

# Consultant guidelines panned

**MELBOURNE:** A proposal to implement a set of guidelines for consultants to the ad industry looks like being a non-starter.

P3 founder Darren Woolley believes implementing a set of "rules for the road" would overcome the apprehension and fear that some within the advertising industry face when working with consultants.

But his competitors vehemently disagree, saying their own internal codes of ethics and various professional bodies they belong to bind them to guidelines that make his suggestion superfluous.

Woolley first raised the issue with the Advertising Federation of Australia (AFA) in July last year after discovering US consultants adhere to a uniform set of guidelines. At the time, the suggestion was met with apprehension among consultants and therefore not pursued, which Woolley said

he found disappointing.

He said he continues to come across clients who raise concerns that commercially sensitive information could fall into the wrong hands because of malpractice within the industry, and asserts that guidelines will alleviate this

fear. "I think there is a lot of mistrust out there. I've heard about certain operators demanding fees and sharing confidentiality agreements with other clients, which calls our whole category into disrepute," Woolley said.

Fellow consultants are adamant, however, the guidelines are unnecessary.

"We just don't face a problem with our clients. I guess after 10 years in the business, we have a reputation that can be trusted," Firm Decisions GM Australasia Greg Flint said.

"We self-regulate ourselves and live by our own code of ethics

**"WE JUST DON'T FACE A PROBLEM WITH OUR CLIENTS. I GUESS AFTER 10 YEARS IN THE BUSINESS, WE HAVE A REPUTATION THAT CAN BE TRUSTED."**

Greg Flint

and that's enough for us. Darren might have problems with his clients, but we don't."

The AFA said implementing such an agreement was difficult given the diverse roles consultants play. "It must be remembered that in the US, they are dealing with hundreds of consultants," said AFA chairman Russel Howcroft.

"The AFA would be happy to facilitate the adoption of such an agreement if the marketplace felt there was a compelling need."

The Clinic principal Colin Wilson-Brown is also against Woolley's suggestion. "I just don't have a need for such rules because no one has ever expressed a concern about my business. Therefore, I'm not interested in pursuing it."

Peter McDonald, managing director of The Agency Register, said its own code of ethics, which has been in place for eight years, covers any concerns. "I know consultants in the US sign such guidelines but then they ignore them," he said. "It's just not effective. We're like any other business that stands up to be counted. We need to get down to what is relative to our market instead of trying to adopt something from other markets that just doesn't work."

Nina Lees