



By Matthew Jones

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## Rockit Global opens new headquarters

Company behind miniature apple unveils facility and refreshed branding

**R**ockit Global has officially opened its new global headquarters in New Zealand's Hawke's Bay.

Board members, shareholders, business partners and dignitaries took a first look at the new facility during a ceremony earlier today (1 June).

Located in Irongate, Hastings, the site comprises a 21,000m<sup>2</sup> packhouse, coolstores and offices. It will become a hub for handling, packing and marketing the PremA96 miniature apple variety, sold under the brand name Rockit.

Mark O'Donnell, chief executive of Rockit Global, said expansion into a digitally advanced, fit-for-purpose facility was a worthy investment, given growing demand for Rockit apples across North America, Asia, Europe and the Middle East.

"This is a magnificent moment for everyone involved with Rockit Global,"

explained O'Donnell. "It's not only a place to call home for our hundreds of growers, investors, staff and industry colleagues, it's an innovation hub and place of ideating, exploring and excelling."

Artificial intelligence (AI) will play a major role in ensuring efficient sorting, packing and storage within the packhouse. Apples are washed and dried automatically before a specialised conveyor scans the fruit, determining size and colour and checking for any anomalies. Software can also sort the apples into manual or automated packing lines.

"Using robotics to pack our apples has significantly grown our capacity," said O'Donnell. "Automated packing helps reduce our reliance on finding staff for what have typically been harder roles to fill, and we're optimising workers' time."

Other leading-edge innovations include lithium-powered forklifts, which will carry pallets of apples across packhouse floor to the adjoining coolstores.

O'Donnell estimated over 100 m apples will be packed and shipped from Rockit Global's headquarters this year, with that number to increase considerably over the next five years.

"By 2025, we're expecting that figure to swell to over 400m apples," he said.

### Fresh branding

The new headquarters wasn't the only cause for celebration. Rockit Global's general manager of global marketing, Julian Smith, unveiled fresh branding for Rockit apples at today's ceremony, explaining that a reimagining of the logo and colour palette helps to widen its appeal overseas.

"We're still instantly recognisable, but we've evolved our brand personality, story and position in the market so that we truly stand out," Smith said.

The new logo and packaging will roll out globally on 1 July (2021). Rockit Global has partnered with PacMan (part of the Namco family) in greater China to bring the refreshed brand to market.

"We involved the entire company in bringing our new brand to life – it really reflects who we are," Smith said. "Our goal is

and appealing new brand will help drive consumer demand in global markets."



### At home in Hawke's Bay

Speaking at the opening ceremony, Rockit Global chairman John Loughlin said that while Rockit Global and Rockit



Mark O'Donnell, chief executive of Rockit Global, opens the company's new headquarters

Meanwhile, machinery to manufacture Rockit's apple tubes sits on the facility's mezzanine.

"This means we only manufacture what we need – no waste – and that we can trial innovative new packaging, including promotional and sustainable options," said O'Donnell.



Loughlin. "We are committed to employing from this region, and continuing the legacy we've built as an energetic, exciting, forward-focused global business, rooted in Hawke's Bay and surrounded by the very orchards in which this company began."

With projections of sustained year-on-year production growth set to catapult the Rockit brand into new markets, O'Donnell said he was delighted to be leading a talented and enthusiastic team.

"We have a number of ambitious projects just around the corner," he said. "There's a suite of new on-orchard technology to fully roll out, new countries to access, hundreds of hectares of plantings to facilitate both here and overseas as demand grows, as well as a further expansion of Te Ipu (the new headquarters), earmarked for 2023. The footprint of the land should allow us to double the size of our packing area and finished goods storage."

"We are laser focused on the future, and on continuing to extend ourselves and our reach. It's a truly exciting time for Rockit Global, here at the very forefront of what's fresh and innovative."

to become the world's most loved apple and we believe our contemporary

apples are growing on the world stage, their home would always be in New Zealand, and more specifically in the Hastings district.

"We were founded here, we've matured here, and we belong here," said

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