

Adland polishes its credentials

SYDNEY: Amid inspirational quotes from Albert Einstein and Nelson Mandela, and a slick TV presentation from Sandra Sully, the ad industry got its first glimpse of accreditation.

The launch of the Advertising Federation of Australia's Best Practice Accreditation program at NSW Parliament House this week revealed an ad industry development program further-reaching than any overseas.

While the UK's Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) has operated a continuous professional development program (CPD) for several years, the AFA's program not only expands on the CPD requirement, but adds an agency compliance component.

The stated aim of the accreditation program is to raise standards across the industry, give advertisers confidence in their choice of agency and provide employees with a defined career path. It should also help agencies retain staff – according to the latest AFA survey, staff turnover across the whole industry sits at 29.6%.

The program is designed to mirror the requirements set down by governments and procurement professionals when contracting advertising services. The NSW and federal government communications units have both indicated they will be asking agencies seeking places on advertising rosters whether they are accredited or not.

Darren Woolley, founder of consultancy P3, said his company will also be asking the same question in new business pitches. Key areas in which accreditation will play a part in client/agency relationships will be around proposals for agency resourcing and ongoing contract negotiation, said Woolley.



From left: Lesley Brydon, executive director of the AFA; Hon. Gary Nairn, Special Minister of State; Russel Howcroft, national chairman of the AFA and CEO of The Furnace; Jim Moser, AFA accreditation ambassador and MD of Clemenger BBDO Sydney.

"Agencies will be able to justify and substantiate higher salaries for their staff if they meet or exceed the accreditation training quota," he said.

Woolley warned that accreditation will not be a new business

Several advertisers voiced their support of the AFA accreditation program at its launch but it remains to be seen how the wider industry will react. The AFA will pitch its accreditation program to the Australian Association of

2008 and while it has no immediate plans to follow suit, the AFA will consider this route if reaction to the program is favourable.

One industry observer predicted the AFA would have little chance of achieving this, though, as it does not enjoy the power wielded by the IPA in the UK.

Much of the success of the program hinges on its uptake, with the same observer questioning how it will achieve success when major ad agencies such as Singleton Ogilvy & Mather and JWT are not AFA members.

"Some of the biggest agencies aren't going to have a bar of it because they aren't in the AFA," the industry observer said.

The AFA acknowledges it will take some time to achieve critical mass. It has 165 members and, going by the IPA's example, aims to have 45 agencies accredited by the end of June, 60 by the end of the year and 100 by the end of year three.

The IPA has signed up 160 agencies, and 10,000 employees have participated in its program since its inception five years ago.

When the AFA briefed members on the program in November 2005, the response was extremely positive, and feedback from members after the launch this week was of a similar vein, said AFA general manager Chris Thomas.

The AFA will invest 50% of the fees from the program into promoting it, with a national ad campaign starting later this year.

The advertising peak body has appointed an accreditation advisory board including Dr Simon Longstaff of the St James Ethics Centre, and ex-ABC deputy chair Wendy McCarthy, to oversee the program. Client/agency relationship specialist APRAIS will assess the progress of the program.

Dave Clutterbuck

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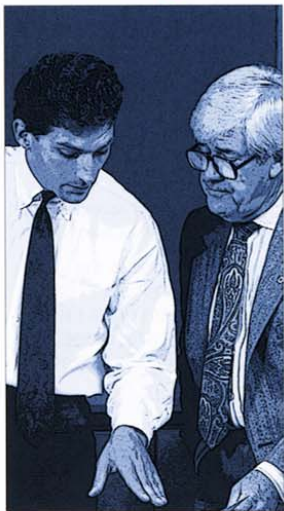
panacea but said any move to improve the level of training and development in the industry was a good one.

"Financial pressure on the industry has meant staff development has fallen by the wayside in recent times."

National Advertisers (AANA) at a directors' lunch on 15 February and while the AANA will not officially endorse the program, executive director Collin Segelov said it is to be commended.

The IPA's program will become mandatory for UK agencies in

What agencies need to know



TO BECOME AFA ACCREDITED, AGENCIES WILL NEED TO:

- Be members of the AFA, agree to abide by the Agency Code of Ethics and undertake an ethics workshop.
- Implement OH&S guidelines and safety checklists for agency offices and TV production shoots.
- Implement a Trade Practices Compliance Program and commit to education on relevant advertising codes and regulations.
- Structure at least 24 hours continued professional development per permanent staff member each year with a recommended minimum of 75% of staff enrolled.
- Agree to be audited by an independent consultant appointed by the Advisory Board at least once every three years.
- Take advantage of best practice HR tools covering staff positions, induction programs and performance appraisals.
- Pay an establishment fee and an annual fee. The establishment fee for a single business agency is \$1,650, and the annual fee \$1,045. Multiple businesses pay an establishment fee of \$2,750 and an annual fee per business of \$1,045 (enrol as many businesses as you like but payment is capped at three). These costs include GST.