



Members of the Virtual Consulting team celebrate its official launch — from left to right: Jim Greenhough, David Young, Eileen Greenhough, Bruce Holland, Liz Gully and Warwick Powell.

Wisdom without walls:

Business goes virtual

BY AMANDA MCVITTY

It's no secret that the shape of the modern organisation is flatter, less hierarchical and built around the concept of fluid team dynamics. At the Wellington-based Virtual Consulting Group, electronic mail and the Internet is helping take this business model to its logical conclusion: a virtual company. The benefits include much lower overheads than conventional consulting firms, strong customer-focus, and the ability to rapidly build customised project teams.

Virtual's 20 consultants cover a wide skills base, including corporate strategy, organisational development, policy advice, human resource management, training and communications. Each operates as an independent business — often from existing home offices — but they are connected to all other members of the group and to a central co-ordinating office by electronic mail. When a job comes in, they liaise electronically to put together project teams which match individuals' skills to the client's requirements.

There is only one person on the company's payroll, explains business improvement consultant and company co-founder Paul Goodhead.

"Liz Gully is Virtual's manager, and acts as a central liaison point and as the first contact for customers. With only Liz on the payroll, it means we can assemble a group with the skills needed for each job, without having to worry about things like filling quotas for chargeable hours.

"Our philosophy is 'wisdom without walls'. Our competition in the market is the big chartered accounting firms, and the main idea for us is to keep the overheads down.

"This is head office," he says, gesturing around the company's modest headquarters in the heart of Wellington's cafe district, "but most of us work out of our own offices. That