

INVADING Y ASIA

IN THE FIRST INSTALMENT OF A THREE-PART "CAREER PATHWAYS" SERIES, JOHN DAVIDSON INVESTIGATES HOW THE GROWING MIGHT OF ASIA HAS SEEN THE REGION SUPPLANT THE UK AND UNITED STATES AS THE LOCATION OF CHOICE FOR AUSTRALIANS LOOKING TO DECAMP AND GET AHEAD OVERSEAS.



For many, Madison Avenue in New York is considered the centre of the advertising world. For others, London takes that mantle. And while cities like Paris, Amsterdam and Berlin have their own claims as advertising strongholds, it has always been the US and UK that have drawn many an Australian yearning to make a name for themselves. In fact, the pilgrimage has been a long, discernible trend in Australia's media and advertising history, going back to Rupert Murdoch, and continuing with the likes of Dave Droga and Hamish McLennan.

But in the past year a new target destination has emerged for marketers and agency folk - Asia. As the global financial crisis put a sleeper hold on the economies of the West, the might of China and India slowed but continued to expand. The opportunities in these two markets and in fast-developing South East Asia appear endless, and Australians are moving into the region in record numbers.

The senior leadership ranks of agency networks in Asia boast an abundance of Australian faces. Neil Stewart runs Maxus in the region and Ruth Stubbs is in charge of Mediabrands, which covers both Universal McCann and Initiative, while Cheuk Chiang leads PHD in Asia Pacific. On the creative side Matthew Godfrey runs Publicis's

Asian operations and Digby Richards heads up WPP's Bates 141 in Asia. Tim Riches, formerly CEO of Futurebrand in Australia, was recently appointed the agency's chief in Singapore and chief growth officer for Asia Pacific.

Australians are also among the heavy hitters client side: Elizabeth Armstrong is the global head of marketing for wholesale banking at Standard Chartered, based in Singapore. Martyn Ferguson is the assistant GM for marketing at Asia Pacific Breweries Singapore, handling alcohol brands Tiger and Heineken, and John Pollaers is president of Diageo Asia Pacific. These are just a few of the many Aussies in senior advertising and marketing roles in Asia, making big decisions and running operations across multiple markets.

Charlie Thomas, MD of recruitment company The Talent Business, says Australians are "certainly viewed positively" within the Asian ad scene. "From a skill set perspective, the creative product in Australia is good and as a result, agencies in Asia are often interested in importing that level of creativity. Culturally Australians are well-travelled, open-minded and good at adapting to their surroundings, which is obviously important when moving to a new market.

"A lot of the agencies in Austral-

ia have a strong integrated offering, largely due to the size of the market, whereas in the UK the agencies tend to have a more siloed approach. An integrated skill set is becoming more and more important and that applies to Asia as much as it does elsewhere."

Kurt Viertel spent five years in Asia, running Leo Burnett in Vietnam and then Singapore as MD, before his recent move to Brisbane to head Clemenger Harvie Edge. The native Queenslander remembers an adage when he moved to

the region: "When you go to Asia you're either on your way up or you're on your way down".

Viertel moved to Vietnam after more than four years at agencies in London to become an MD because "at 30 years old it was too good an opportunity to pass up".

"We did 20 TVCs a year [in Vietnam], as the TV penetration is still very high. We worked crazy hours," said Viertel, who then replaced Phil McDonald - now the head of George Patterson Y&R Sydney - as MD of Leo Burnett Singapore.

AGENCIES ON THE MOVE

It's not just individuals who are looking north for opportunities. More and more Australian agencies are seeking work in Asia or expanding into the region, using Australia's reputation as a developed market.

Three Drunk Monkeys has been working with one of Singapore's biggest telcos, StarHub, on a digital project, while Perth agency Cooch Creative has created work for the brand Ricola for markets such as Indonesia in the past. In July, Mitchell Communication Group PR firm Haystack expanded its regional footprint with offices in Singapore and New Zealand. The Face, Euro RSCG's recruitment advertising agency, is planning to launch its Engage brand in parts of Asia in 2010.

But it's not just a case of the Aussies moving in. Two Singapore-based agencies, The Upper Storey and The Secret Little Agency, have created work for Australian clients showing that great work can come from anywhere. Another Singapore-based shop, word of mouth marketing outfit Vocanic, has worked with Woolworths, Hungry Jacks and IAG.

strong agency network is difficult," he says. "Australian advertising skill sets can be a perfect way to complement local talent and build a sustainable agency."

Maxus's Stewart, who leads the media agency's network across Asia and Australia, has lived and worked in Singapore and Taiwan. He predicts that experience in Asia will be viewed in a more positive light.

"Experience in these markets is going to be seen as an important career move for global roles – but more importantly these markets are going to become centres of innovation, investment and opportunities," he says.

The belief that experience in Asia is an invaluable step in getting a global role is commonplace, and drives many Westerners to Asia. McDonald says: "I don't think Asian experience is absolutely essential, but if you look at the global CEOs of Y&R, Publicis and Ogilvy at the moment, you will find they have all done time in Asia. Looking at the incredible success of those three, it certainly can't do you any harm".

Robbie Hills, CEO of GroupM Search in Asia Pacific, agrees with McDonald. "As the region becomes an increasingly large contributor of revenue it certainly can't hurt."

Aside from career growth and advancement, there are other reasons why Australians are flocking to Asia. Lifestyle is one, along with attractive salary packages and a cultural diversity that few parts of the world can match. According to The Talent Business's Thomas, another reason is location: "Clearly the proximity to Melbourne and Sydney makes it more attractive than Europe for personal reasons. Also, the tax regimes in the likes of Singapore and Hong Kong are very favourable to that of Australia."

While Aussies dominate in management roles on the agency and account management side, on the creative side there are fewer making inroads.

Danny Searle is one; the former executive creative director of Clemenger BBDO Sydney is the chief creative officer and chairman of BBDO Singapore. Another is Tom Ormes, joint creative director at Iris Singapore, who has spent the past 12 years in Asia. During that time he has had stints with McCann in India and Sri Lanka, with Lowe in Dubai and with Ogilvy, Publicis, Y&R and Iris in Singapore.

"Asia's more fast-paced than what I was used to in Australia," he says. "It's more vibrant, and there's a good opportunity for creative work. That's absolutely not to say the opportunities aren't there in Australia, but my personal experience has been that things happen faster up here, so you get more out, which translates as more opportunities. Also, Asia has a tendency to be more integrated than Australia. It's not just about the big TV and print campaigns here."

CHE's Viertel believes it's tougher for Australian creatives in Asia as there's "fewer great briefs" to work on. Ormes disagrees: "The oppor-

tunities seem to present themselves more often [in Asia] than what I was used to in Australia," he says. "There's a massive hunger here to prove ourselves, and that's bloody great to be around. And I suppose, that's the region.

"And not just creatively. Clients in Asia can be tough, but the same as anywhere, it's just about getting to the bottom of the problem that they're trying to solve."

On the whole, like other developed markets, Australia has its fair share of big and powerful independents. In Asia this is not necessarily the case. Multinational agencies and brands tend to dominate. Euan Wilcox, business director at agency The Upper Storey, says: "Unfortunately Asian clients still trust multinationals too much.

"They trust the name," he says. "In London and New York the best and most dynamic agencies are independents. But in Asia you have to have the name. But that is our opportunity – to build a name that is independent but has the credibility of a multinational."

The Upper Storey, which has offices in Singapore, Kuala Lumpur and India, is bucking this trend and has worked with LG, Dell, Nokia and Nikon. Wilcox has worked in Asia for the past five years, following a stint in Europe, and feels that in the Asian business environment "anything goes". "While budgets are smaller and the work arguably less sophisticated, the business environment is more dynamic," he says. "Thus it is a better environment for things to change and business opportunities to come up."

The market dynamics of Asia vary massively from country to country. While budgets in Singapore might be small for a national campaign, those in China and Japan would be huge in comparison. And while some clients are risk-averse and less spontaneous, others in places such as Indonesia are more willing to push the envelope. And as business growth in Asia skyrockets while stagnating in the West, the common belief is the deluge of Australians heading to Asia will grow stronger.

Wilcox believes there is nothing like working in Asia "in terms of developing skills needed in a globalised world".

"Ten to 20 years here will pay off much more significantly than in the United States or Europe," he says. "Australians have to wake up to Asian business opportunities more. Spending time here will help them do that much better than in Australia.

PHD's Chiang, now in his third "tour of duty" in the region, gets continuously drawn back by Asia's energy and dynamism.

"Markets like Singapore, Hong Kong and Shanghai are now regional hubs for many multinational clients, so you get exposure to great talent and people, both agency and client, from around the world," he says. "Although there is no place like home, Asia is where the action is." <

THE RETURNED SERVICEMAN



PHIL MCDONALD,
MANAGING DIRECTOR, GEORGE
PATTERSON Y&R SYDNEY

When and why did you move to Asia?

I moved to Asia in 2001 to get through a glass ceiling. I was 31 with 12 years in advertising under my belt and the next step was agency management. However, I had someone standing in the way and

they weren't going anywhere. So, in the end, I did and it was Asia.

Why did you move back?

We were happy to stay in Asia to be honest, but in late 2006 George Patterson Y&R offered me the job as managing director of its Brisbane office. This was a great opportunity to shape a newly merged agency and it was a good time to bring our two boys home to start an Australian education.

What are key differences between Asia and Australia?

The key difference is language. This of course affects the end of product, but also presents many challenges in the strategic development of communication campaigns. Successful Asia advertising expats have the ability to defer judgment and control to their local teams at the right time. There are cultural nuances that are not initially obvious to us as expats, nor even fully understood once explained to us. To a point you have to go with the flow. Many expats fail in advertising because they can't do this. It's a real balancing act to know how to lead and direct, but to also relinquish control at the appropriate time.

THE VIEW FROM OVERSEAS



ROBBIE HILLS, CEO,
GROUPM SEARCH ASIA PACIFIC

When and why did you move to Asia?

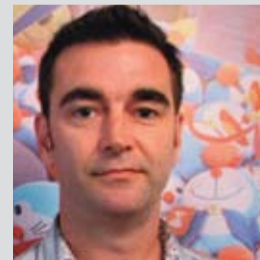
I was asked to move to Singapore at the end of 2007 to take on a new role as CEO GroupM Search Asia Pacific. GroupM, across all our agencies in the region, identified early on that we needed to bring regional consistency to our search offering in Asia Pacific.

We now have the largest agency footprint in Asia for search marketing – paid search, SEO, mobile search, search analytics – with teams in multiple cities in Australia, Japan, China, India, Singapore, Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Thailand.

What are key differences between Asia and Australia?

It really varies by country, which is the challenging and enjoyable part of being across the region. For example, in China the way business is conducted is completely different to Japan, which is different again to India. Ensuring you are sensitive and understanding to local, cultural nuances is very important.

THE VIEW FROM OVERSEAS



**CRAIG MAPLESTON, MANAGING
DIRECTOR, IRIS SINGAPORE**

When and why did you move to Asia?

I moved to Asia 15 years ago for a change of scenery and change of pace. My intention was only to stay for a year or two, but I am still here.

What are key differences between Asia and Australia?

The scale and diversity of consumer communications is the obvious difference – 20 million people in Australia and roughly four billion in Asia. And across those four billion is an incredible diversity in language, lifestyle, aspirations and inspirations. The way people buy is hugely different between Australia and Asia, and within Asian markets. Understanding these diverse sales channels and purchase motivators is a big learning curve. The other huge difference is the working hours. Perhaps it is due to a reluctance to say "no" to clients in Asia, but consistently tight deadlines means working longer hours and more weekends. Generally, Australian agencies are still split by discipline lines – there are ad agencies, promo agencies, brand consultancies, digital agencies. In Asia, there is a noticeable move towards integration.