

# *Gill South*: Beating the tyranny of distance requires special HR skills

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By [Gill South](#)

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**Head office in Auckland, staff in the US and Britain - it's par for the course for Endace.**

Do you spend early mornings talking to the US office, and evenings talking to staff in Britain? Are you regularly leaping on planes to get to the States or Europe for face time with staff and clients?



Mike Riley, chief executive of the software company, Endace, which operates on a global scale. Photo / Martin Sykes

More New Zealand companies are becoming international players with offices all over the world, and they have to become comfortable operating on the global stage. But are their leaders experienced in managing staff remotely?

Endace chief executive Mike Riley runs the fast-growing New Zealand technology business from its Auckland office. The company, co-founded in Hamilton by chairman Ian Graham, is a world leader in the business of monitoring, measuring and protecting high-speed and ultra high-speed computer networks, with customers in financial markets, government and security agencies internationally.

Endace is listed on the London Stock Exchange's AIM market, and has offices and senior staff in the United States and in Britain, as well as New Zealand.

A Briton, Riley joined Endace in November 2006 as vice-president for worldwide marketing, before becoming chief executive in July 2007.

He is an electronics engineer with more than 25 years' experience in networking and security, working in both the US and Britain.

While 100 staff are divided between Hamilton and Auckland, a further 50 are overseas, in Atlanta, Chicago, Boston, New York, Washington DC and Reading in Britain.

The chief executive has a vice-president of sales, Len Weinstein, based in Chicago while Michael Kelley, vice-president of Global Services, is in Atlanta. Jason Moore, general manager

for Europe, the Middle East and Africa, has headquarters in Reading, while board directors John Scott and Mark Rowan are London-based, which makes sense for a company listed on AIM.

The Endace staff network is going to get more widespread, with an expansion to the West Coast of the US planned, as well as Singapore and Japan.

"We don't think of ourselves as a New Zealand company - we are a global company. We happen to have come out of New Zealand," says Riley.

His typical day is a long one: he starts at 8am to talk to the British team and then is communicating with the US between 7 and 9 pm. His weekend doesn't normally start until Saturday lunchtime. It's worth it, he says: "I'd still much rather live in New Zealand."

Riley is a big believer in using the technology available, such as Skype, video conferencing and mobile technology. He has a huge mobile bill, he says unapologetically.

"Technological companies are quite poor at using their own technology," reckons Riley, who has invested in some serious communication equipment. The boardroom has a large high-definition TV screen for video conferencing between international staff.

The chief executive organises meetings at least twice a year for the senior team to get together in one location. They all met last October in New Zealand, and London is scheduled in May. Later this year they will get together on the West Coast of the US, "which will be a single hop for all of us".

"There is nothing like face time," says Riley, who will probably fly around the world five times this year. He goes to London two or three times a year to see shareholders.

"Endace is not your typical American or European tech company," says the CEO. "Its culture and values are unique to us. We are from New Zealand and we are proud of that. A while ago we stopped apologising. We bring staff down here. That's expensive - but we do it with senior staff. It's very important."

When asked how he deals with a staff member who has gone off on a tangent, he says, "I think the biggest issue for me on how to deal with a rogue [employee] is in creating and maintaining that company culture.

"We've hired 12 people offshore in the last three months. The question is how make them into 'Endacians'. This takes time, building, maintaining and developing that global mindset and culture."

You have to be very straightforward about what you expect of people, adds Riley. If you can find a mechanism where the values and culture are part of the fabric, then roguish behaviour, "stands out like a sore thumb".

"If you get the culture values right, the organisation deals with it rather than the CEO. The whole team goes: 'What?'"

Riley is a big fan of teams working together in the company's offices around the world.

"I'm passionate about teams in offices because they feed off each other, they support each other."

He has asked **Clare Parkes of Clarian Human Resources** to help him communicate with his growing company network. She is helping with both the culture and strategy management at team and board level.

**Parkes** formerly worked at large high-tech company 3Com, in the Europeanteam.

"Both us have been there before. We already know some of the issues and opportunities that lie ahead," says Riley.

It's fortunate the Endace boss has a strong marketing background, says **Parkes**.

The skills needed to manage a remote or virtual team are very different from managing a team on site, says the HR expert.

"How we communicate, respect each other's needs, how that's delivered, there are lots of different areas which can impact on people's ability to work together efficiently," says **Parkes**.

"It's about trust, about being really clear about expectations, keeping in touch on a regular basis but not over-managing - giving them coaching and support in areas that they feel [uncertain]," she says.

Riley's work experience in Europe and the States is also invaluable for someone managing an international business from New Zealand, she says.

"Mike is capable of entrepreneurial spirit in where the business should be going, fuelled by the experience overseas. That is definitely a strong point."

*Gill South is an Auckland freelance writer*