

SPOTLIGHT ON

CREATIVITY AUSTRALIA

launches into action

Sofitel Melbourne staff in SINGS Choir with soprano & Founder of Creativity Australia, Tania de Jong.

"Creativity has become the most universally endangered species in the Twenty First Century. Never has the need for creativity been so compelling and never has genuine creativity been in such short supply." Ryan Mathews & Watts Wacker

When did Creativity Australia come in to being and what were the driving forces behind its formation?

Creativity Australia was launched in November 2008 at the Sofitel Melbourne by Dame Elisabeth Murdoch and Evan Thornley just as the economic downturn began! I have had many discussions with CEOs, Board members and HR directors who are very concerned with the rising incidence of depression, the social isolation being experienced by employees, and the challenge of attracting and retaining talent and engaging with employees. The cost of depression to the Australian workforce equates to around 30 million working days per year with lost or reduced productivity, at a cost to employers of approximately \$10.11 billion a year. And the national cost of staff turnover to organisations is estimated in the order of \$100 billion annually (AHRI). The world is out of balance and this social venture is an attempt to address our internal ecology and relationships with others.

What does Creativity Australia aim to achieve and how do you plan for these aims to be fulfilled?

Creativity Australia, a new not-for-profit organisation:

- ▶ Promotes creativity in individual lives, our workplaces and in our wider community;
- ▶ Develops sustainable and innovative mind health and well-being programmes and activities to nurture and affirm personal creativity; and
- ▶ Advocates creative leadership and thinking in all walks of life, and encourages policy-makers and business leaders to promote personal creativity in their own decision-making.

Our vision is to unlock the innate creativity present in all human

beings, so as to improve mental health and wellbeing, social cohesion, innovation and productivity.

To do so we will create targeted creative programs engaging with the right side of the brain. These programs will not only help people's sense of self esteem, connection and wellbeing but will lead to outcomes including creative leadership, greater innovation and increased productivity.

Through our innovative programs we can help people to express their emotions and connect on a meaningful level with others.

CA's initiatives include:

- ▶ **Mind over Music:** Music and other creative programmes for wellbeing/positive mental health in partnership with mental health institutes and researchers.
- ▶ **With One Voice: Australia Sings** - Corporate Choirs will be recruited and rehearse weekly over 12 months and perform for their company events, local hospitals, aged care centres and community groups. Choirs will be encouraged to "adopt" groups in socially disadvantaged areas, working with them in the common endeavour of tapping individual creativity and imagination.
- ▶ **The Battle of the Corporate Choirs:** A major annual corporate challenge event celebrating the diversity of Australia's organisations through the power of song, and providing an outlet for the creative passions of their members.
- ▶ **Brainstorm Series:** One-off 'creative booster' sessions for conferences, retreats, board meetings, break-out sessions etc.
- ▶ **Australia Cares:** Business/community creative partnership programmes with employees of various organisations, migrant communities and regionally disadvantaged areas.

CA will also work with companies and business organisations on an advisory basis to develop and implement creativity activities tailored to individual workplaces and corporate cultures.

Why do you believe an organisation such as CA is currently so important?

We believe that unlocking creative potential and addressing our inner environment will help in dealing with major global issues. We need to constantly create opportunities for individuals and communities to connect with one another in new and meaningful ways and stimulate different thought and therefore behaviour.

The barriers are ever present. We live in a world where computers, the internet, image and popular culture take us further away from connecting with one another in a meaningful way. We are in danger of becoming a society where alienation, disengagement and self centeredness are entrenched in a world where human beings fail to capitalize on building relationships that are generative and creative.

Creativity is not a unique talent. Yet it was recently said that: Creativity has become the most universally endangered species in the Twenty First Century. A 15 country research project showed that creative behaviour diminishes from 98% in 3-5 year olds to only 2% by age 25.

We need to start to value the richness of the human intellect, including our creative capacities and educate our whole being (left and right brains) so that we can all face the future in a balanced way and make something of it.

What makes Creativity Australia unique?



We have a number of innovative programs which are designed to bridge social capital and bring different individuals and organisations together to tackle issues such as mental wellbeing, unemployment, employee engagement, innovation, communication and leadership skills. In addition, we will administer wellbeing surveys to participants on a regular basis to assess the outcomes of

our programs and engage in evidence-based longitudinal research with leading research institutes and universities.

We envisage that the *With One Voice* and *Battle of the Corporate Choir* programme concepts especially will appeal to large, multi-divisional companies that may find it difficult to engage staff in their corporate cultures. It should also appeal to companies and government agencies who not only want to foster their own teamwork, wellbeing and innovation, but see a social mission in encouraging their staff to engage with people in the wider community experiencing alienation due to socio-economic disadvantage.

I believe CA partner with other organisations. Who are some of these and what role do they play?

CA already has drawn in a number of community leaders and businesses. Patrons and partners include Dame Elisabeth Murdoch AC, Hugh Morgan AC, Allan Fels AO, Committee for Melbourne, Sofitel Hotel Melbourne and VECCI.

In addition CA has recruited a number of ambassadors and “thought leaders”, leading members of the business and wider communities to promote the organisation and to stimulate the discussion of creativity’s role in improving people’s lives.

One of our key projects is “Melbourne SINGS” – a choir which will engage employees from various corporations and members of the Collingwood/Fitzroy Housing Estate community (approx. 1500 migrants). Sofitel Melbourne has agreed to host this choir for weekly rehearsals in order to involve employees, and, importantly, it hopes to identify and train prospective employees from the migrant community. ■

Want to know more?

To learn more about Creativity Australia or for enquiries about their services and getting involved, please contact Tania de Jong (03) 9682 9686. Visit www.creativityaustralia.org.au Contact tania@creativityaustralia.org.au



HOW MUCH BENEFIT DO YOU GET FROM TECHNOLOGY?

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fees, version upgrades and a maintenance contract. You won’t need to include changes in communication costs, for example.

If you are looking into an SOE (Standard Operating Environment) then less tangible factors such as down-time need to be considered. The important thing when determining TCO is to be consistent. When comparing the TCO of your process now and the estimated TCO for after the implementation of any technology, the inclusions and exclusions should be consistent across both instances.

Using the example at hand, the consideration of the new website should lead you to ask:

1. What will be the effort required to keep the information current, assuming dynamic data due to usage changes?
2. What is the expected useful lifespan of the proposed web site and its dependencies, and what costs should I expect (and when) in the event I need to upgrade?

3. How critical is this service for my members? Do I need to consider a redundancy plan?

The main sources of information required to successfully generate a TCO figure are accounting reports, staff or member surveys, and assumptions and estimates based on experience. Of course you will also need to consult the technology provider for their input, and be sure to hold them accountable for any commitments they make!

Don’t be afraid to ask all the supposedly ‘dumb’ questions, and for larger projects consider employing the services of a trusted independent technology consultant who will assist you with your decision making process. After having a thorough understanding of your objectives, he/she will be able to advise on aspects that you may not normally consider, and perhaps even project manage the implementation and ultimately ensure accountability of deliverables from the technology vendor. ■

David Woo is co-founder of FOCUS Business Technologies Pty Ltd, one of Australia’s most respected IT engineering organisations. For more info visit www.focusbt.com.au or call David on 02 8259 0980.