



# Dreaver, 2020

POLITICS (/NEWS/POLITICAL) / COVID-19 (/NEWS/COVI

## Trade Me founder keen for bluetooth 'CovidCard' alternative to tracing app

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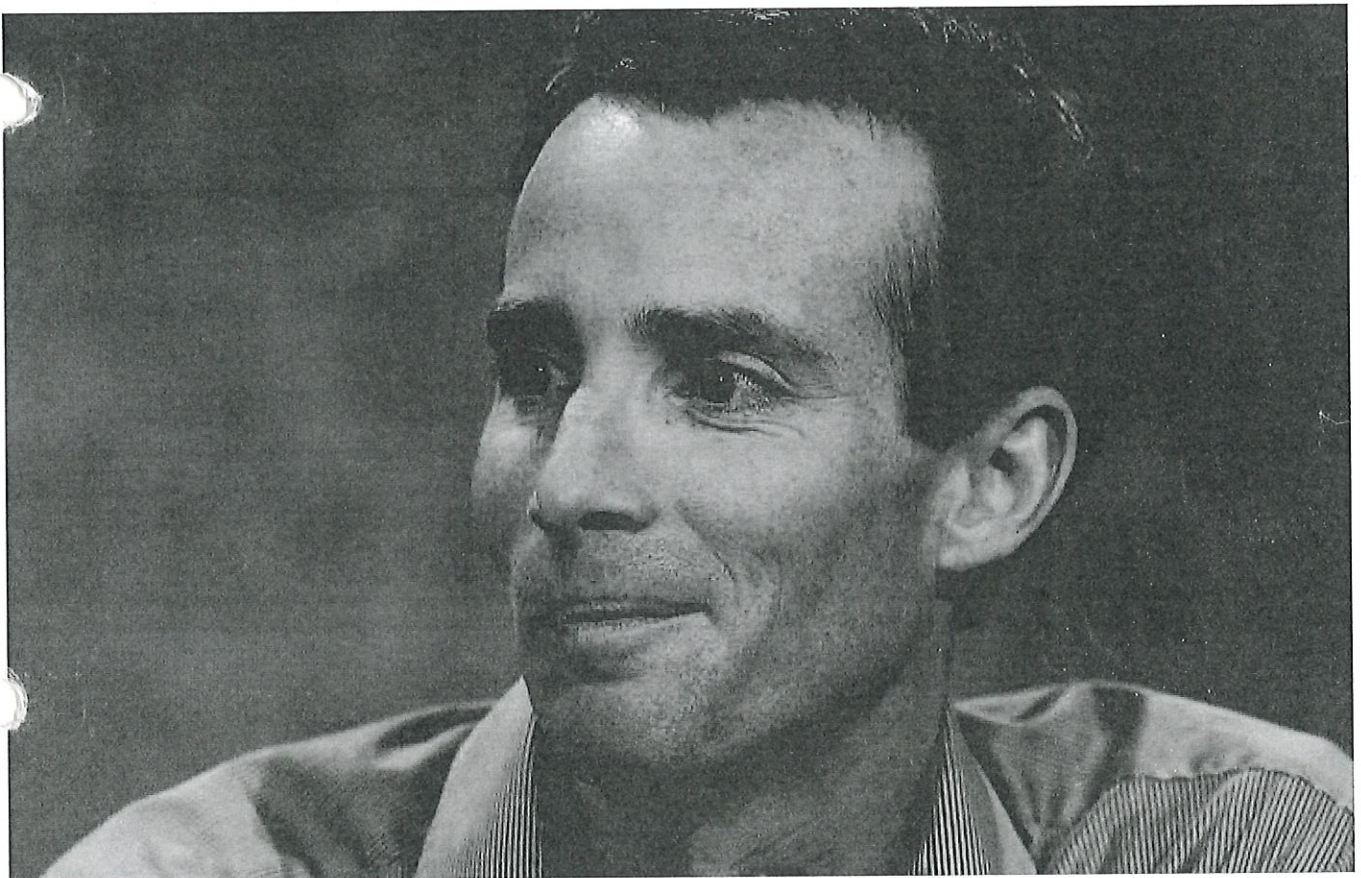
[Charlie Dreaver \(/authors/charlie-dreaver\)](#), Political Reporter

✉ [charlie.dreaver@rnz.co.nz](mailto:charlie.dreaver@rnz.co.nz) (mailto:charlie.dreaver@rnz.co.nz?)

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Covid-19 timeline  
7 May 2020

A prominent entrepreneur is frustrated that an alternative to the troubled Covid-19 tracing app is stuck in limbo with officials.



Trade Me founder Sam Morgan. Photo: Getty Images

Since March, Trade Me founder Sam Morgan has been working as part of a team to test the ability of 'CovidCard'.

CovidCard is a low energy bluetooth device the size of a credit card, that is designed to be worn on a lanyard around the neck when in areas such as public transport, workplaces, bars, restaurants, gyms, hospitals, large gatherings and events.

It detects and records close contacts using bluetooth and stores this data securely on a person's card for 21 days.

No contact data is automatically stored in the cloud or elsewhere and it does not track user location as the card does not contain GPS capability.



Six weeks ago, the team delivered a report to officials following field trials, but are yet to be given any indication of a decision.

The project and first year of operation is estimated to cost just under \$100 million and would take about five months to roll out, which is why Morgan wanted a decision to be made quickly.

Meanwhile, politicians are continuing to push for people to use the Covid-19 Tracer app, which only gets about 10,000 scans a day.

Minister of Health Chris Hipkins has appealed to New Zealanders to use the contact tracing app (<https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/421263/hipkins-urges-use-of-contact-tracer-app-step-up-your-efforts>), saying he believes there is a degree of complacency in this country, even as the risk grows every day.

"Please step up your efforts, scan wherever you go and keep a record of your movements," he said.

"Now's the time to be vigilant."

Morgan said apps overseas - which were even better than the Covid-19 Tracer app - had failed miserably.

"So the solution isn't on a phone and in our consultation with iwi and Pasifika and so forth, they made it really clear to us that if you're going to give [them] an app don't expect all of [their] people to be able to use this and that is a fundamental equity issue," he said.



Minister of Health Chris Hipkins. Photo: RNZ / Dom Thomas

"It is really important we can reach every New Zealander and no app is going to do that."

Field trials have already been completed on the CovidCard in Nelson Hospital and through scripted work.

"We effectively put cards on people and then scripted them through various cafe scenes or catching a taxi scene, all these real world situations and that was all about getting data to work out whether this thing could actually work," Morgan said.

It picked up about 90 percent of close contacts and up to 10 percent of false close contacts, which were people too far away to be clinically considered a close contact, he said.

Officials have been in regular contact, but have not indicated when a decision could be made on whether or not to roll out the card.

"It is not clear if or when a decision will be made on whether to do it or not, we are just not having a substantive conversation, that needs to take place," Morgan said.

"That's probably the frustrating place we are at, is that every time the Health Minister, Dr Bloomfield, the prime minister hops up and tells people to use a technology that we consider has no chance of success and that really erodes our ability to deploy technology that can work."

He said the cards could stop the country from going back into lockdown if there was another wave of community transmission.

"In my view, if you see one or two cases of transmission that you don't know where they come from, we are a matter of weeks away from locking the whole economy down again," he said.

"We don't think that is sustainable politically, maybe New Zealanders will tolerate another lockdown but they are not going to tolerate lockdown four, five and six and there is no timeline on a vaccine."

Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said earlier this week the card was something being explored.

"We have continued to keep a very open mind over different technologies."

Trials of the card were continuing, but it was human behaviour that really needed to be tested, Ardern said.

She also noted technology only enhanced contact tracing systems already in place.

"It will continue to be a process that involves people on the ground, interviewing and then taking a precautionary approach of testing everyone that works, plays, lives with the people who may have come into contact with Covid," she said.

"What it helps us do is put that extra precautionary layer in for people they might not even know they had contact with."

Minister of Health Chris Hipkins said there were pros and cons with all technologies, and they were not taking any off the table at this stage.

