



# Sharp Insights, SMART IDEAS

OMD Australia is navigating the complex media landscape to deliver insights, ideas, and results for its national and international portfolio of clients.

Images by Scott Ehler

**A**s part of a global network with 120 offices, OMD Australia consistently comes up with creative solutions to ignite consumer desire and accelerate business growth for its clients. The company was responsible for such campaigns as launching the Best Jobs in the World Phase 2 competition for Tourism Australia, making ‘Macca’s’ the official nickname for American fast-food chain McDonald’s in Australia, and in collaboration with Saatchi & Saatchi introducing a fully interactive illustrated book for OPSM Eye Care that screens children’s vision as they are being read to.

OMD is focused on challenging convention to ensure a consistent delivery of market-leading work. Proof is in the pudding with OMD winning 28 domestic and international product awards over

the past 12 months, including sweeping the board at this year’s Festival of Media Global Awards with OMD taking home five gold awards including the Grand Prix Campaign of the Year Award.

CEO Peter Horgan has an extensive background in the media industry. His professional career began in London in the early 90s in account management and media buying before he moved to Australia in 1995 to take up a job with Y&R, then Media Decisions. In 1998, Peter joined Optimedia, and three years later he moved to Carat Australia, stepping into the position of national buying director. In 2003, Peter joined OMD Australia as the executive director of trading, and after three years was promoted to managing partner. During his three-year term in this role, he worked with fellow managing partner Leigh Terry and CEO Mark Coad to guide the

business to its position as the most successful and awarded media agency in the country. In 2009, Peter became joint managing director with Leigh Terry, and after less than two years stepped up to the top spot of sole CEO with Leigh’s elevation to a regional role.

Like most industries, change is the only constant in media and advertising. Peter says OMD today can’t be compared with the business it was in the early days when he joined. Even as recently as five years ago, it was fundamentally a planning and buying industry with far fewer people and a much simpler process in place. “You agreed who the target audience was and you laid down a planned schedule of activity, which was fundamentally in paid media,” he says. “Digital was re-emerging after spending five or so years in the naughty corner after the dotcom crash. The >



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media agency industry had a strong focus on process; it needed to transact more efficiently, streamline the planning and buying functions, and do that with a lean resource structure.

“The landscape has changed enormously, and the complexity of what a media agency does has moved way beyond traditional paid media. Clients themselves have become broadcasters with the ability to leverage their own brands and narrative through their own channels.”

Throughout Peter’s time at the helm, he has led OMD through a metamorphosis to one of the larger, smarter, and more commercially successful agencies in Australia. Fundamental to OMD’s success under Peter’s leadership has been the ability to help clients transform their business in this constantly changing landscape. “Technology has had a transformative impact on the media market, and it is our role to help our clients navigate this,” Peter explains. “We employ a number of insight and data specialists to analyse and demystify the wealth of data that technology has made available to our clients.”

Tackling this ever-evolving environment has been a challenge. The company must attract and streamline the diverse skill sets necessary to remain the experts. “You see a decade’s worth of change every year,” Peter notes. “Clients don’t want to navigate that themselves. They need you to be able to coordinate those different pillars of expertise for them.”

One area of the business Peter is particularly renowned for is his focus on people. “The landscape is much more about performance, but, from my perspective, the most fundamental difference at OMD has been that we were an early adopter of shifting the focus from process towards people. Our continued success is 100-per-cent dependent on our people and the culture we create. We wanted to nurture an environment that people wanted to work in, one where they felt connected to the brand, and one where there was loyalty between the employees and the organisation. We wanted to empower our people to do great work for clients.”

These lessons came about early in his leadership tenure when he

found the constant push for new business could be costly. Peter explains: “If you become too focused on new business targets or client imperatives, there is a danger that you can forget the human side of the teams that are working for you and push them too hard. I was guilty of this earlier on, and it reflected in staff morale, which had a big impact on the business. Now commercial success is never at the expense of our people.”

This is where Peter sets himself apart from his peers. Unlike many agencies, Peter makes it a public priority to resource for sustainable workloads and the headspace to drive results. Over the past year, Peter declined to participate in a number of new business pitches when he felt the participation would put a damaging burden on his people. Recognising the importance of sustainable growth, Peter places greater emphasis on cultivating business from within. In an industry where often success is defined by the number of new business wins, this was a brave move. “While we may not always be in the headlines for new business wins, we are very proud of that fact that we have a 95-per-cent client retention rate over a number years. Tenure and deeper client relationships is what counts. While, of course, we’ll chase new business, it won’t be at the expense of our people or our clients.”

In cultivating this people-first approach, OMD invests in three core areas of training and development to ensure staff remain at the cutting edge of the media landscape, and are fully supported to maximise their personal potential. The first is internal core skills training where experts and leaders evangelise throughout the business. The second is external skills training with a focus on developing employees into effective managers or leaders.

The final element is inspiration, inviting game-changing leaders across a diverse range of industries and backgrounds to come in and share their experience, ideas, and perspectives. Recently, OMD



hosted a member of the Australian Army who spoke about teamwork and how that is addressed within the military.

According to Peter, recent staff survey scores have revealed that employees are the happiest they’ve been in five years, and client satisfaction scores are also as good as they’ve ever been. “We’ve won awards in the Asia-Pacific region in recognition of our people development and culture for the past two years running. We’ve also consistently ranked in the Top 50 *BRW* Best Places to Work in Australia.” OMD is the only communications company to have ranked in this listing for the past six years.

“I take great pride that with our people culture and product perspectives, the wider network draws a lot from OMD Australia. We are seen as leaders in this space and we are frequently tapped for the initiatives we put in place.”

Peter says that it’s OMD’s core values that underpin the company, and these have been shaped around instilling a strong working culture where everybody’s voice is heard. “Team First is the first of our four pillars,” he says. “With a complex environment of diverse skill sets and levels of expertise, there is a danger of creating a departmentalised organisation and all of the cultural malaise that can go along with that. So we put a central focus on teamwork and cross-collaboration.

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“The second is Authenticity. We may not be the flashiest or showiest culture, but we are real. We deliver what we say, and there is a down-to-earth authenticity that is fundamental to our output. We recruit around this value.

“Next is Challenge Convention: permission to push the boundaries but not lose sight of the fundamental fact that you’re investing other people’s money. You can’t be reckless in how you do that, but clients do require you to be brave and to challenge the status quo.

“Finally, the fourth pillar is Fun Matters. We spend a lot of time together. It is a work-hard environment, but we also want to be able to enjoy each other’s company and enjoy what we do every day.”

When looking to the future, Peter’s vision is focused on driving a strong performance culture that is centred on return on investment, and shifting the traditional position of the media agency to one of a true strategic partner to its clients. “We want to do that in a truly OMD way—an authentic group of professionals that clients are excited to partner with. This is only made possible with a staff base which is nurtured, supported, and invested to be the best that they can be.”

Peter is excited to continue his role in guiding OMD on a successful path forward. He is a great asset to the brand and an effective driver of its services on Australian shores. Peter’s passion was recently recognised with the accolade of Agency Head of the Year in the Campaign Asia-Pacific Agency of the Year Awards 2014. •

