technology at a sample hive in the Christchurch CBD.

A Christchurch company is using modern software to transform one of the world's oldest professions - beekeeping.

Hivemind creates technology to track the health and weight of beehives. They sell a software and hardware package: scales that sit beneath the beehives, and a software program that collates the changing weights of the hives and communicates it by satellite to the beekeepers.

The tech resolves a long-held problem for beekeepers, says Hivemind chief executive Christian Walsh.

For commercial honey operations, beehives are often geographically isolated, and costly to reach.

In New Zealand targeting the highest value honey -Manuka - means getting hives into remote native bush blocks.

"Some of them use helicopters, they actually helicopter the hives in to locations. So obviously you don't want to have to be doing that every day just to check on the hives. You want to be doing it once to drop them in and once to take them out," Walsh says.

"It's a timing issue. Manuka honey is extremely high value but it's also low yield - so knowing when to take it out is critical.

"In Australia it's almost the opposite, the value of honey is less but they get more of it, and they travel enormous distances - 100s of ks, sometimes 1000s to get to their apiary sites."

Most commercial beekeeping operations will have four of the scale systems of an apiary, which provide average data over 30-50 hives. The apiary has one software "hub" which communicates via satellite, back to a secure database. From there, beekeepers can log in and see remotely what's happening at the site.

The business started from "a classic case of somebody sitting next to somebody on a plane," Walsh says. "It was a beekeeper sitting next to one of us and saying, 'With all this tech surely we must be able to do this now?' And an engineer saying, 'Yeah actually we should be able to do that.'"

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Hivemind has now been in operation about four years, and the product is on its third version.

Currently, Hivemind is installed with around 20 commercial operations in New Zealand and the same number in Australia. Next year, they're

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targeting the United States, which has a large honey industry, which has recently been troubled by disease and Colony Collapse Disorder.

Walsh says the shift to the States is "largely so we can get a counter-seasonal element to the business, and it's a large bee keeping nation too."

He says the technology is useful for more than just measuring yield - it's also able to gather information about the health of the hives.

Through weight and temperature, beekeepers can track the size of the colony, as disease can take the weight down.

Sudden drops in weight could mean the bees are swarming or dying off - or the hives have been hit by "robbing", where wasps can get in to steal honey from the hives. Walsh recalls one North Island apiary where the system managed to catch some wasps taking 17kg of honey in a single day.

Outbreaks of disease have increasingly become an issue for the honey industry, and Walsh says



more beekeepers are now taking precautions to to ensure their hives are stable and healthy year-round.

Hivemind is a subsidiary of Brush Technology, which is also headed up by Walsh. The two companies run out of a single premises at EPIC Innovation Centre. Brush Technology's main focus is on remote monitoring systems used in wineries, vending machines and milk vats.

The business employs three engineers, brothers Berwyn, Bryan and Ben Hoyt, two software developers and Walsh in sales.

In terms of revenue, sales of the scales and hubs are a one-off cost, with a small monthly data charge for satellite connection. But Walsh says the company also leases many of their systems as a form of recurring revenue.

"That makes the entry cost lower for the beekeeper, and builds longer term revenue for us," he says.

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Thanks for the great article; this invention looks great. Hope to get them on our podcast one day. I wonder if these can also be used to stop hive thefts happening?

We discussed this on our recent beekeeping podcast at <http://kiwi.bz/76>

Thanks.  
Gary Fawcett

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