

Emagine International Shines in Employer of the Year Awards

Emagine International has been named as one of the top ten Marketing Employers of the Year in the B&T/Stopgap annual awards. Over 80 companies participated in the survey with employees citing communication, flexibility and clear direction as some of the major influences of a desirable workplace. This is the fourth year the survey has been running and the first year Emagine has entered the competition to be ranked alongside companies such as IBM, Vodafone and Nokia.

“This survey is voted for by the staff, on a voluntary basis,” said David Peters, CEO of Emagine, “so it is very encouraging to rate so highly. Our business is about getting better results from IT solutions to automate marketing, and great people make a great business.”



EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR

DANIELLE VELDRE

Clear organisational business objectives, employer flexibility and performance appraisals were the perennial themes which emerged again in this year's responses to the *B&T/Stopgap* Employer of the Year survey.

This is the fourth year the survey has run in both Australia and the UK, where it has provided an ongoing insight into marketing and advertising agency workplaces.

This year more than 539 individuals from 81 companies participated in the survey, which represented an increase of 10% of individuals participating, and a huge 30% increase in qual-

ifying companies participating. In order to be a qualifying company, at least five individuals must have participated in the survey.

The questionnaire is divided into three sections: one which focuses on management style, company ethos and employee's general feelings about their place of work; one which measures tangible company benefits such as healthcare policies, paternity packages and car allowances; and a final opportunity for employees to provide some qualitative feedback.

The companies which came out on top in this year's survey also show consistency over the years the survey has been run, with Vodafone, Nokia, IBM and Text 100 all appearing in the top 10 for the most part of the survey's life.

So what are these companies doing right?

Let's not kid ourselves that companies are improving conditions for their workers simply for the sake of altruism alone. Particu-

larly in a labour market which is, technically speaking, one of almost full employment, good people are hard to find, and you want to make damn sure you hang onto them if and when you find them. Recruitment costs more in time, productivity and cash than retention.

“Salary, flexible working, benefits, inspiring leaders and training all prove to be important criteria for judging whether your employer is better than others. But the overwhelming reason that marketers and agency staff are happy in their jobs is that they enjoy their working environment and culture,” Stopgap operational director, Jackie Pollock, says.

“Of those considering moving jobs, both agency and in-house respondents scored consistently in their top two reasons—firstly, better salary and benefits (54%)

CONTENTS

IBM	[15]
Vodafone	[15]
Marketing Zoo	[16]
Hope Advertising	[16]
Nokia	[16]

> Story continues on PAGE 14

Employer of the year

> Story continued from PAGE 13

and secondly, lack of career progression or desire for clearer career progression (47%). The third reason for leaving by in-house marketers was better geographical location (29%) but, interestingly, none from the agency companies cited this reason at all. For agency staff, their joint third reasons were that they wanted more flexible working styles (27%) and to work for someone who inspires them (27%). "Working for a boss who truly inspires you is high on the agenda of agency staff," Pollock says.

Of course, consistent themes ran through the responses from employees in the top 10 companies as to what made them so.

The clear communication of vision and business objectives was common among all the companies in the top 10.

Flexibility has become increasingly important to employees, and again this is a characteristic of all of the top 10 companies.

The tight job market also led to most

employees (75%) expressing a feeling of security in their employment, and 98% of employees in the top 10 companies received performance feedback throughout the year.

Workers looking to their future financial security also figured in this year's results, with 50% receiving additional superannuation contributions, compared with only 31% last year.

Agencies

The tight labour market and improving conditions were reflected in the responses from ad agency employees: 87% of agency respondents said they were unlikely to leave their current employer in the next 12 months; 83% said that if they were to leave, they would be looking for an improved working environment/culture, and 46% said salary/benefits played a part in this decision; and 97% felt secure in their current job

There has also been an increased level of flexibility from agencies to accommodate employees wanting to take an

extended period of time away from work.

"A significant increase was noted year on year when looking at career breaks and sabbaticals—57% of agency side respondents agreed that their current workplace would offer this," Stopgap freelance agency recruitment consultant, Rebecca Crocker, says.

"The increase in agencies offering extended leave relates back to the growth in the Australian freelance market. Agencies are now able to secure skilled freelance/contract account handlers across a range of disciplines. Freelancers are a great, cost-effective recruitment solution to cover sabbaticals, annual and extended leave."

Surprisingly, those companies with the most resources aren't necessarily those which offer the best benefits, Stopgap permanent agency recruitment senior consultant, Dene Brentnall, says.

"The survey highlights that you need not work for the biggest to gain the best working conditions—this year we saw an increase in small to medium-sized marketing agencies within the top performers," Brentnall says.

"Not surprisingly 97% of agency respondents felt secure in their jobs, with unemployment at an all-time low, candidates are in demand and so the focus over

the past 12 months has been on staff retention. Companies have responded with enhanced and creative remuneration packages to include additional holidays or superannuation and for some may include gym memberships or time to participate in outside of work hobbies."

Marketers

Unsurprisingly, marketing departments (not being service departments) ranked higher than their agency peers when it came to accommodating employees outside work commitments.

Marketing departments also fared better than agency counterparts in annual and periodic performance reviews and better than average maternity leave packages.

Eighty per cent of survey respondents in-house were able to say that the business objectives and management vision for their company in the coming 12 months had been communicated clearly to them.

It's also encouraging that the majority of respondents in-house agree with statements about clear brand values for the companies in which they work.

But, compared to their agency counterparts, consensus-based decision making is well below average.



Empowerment key to satisfaction

Foosball tables and cappuccino machines might provide distractions for employees, but it seems there is no substitute for clearly communicated business objectives and empowering staff to be part of the bigger picture, if the leading company in the Marketing Employer of the Year survey is any indication.

IBM topped the survey for the second year running with staff indicating that IBM's marketing department not only accommodates the needs of its employees when it comes to their lives outside work, but also involves them deeply in the overall business objectives of the organisation, something its director, Megan Dalla-Camina, acknowledges isn't possible in all companies.

"Marketing has a very respected role within the IBM business," Dalla-Camina says.

"The first and foremost role of the marketing department is to deliver on

the business objectives. It's very empowering, and it doesn't happen in a lot of companies."

She says with regards to flexibility, be it job sharing, working part time or a condensed week, hours spent in the office isn't IBM's major concern.

"The philosophy is really about the output, rather than the input."

Satisfaction with this philosophy is evident in measures such as the 97% rate of women returning to work after maternity leave.

But Della-Camina stresses that this flexibility is not just extended to women, and there is an acknowledgement of men's commitments outside of work.

She says apart from being empowered within the overall IBM business, staff of the 120-strong marketing department have access to various professional development courses as well as a clearly defined career path.



Staff at Vodafone have the flexibility of job sharing, part-time work, as well as an 'open door' policy where they can challenge management.

Be good to your staff

While remuneration is a key element in attracting and retaining quality staff, oftentimes, it can play a less important role in staff feeling recognised and rewarded.

Vodafone, which is the runner-up Employer of the Year for the second year in a row, strives to recognise and reward its employees in the most meaningful way, according to marketing department human resources manager, Michelle Pombart.

She says in many instances an employee who has put in a period of especially hard work might prefer a day off rather than financial remuneration, something she says is part of the company's overall commitment to flexibility in the workplace. Vodafone offers job

sharing, part-time work, and annual leave and paternity leave benefits above and beyond statutory requirements.

Again, the theme of clearly communicated brand values of the organisation appears to be the element which separates the best employers from the rest.

The key value of Vodafone is 'fresh thinking', something Pombart says permeates all aspect of the business including an 'open door' policy where staff feel they can approach and challenge senior management.

Vodafone also has strong people development programs in place.

"[We think] if you're good to your people they're good to our customers and that makes a good business," Pombart says.

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Good, bad and ugly

The Marketing Zoo's two principals have worked together in the industry for over 11 years, and prior to starting up their own agency, had seen "the good, the bad and the ugly".

Managing director and co-principal, Brad Hellgas, says the most fundamental issue they needed to understand was "if you start with the premise that the most important asset in a business is the people, then it makes for a pretty good foundation to build a successful operation".

And with only 23 people working in the six-year-old agency, its director and co-principal, David Lo, adds that open communication is a key component in keeping its employees happy.

"Especially in a company our size, it's important to involve your staff in your vision for the future. Also, if you

don't make it clear what your expectations are from them, you end up running the risk of not being aligned at the end of the year—it's about having clearly defined, measurable objectives," Lo says.

And with people spending up to 80% of their time in the workplace, Hellgas says it's important staff also have fun, with the agency organising quarterly social functions, conducting ongoing developmental work in its annual conference, and holding its Christmas party for both staff and clients.

Lo adds that often in big pitches when it can become a tight race among the short-listed agencies, it ultimately comes down to "who clients would want to work with—it becomes a relationships game...and people like working with our staff".



Marketing Zoo aims for open communication with its staff and involves them in its vision for the future. The agency organises regular social events for employees, as well as opportunities for personal development.

Dairy Farmers marketing manager, Suellen Todd, says she appreciates the agency's dynamic approach to business.

"While always professional, [it] also manages to instil in those working with them a sense of fun and excitement, which is always refreshing and makes their team a pleasure to work

with," Todd says.

Hellgas concedes that both he and Lo have "seen the good, the bad and the ugly, and we've used those learnings and experience to make sure we understand what our staff and business need to develop and grow".

Camille Alarcon

Hope Advertising's Jeremy Hope (middle, rear with staff) gives Hope Comrades such as the one pictured (front, centre) projects to complete during their work experience.



Hope springs international

There was a time when work experience meant twiddling your thumbs at a desk, opening letters and making coffee, but St Kilda-based agency Hope Advertising sets its young hopefuls to work.

The group recently teamed up with RMIT University to offer final-year advertising students a week of work experience, a program called Hope Comrades.

Hope Advertising managing director, Jeremy Hope, says students are given a project and at the end of the week must make a presentation on the work they have done.

"It gives them a good grounding and understanding of what it's like to be in the business, on top of the skills they have learned at uni," he says.

Hope Advertising is a small team of eight people and a few sub-contractors but every one has been hand-picked for the role. Potential employees are given at least four interviews to ensure they fit the values of the business, which Hope says are "passion, commitment,

flexibility, teamwork, risk-taking and good reason".

He is keen on communicating with employees and is currently building an intranet training system.

"Our culture is open and honest. I have an office but I'm not in it, Friday drinks is a big thing for staff and clients as it's a good way of dealing with any issues that week and we have regular morning meetings so everyone can hear what's going on," he says.

The working environment is flexible and Hope leaves people to "run their own race". The office is designed for interaction, with the front desk set up like a bar, and tables and chairs outside, so the staff, who are all wireless, can choose to work outside in the summer.

As an incentive, staff who have been working at Hope for more than 12 months are given a share of the profits. Hope is also working on turning the company into a global franchise, using Melbourne as a back-end hub for the rest of the world.

Amanda Swinburn

Apples each day help staff stay

While that may not quite be the official slogan of mobile phone supplier Nokia, fresh fruit is one of the items on an impressive list of employee benefits reeled off by the company's head of marketing, Antony Wilson.

Also included is free massages; life insurance, a gym, a subsidised café, independent helplines to assist employees in dealing with personal issues and a \$1000 'flexi spend', which employees can use on anything from transport to sports equipment.

"It is an enormous range of benefits that helps employees feel really valued," Wilson says.

Equally important, he says, is the structure of the company.

"The environment itself is a very flat, non-hierarchical structure where everyone is encouraged to make a difference," he says.

This results in a company where staff are not intimidated by their superiors, and are not scared to step forward and make their voices heard, meaning ideas on potential improvements come from all levels—including reception and the shop floor.

"Rather than senior people being above themselves, they feel like they are there to support all the other staff," Wilson says.

Also significant in the contentment of marketing employees, he adds, is

that Nokia sees branding and marketing as key activities for the company.

"So the marketing teams themselves feel very valued and feel like they are at the core of the operations," he says.

And working in a dynamic industry, like telecommunications means the marketing teams are constantly being confronted by new challenges, so are not easily jaded, nor looking to move companies in search of a challenge.

"I think for everybody, after a while if you do the same thing every day it starts to get very dry and very boring," Wilson says.

"And that is not a problem here."

Will Sinclair



Nokia's Antony Wilson says benefits such as free massage make staff feel valued.