

The world may not be enough...

By **Mike Beeley**, CEO, ReAgent Employer Marketing

Unless you've been covered in mud and living up a tree in Nimbin all year, you'll no doubt be aware of the colossal skills shortage we are facing and the resultant focus on 457 visas and other short-term solutions to import talent being considered by employers.

We are increasingly being asked by clients, especially in the resources sector, to advise on sourcing talent from overseas destinations for Australian roles, as they realise we just don't have enough skilled workers here to meet our country's pending needs.

A report out from Skills Australia this month suggests we will be short of 2.4 million skilled workers by 2015 – that's less than four years away!

Such is the looming talent shortage here that some companies have moved straight past the idea of recruiting locally and are now establishing long-term strategies to pipeline talent in on an ongoing basis from key global locations. Why waste time and money looking locally when it's obvious what we need to do?

But where are these people going to come from?

We all know that India and China are going to be the engines of skills generation in the future, and could provide much of our required labour. In fact, China already has performed that function for this country – the gold rush around 1850 was only possible through the provision of

cheap and plentiful labour from China (over 50,000 arrived between 1851-1861) and other countries, and left a delightful and indelible legacy in Australian culture, most notably in the form of our Chinatowns.

I wonder what the recruitment ads looked like – maybe something like these from WW1:



Produced with kind permission from the National Library of Australia

Give us your talent attraction challenges contact

The numbers were staggering – in 1852 alone over 370,000 immigrants arrived in Australia, enabling the economy to boom. The population of the country trebled from 430,000 in 1851 to 1.7 million in 1871, paving the way for the unique and unparalleled cultural diversity we enjoy today. If that were to happen in this current boom, we would have a population of close to 70 million by 2031...

But it wasn't easy for them – there was ignorance of Chinese customs and culture, leading to suspicion and prejudice. It took many years for them to be accepted and be given equal opportunities – a form of racism we still face today.

Can we learn anything from history?

We are now experiencing our next resources rush, centred on iron ore, coal and LNG. Anyone who studies history will surely agree that, to some degree, we are in for a repeat performance of the 1850s. And while it clearly won't have such a dramatic effect on our population, it could write the next chapter in Australia's cultural adolescence.

One thing that strikes me as odd is the extreme polarity of the Australian government (and of some of our population) between skilled migrants and refugees. It is possible that the only real difference between a refugee and an indentured Electrician is four years in Tech. The 4,000 refugees we are about to swap with Malaysia could put a big dent in our skills hole by 2015.

But before we can do that we need to change – change our perceptions of 'talent', stop thinking of eligible talent as 'candidates', and not allow the media to direct our perception of the usefulness or otherwise of individuals.

Have a think about this - the only difference between a 'boatperson' and a

457 migrant is a piece of paper. And the attitude adjustment of a nation.

Anyway, I digress. Back to the world.

Very quickly companies looking to recruit from overseas realise the enormity of the challenge – the sheer size and complexity, not to mention resource-drain, of the exercise. A long and complex process involving:

1. Identifying the global skills pools through talent mapping;
2. Assessing the available sourcing channels;
3. Analysing and buying the most; appropriate and cost-effective media
4. Deciding on appropriate creative which doesn't trample over local culture and sensibilities;
5. Building a website to capture attention and response; and
6. Creating an efficient and appropriate CRM process to exploit the response.

Not to mention the logistics of actually interviewing and assessing these people.

And that's just to find and assess them against professional criteria. The next challenge centres on diversity – how do we ensure they feel at home here and stay?

There's nothing more frustrating than spending \$50,000 to land a Qatari national to run our LNG train in Karratha, only to lose them again when they discover there are no mosques or halal butcheries for 450km.

We need to understand that if we are to invite people to our nation, we need to make sure they feel welcome. It's just common sense. You wouldn't invite a vegetarian to dinner and serve them haggis.

If we want people to come and stay, it's up to us to ensure the transition is smooth and the environment appropriate – it's not up to them to tell us what they need.

This obviously creates enormous infrastructure development issues in the

regions where we need these skills, and the tendency is to leave it to the government.

But a few more enlightened employers are taking matters into their own hands, creating environments that welcome diversity and cater to their audience.

Next time you're advising a client on overseas sourcing, have a think about what the employee will need, rather than what your client wants to offer them...

More info

Gold rush -

www.australia.gov.au/about-australia/australian-story/austn-gold-rush

Examples of the early recruitment posters here -

www.pictureaustralia.org/trails/history

Chinese in the goldfields -

www.kidcyber.com.au/topics/goldchinese ■



Mike Beeley has spent the last 20+ years helping global and local organisations understand their Employee Value Proposition and how to market that proposition to

their target audiences through traditional and emerging media. Through his ad agency, ReAgent Employer Marketing, he brings marketing disciplines to the HR profession. He is a regular speaker internationally on how talent acquisition and retention can form the backbone of a good Workforce Plan.