

# Training a national concern

The message from ad campaigns is that employers want workplace training to move past state boundaries. By John Mitchell.



**H**ave you seen the television commercial which ends with the arrival on screen of a blue work van with the yellow letters MEGT emblazoned across it?

The modestly designed ad commences with some worried looking characters fretting in the office. Each of the characters is dressed in a white top with one or two words written across it – payroll, paperwork, administration, or workers compensation. Typical employer headaches.

To add to the stress on the employer, who is pictured seated forlornly outside on the footpath, another character enters the scene with the words trainee and apprentice on his shirt. More employer headaches.

Phew, the MEGT blue work van arrives and the employer's troubles evaporate. Simple message: MEGT takes the worry out of training for employers.

MEGT's bare-bones commercial is a world apart from the sassy ones shown repeatedly during the one-day cricket season last January by two distance education universities, UNE and USQ. One commercial featured a trendy young professional in the city linking to her professor via Skype or similar, and the other commercial offered the frustrated young professional the option of online education as a way to break out of the box he might have built around himself.

The contrast between the MEGT and the universities' commercials suggests

blue van arriving in time to do all the training-related work underlines the point that MEGT makes things happen, no matter what services MEGT provides. Windridge says conveying this single message is vital to his business.

"Because MEGT delivers so many different services it's hard to actually give a clear message that covers all of those in one hit. We're a training organisation, a group training organisation and an Australian apprenticeship centre and we've got other ancillary services. It is difficult to get that across."

MEGT is also deliberately pitching to two different target markets. The television campaign is planned by a media buying organisation and the commercials scheduled and placed to ensure the MEGT message reaches two diverse target audiences at critical times of the day: employers on the one hand, and 17- to 25-year-olds on the other.

However, Windridge is aware that 17- to 25-year-olds consume media in totally different ways to employers. "That's why TV is not the major platform we use for that market. For the younger group we also use social media such as Facebook. We have a very big online presence."

"TV on its own is not a worthwhile strategy. So the campaign for young people was designed quite differently to the employer campaign. And local area marketing was incorporated into the mix for it to work."

Another difference between sectors is timing. MEGT needs to get its message across to employers in October when employers are making decisions about apprentices and other staff for the following year; universities want to influence individual customers' buying decisions in January.

Meanwhile, the similarities between these sets of commercials are arguably more significant, including the common attempt to build market share through mass media marketing and the creation of a national brand not bound by the location of the provider's headquarters, such as in Armidale for UNE, Toowoomba for USQ or Ringwood in Melbourne for MEGT.

Windridge says there are two reasons why MEGT is running these TV commercials, the second of which may surprise. "The first reason is to build our market share. The second is to build market size as we feel a responsibility to promote apprenticeships, traineeships and vocational education in general; the health of this sector affects our livelihoods."

When Windridge refers to livelihoods, for this not-for-profit organisation this means the livelihoods of its staff located a long way from Ringwood. "We've

got 67 offices, 900 staff and we deliver services in every state in Australia, and we certainly see ourselves as a national provider."

Besides looking after the welfare of his staff, Windridge is passionate about the need for VET providers to think about the national market, because industry is national in its outlook.

"A VET provider can still legitimately choose to be purely local and that's still a valid proposition, but if you want to grow the business then you also have to have a national viewpoint as well.

"We look at VET as a national product and sometimes in the world of state regulations, or state interpretations of federal regulation, it is hard to actually justify that as a national product. But I think VET has to be national in its approach because industry is national. If VET is going to meet the needs of industry, and that's what VET's fundamentally about, then VET also has to take a national approach."

Windridge believes that if a training provider is interested in taking a long-term view of the world "then they have to look at some type of advertising strategy over a period of time". He appreciates that "it's an expensive process" to advertise on TV, but says it also provides "opportunities and it's an important part of having a long-term view as to where your business is going to go".

Employers like the message that MEGT will "get things to work nationally", says Windridge. "National employers use MEGT to make things easier when navigating what is ostensibly a state-based education system delivering nationally recognised qualifications." This is MEGT's subtext: MEGT works nationally despite any hurdles put in its way or in the way of employers.

Windridge is not mesmerised by his own high-profile commercials and is determined that MEGT maintain its local identity: "Our positioning line is: big enough to support you, small enough to know you."

MEGT is big enough to mount a marketing campaign that signals the arrival of a national VET market, despite the difficulties historically created by state-based regulations. And the market will only get bigger, says Windridge.

"In the not too distant future increasingly it will be a global approach [to the VET market]. National is almost a stepping stone to global. I don't know how our regulators are going to cope with that, but that's another matter." ■

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some differences between VET and higher education. For instance, recruitment campaigns for many VET programs such as traineeships and apprenticeships need to be pitched as much at employers as at potential apprentices, while the vast majority of university courses are pitched solely at the prospective individual student.

If the message of the university commercials is to be bold, enrol now and catapult forward your professional career, the message of the MEGT ad is far more practical, says CEO David Windridge. "We have one message: MEGT makes apprenticeships, traineeships and training happen."

The simple metaphor of an MEGT

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