

Difficult for small outfits to take on big guns

By NATHAN CROSS

HALF of small business owners believe they can't compete with big business for skilled staff, a new survey has found.

Finance and accounting body CPA Australia said business owners thought employees were attracted to larger businesses for better pay, more job security and tenure, greater benefits and enhanced career paths.

The survey also found business owners are more optimistic than their accountants, with almost three-quarters of the certified practising accountants (CPAs) questioned saying small business suffers a recruitment disadvantage compared with big business.

The CPA Australia survey of 600 small business owners and 105 CPAs found 61 per cent of small businesses had experienced difficulties in recruiting skilled staff.

CPA Australia state small business spokesman Rod Wortley said small businesses were faced with the problem of bright young workers being poached by large companies interstate that offered better job opportunities.

"The biggest problem here is the brain drain among younger workers out of South Australia," he said.

"Currently there are skill shortages in most trades, in the construction sector and the health sector.

"Accountants, civil engineers and child-care workers are also in demand."

The survey also found that more than 30 per cent of small business owners were uncomfortable when it came to hiring younger workers.

The main reasons were unreliability, lack of experience, immaturity, lack of training or qualifications and lack of skill requirements.

Finding good staff not always costly



ON THE LOOKOUT: Nicole Underwood... "there is a misconception out there that the best candidates want to work for larger organisations".

SMALL companies do not have to spend a lot of money to match what large firms have to offer new recruits, Entree Recruitment general manager Nicole Underwood believes.

She said the national skills shortage, ageing of the population and declining birth rate was making it even more difficult to attract the right talent.

"Often smaller companies think they don't have the reputation, presence or budget to attract and entice the top candidates in the market," Ms Underwood said.

"However, in my experience, it is not about how big your marketing budget is, it is more about the way you present and sell your company and opportunity."

She stresses the importance of investing time and money to find the right person for a job.

"Taking short cuts, like trialling a friend of a friend, calling in favours and just scouring numerous consultants' databases are usually ineffective strategies that create more pain and delay a successful result," Ms Underwood said.

"Low-risk strategies with higher probability rates are always better investments, especially for smaller companies trying to work within restricted financial guidelines."

A clear strategy, quick action and ability to market yourself and the business effectively could win the



Tania Bawden

best candidate from other employers, - even if they offer higher salaries, Ms Underwood said.

"To recruit and then retain the best people, you need to engage candidates to come and work with you through energy, intention and purpose," she said.

"They want a company to stand for something and to be inspired by more than just a job, and this doesn't cost you anything."

Effective planning started at the front door, with first impressions made about a job by the decor and atmosphere of the reception area of an office.

Ms Underwood said surveys had found the best employers had the highest retention rates - which flowed directly through to higher revenue and earnings growth compared with other companies.

"I think there is a misconception out there that the best candidates want to work for larger organisations," Ms Underwood said.

She said this was her experience setting up Adelaide-based consultancy Entree Recruitment.

Handy low cost tips

1. PREPARATION - Have a clear description of the position as well as quantifiable outcomes.

2. ACT QUICKLY - Candidates move quickly so, therefore, must you. Know all your costs in advance and this will save time and money.

3. THE PERSON - What skills and qualifications are needed?

4. RECRUITMENT STRATEGY - Options include print media, online, outsourcing to specialist recruiters or headhunting your competitors.

5. ADVERTISING - Still the best way to find the best candidate for the job. Sell the opportunity and the company, don't just copy your position description into the ad space.



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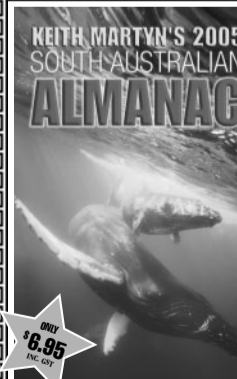
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Rural retailing strong

AUSTRALIA'S regional shopping centres had their best year on record in 2003-04, a retail industry scorecard has found.

The UrbisJHD Retail Averages 2004, released yesterday, found they generated a record average turnover of \$324 million in the year to June 3.

This was 6.2 per cent up on the previous year.

Specialty retailers were up by 8.5 per cent in sales.

While turnover volume for regionals grew by 6.2 per cent in 2003-04, total retail spending grew by 7.7 per cent, showing that other retail formats grew at an even faster rate.

Big banks on notice

REGIONAL and international banks are snatching some of the small-to-medium-enterprise (SME) banking market from Australia's four biggest banks.

The four big banks' collective share of primary-transaction banking by SMEs has dropped to 67.5 per cent, from

68.2 per cent six months ago, Asia Pacific banking analyst group East & Partners said.

It said 43 per cent of small businesses were seriously considering or at least contemplating moving to another bank. Six to eight per cent of them would actually do so over the next six months.