

THE AUSTRALIAN

Time to recognise homegrown digital talent

ANTONY HARROWELL THE AUSTRALIAN 12:00AM September 6, 2016

Navigating through darkness understandably heightens anxiety, and for the disoriented the challenge to overcome the despair requires a different mindset.

This fumbling in the dark, the grapple for guidance, has become an all too common feature of the federal government and corporate Australia's understanding of the digital world.

There's plenty of good intention but most organisations are still struggling to come up with the strategies needed to manage their way through the maze. Like the rest of the world, Australia is dealing with the digital future, but the reality is, as a nation, we are proving to be our own worst enemy.

We need to be driving the future, yet we appear directionless, unable to grasp the nettle of prosperity the digital world has or can deliver, or what it really means.

It's great to know buzz words, but it's even better to know what they mean, represent and understand how they apply to the reality of the digital world. It's the lack of genuine knowledge of the digital world and what the digital space really is, and the misuse of it, that is creating a risk of making a mockery of our business prowess. We appear confused.

Innovation confusion

Words like "digital", "innovation", "cloud", "technology", "start-ups", "DDoS attacks" and "hacking" are misused or bandied around at will, and all it has served to do is to confuse the people it should be there to help — the end user.

So before we can engage self-proclaimed international experts with the blueprint for Australia's future, shouldn't we first understand what "digital" is and what it means?

"Digital" is a mix and match of terms to different people, and herein lies the issue. If we cut through all the hype, digital is the medium through which a service is delivered, the online channel to an organisation's services. But digital is not the service itself. It is simply the method of providing something manual or physical in an electronic or computerised format.

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When implemented correctly, digital is a powerful platform that can assist organisations in obtaining substantial benefits through improvement and innovation. But incorrectly implemented without a thorough understanding of the service the digital medium is delivering, it is a recipe for disaster.

In their armoury a digital expert needs a little knowledge of technology, but more about enhancing outcomes and business process improvement, which is the true definition of innovation.

Think local, hire local

So with this said, why is it that we believe Australia lags behind other countries, especially the US and UK, when it comes to talented personnel in the digital arena?


Government and corporates seem to believe talented personnel equates to international experience, and international experience equals individuals from overseas. The need to source overseas executives to tell us how we should do things, and develop strategies to run businesses and drive Australia forward, acts as a stark reminder of the little regard we have for our own professionals.

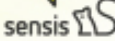
It's bewildering to think there is a confidence issue in Australian talent.

We should absolutely leverage digital service design standards and frameworks from international sources, but we must make a concerted attempt to think local and hire local. Our homegrown technology outfits — from Technology One to Atlassian — can mix it up with the best in the world yet there's a culture of thinking that the overseas heavyweights will do a better job.

It's a perception problem that needs to be overcome. There's no shortage of business subject matter experts and people with the technical capability to create online services in Australia. What they need is a vote of confidence. We have all the pieces required right here in Australia for a digital future. What's missing is the recognition and local investment in this area.

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