

Encouraging Diversity in Communications Agencies

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Abstract

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) are key priorities in Australia (Diversity Council Australia, 2021). The topic of how to better embed DE&I across the public relations and advertising landscape, from undergraduate student recruitment to agency employment, is a problem across public relations and advertising professions, both nationally and around the world (Sison, 2016). In 2016 PriceWaterhouseCoopers's (PwC) Entertainment & Media Outlook report found that the average industry worker was a white male, aged 27, and living in one of Sydney's eastern or inner west suburbs: 82.7% of the national entertainment and media workforce was monolingual, spoke only English at home, and 37% lived in Sydney. The report's release kick-started a national conversation around diversity in media; that an industry premised on creative ideation was so culturally homogenous reflected historic, entrenched and institutionalised bulwarks to genuine and meaningful commitments to diversity, social inclusion and equity.

Since 2016, it has been suggested that industry projects and commitments to address this issue have not been successful and are mostly ad hoc and disconnected. This research reflects our determination to help encourage diversity and empower minority voices in the communications industry, and find ways to increase and strengthen diversity commitments across agencies through education and industry action. This project investigates the extent and efficacy of diversity initiatives across Australia's communications agencies. The objectives are (1) to map how well Australia's leading agencies have diversified their recruitment, retention and promotion of culturally and linguistically diverse personnel, and (2) consider these initiatives alongside comparable ones from around the world that have been seen as successful. To do this, findings from interviews with industry representatives will be discussed, along with an analysis of findings from international industry reports and studies. This paper works from early findings from interviews conducted with several of Australia's biggest agencies. Working with members of the Media Federation of Australia (MFA), we take stock of what proactive measures they have taken since the PwC report, to ultimately gauge how Australian agencies are faring alongside international counterparts on the DE&I front.

The implications of this research rest on recognising that diversity produces a positive social impact with equity and inclusion in the communications industry, as well as economic gains through the long-standing link between productivity and diversity. Efforts to embed and augment diversity are prime indicators of social progress across all sectors and industries. This is an Australian Government priority, as myriad economic sectors still do not reflect

the diversity of the Australian population. This is something that is hoped will change in the communications industry so that new, diverse voice can be heard in the future.

References

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