

Australia & New Zealand

Recruitment

E X T R A

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**Special
Feature**
Software
Specialists

**Greg Savage
at Aquent**
mentor, motivator,
money-maker

**Industry
Opportunities**
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Plus all the latest
industry news

Winning the battle of the Business

I can't imagine many managers in this business who would willingly give the media carte blanche to discuss him or herself with employees, ex-employees, colleagues and competitors alike – can you? Sure, the ego in all of us may tempt us to fish for praise when and where the opportunity arose, but the odds are in nine out of ten cases curiosity would definitely seriously injure the cat. But when the ego concerned is Greg Savage, CEO of Aquent Asia Pacific and well-known motivator, curiosity is the cats' best friend.

Lesley Horsburgh reports

Now it's not that Savage expects the outcome of this exercise to be completely rosy, far from it. After 23 years in the industry he's more than aware that his management style may not have suited everyone under his care, particularly during his eleven years as

Co-founder and Director of Recruitment Solutions. But, he says, the fact is that he has no regrets. And love him or hate him, it's virtually impossible to ignore that he has perhaps done more single-handedly for our industry than anyone else, is arguably one of the best trainers to take the centre

stage and has an almost monotonous track record for being one of the best in our business. After his exit from Recruitment Solutions in 1999, which undeniably contributed to its almost collapse, and a flirt with the good life as part time industry trainer and retiree, he's got to grips with a new discipline, a new region and a new way of doing things. He's joined Aquent, the Boston based creative and marketing consulting firm, that is he says, refreshingly different and totally customer focused, offering a quality of service few can match. You could be forgiven for thinking the move was a bit of a side step for Savage; a cushy little number with a reputable firm in an industry he knows inside out. But that's where you'd be mistaken.

Unlike Recruitment Solutions, Savage isn't building something from scratch. The challenge this time is different. His objective is to expand the Aquent business across Asia Pacific, and launch into the creative, communications and marketing work force, ultimately dominating the whole market. Already with ten offices in six

2002/2003 Year-on-Year Change		
Aquent market	Temporary Revenue	Permanent Revenue
Auckland	4%	523%
Brisbane	78%	23%
Hong Kong	n/a	n/a
Melbourne	69%	430%
Nagoya	470%	2%
Osaka	14%	19%
Singapore	-10%	146%
Sydney	63%	153%
Tokyo	36%	18%
Asia Pacific Total	49%	127%

countries, the Aquent Asia Pacific strategy is ambitious. A range of new services in staffing, executive search and outsourcing have already been rolled out, and several new offices are on the drawing board.

It's a tall order to say the least, but if anyone can do it then Savage can. Despite a testing market locally, a struggling global economy, the war and SARS, profitability is up, branches are multiplying, staff are happy and the plan is firmly on track. How? Well, if you ask Aquent employees it's because Savage has brought to the business a structure that was never there before. In fact of the twelve or so people I interviewed about Savage, not one failed to mention his 'formula' – the relentless focus he applies to the fundamental activities that are recruitment.

"He knows what activities achieve results and focuses on them", says Ross Clennett, who worked with Savage for nine years at Recruitment Solutions.

"He keeps things simple, adds Clennett, "He understands that successful recruitment is about doing a few key things consistently, and consistently well. Things such as visits, calls, interviews, floats. Whenever things started to go off track with me as a consultant or as a Manager he would always look at whether the basics were being done."

But it's a methodology that has both earned him success and a reputation for being a tough operator, a control freak and an uncompromising manager. Ben Wood spent seven years working with Savage at Recruitment Solutions.

"I've got a lot to thank Greg for. He was a mentor and forced me to confront my weaknesses. He has a formula and sticks to it! He creates a structure and the discipline needed to make it work by keeping himself and his staff focused. But he does tend to rule by force of personality – he likes to be in control and doesn't necessarily let go and allow people to make their own mistakes. I think the fact that Recruitment Solutions failed after he left is indicative of his management style."

Savage agrees that he can be demanding but says he's mellowed since then and sees a new way of doing things.

"In the past I was hard – possibly down to immaturity as a manager on my behalf – not suffering fools gladly and an insensitivity to the differences in people and how they respond differently.

"However, now if someone is motivated,

intelligent and responsive to direction I think I'd be very easy to work for, but if they display total maverick behaviour, inconsistent performance and failure to deliver on promises then yes I'd be very hard to work for."

"In the Recruitment Solutions environment people had to fit in to the style we very vigorously put into place. We lost some good people because of that. I don't regret how we did it because I'm extremely proud of the remarkable success of Recruitment Solutions over many years but I can see a different way now. At the time it worked exponentially well but it wouldn't do so well now – great people need far more rope."

Despite his apparent softening, little else has changed in the way he approaches business and is considered very much among staff, industry peers and colleagues as definitively smart.

"Greg is one of the best captains of any ship I've ever worked on. He is a true professional with an excellent commercial mind. His superb people management skills means he can build teams and recognise where expertise is needed and more importantly that he might not be the one with that expertise. He simply sees what needs to be done," comments Graham Whelan, Co-founder of Recruitment Solutions.

This may all sound like a good old back slap for Greg and yes I have to agree it is, but I did find it frustratingly hard to find people who were able to constructively find fault with his style. Malcolm Jackman, formerly CEO of Manpower is well known for his good humoured banter with Savage on certain industry issues and is the first to agree that their management techniques might not reflect the same view, but all the same he knows a good businessman when he sees one.

"I have great respect for Greg, despite competing with him quite fiercely at times. He's pragmatic and extremely disciplined and yet he's emerged recently as a chameleon by re-inventing himself through Aquent," said Jackman.

A re-invention may not be how Savage himself would describe it, he's still passionate about the industry, still focused on delivering results and still influencing the careers of many. Chris Moody, President and Board Member of Aquent in Boston believes the package that made Savage the right man for the job in 2001 is still very much the driving force of the thriving APAC business today.

THE AQUENT DIFFERENCE

- Unconditional 110% money back guarantee on all Talent placed
- International training for Aquent staff at all levels
- Special benefits for long term Talent (candidates)
- Global network of 70 offices world wide
- Unparalleled Talent assessment systems, including proprietary testing
- Largest on line portfolio selection for instant client review.

WHO SAID WHAT

"Aquent are different to other agencies, they're responsive to problems. The quality of their Talent pool and professionalism is second to none."

Client, Mark Gentle,
Operations Manager, LKS Design

"Greg provides a very solid level of leadership but not in an autocratic sense in any form. He's realistic, down to earth and yet very commercially focused."

Kerri Arman, Managing Consultant
Aquent Executive Search

"Greg has given us all at Aquent a level of autonomy that has served only to help drive the business and the agents individually. He's a true leader with a great level of knowledge that he's always willing to share."

Paul Slezak, Manager Sydney Aquent



Greg Savage

“Greg was a great match for Aquent. Fundamentally, he believes that growth is achieved through great customer service. You succeed in this industry by treating your clients and the people you place in positions with respect and you exceed

impressed with it’s quality of service and level of customer focus – that’s now even better, thanks to the structure and accountability we have from Greg. I have a lot of freedom and yet he’s a great mentor and I’ve learnt an enormous amount. I do

business, Kennedy believes that Aquent and Savage are a powerful mix.

“Greg’s appointment has proved to all of us that management can be good and can work if the right person is in the right job. We are communicated to clearly, treated with respect, given autonomy and our budgets are very transparent. He has taught me a tremendous amount about myself and given me the confidence to do things I might not have tackled before.”

His willingness to share experiences has always been the biggest factor that made Savage different for our industry. His ability to let go however and give managers, team leaders and consultants the freedom to make mistakes seems to be a skill he’s recently acquired.

“I probably make less than 10% of the decisions in this business,” he states. Yet in no way does he lose sight of the goal.

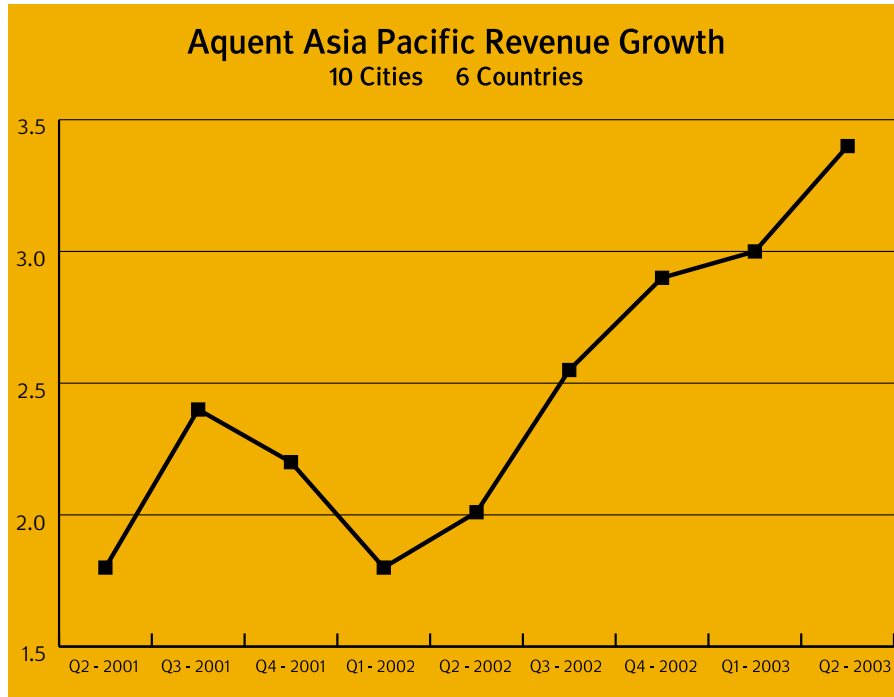
“I’m accountable for delivering results so if there’s a tough decision to be made I’ll make it, and follow through on the outcome. The concept of recruitment is exceptionally simple but delivering results is exceptionally hard. It’s the toughest business I can imagine not least because you’re dealing with people but because it’s stressful and so measurable. What other business would you work the hardest you’ve ever worked for a month with sometimes nothing to show for it?”

Of course the Aquent results speak differently and show little sign of the stresses and frustration of the job. Temporary revenue is up by an impressive 49% in the region compared to this time last year, while permanent revenue has jumped a massive 127%. The Aquent name has developed from small time creative to quality niche brand. Clients, Talent (the Aquent tag for their highly valued candidates) and staff have no complaints and the boys in Boston are watching the consequences of one of their best hiring decisions unfold. As for Savage he’s in his element.

“I can’t help myself. I love the battle of the business – to me it’s like a giant football game – it’s serious and you want to win but it’s not life or death.”

Try saying that from the losing team!

THE SCORES SO FAR



their expectations every chance you get. This is the same foundation on which Aquent has built success over the last 16 years. In addition, Greg believes in the recruitment business as a valuable service and is very pro-active about evangelising the need for better recruiting throughout the industry.

“Of course, Greg’s previous track record for success was outstanding. You combine his beliefs and track record with the fact that he is a very nice person with high ethical standards and the decision was easy.

“We believed these strongly held beliefs would have a major impact on the Aquent employees in Asia Pacific,” said Moody.

They weren’t wrong. Not only is business literally booming, staff exude a pride in the Aquent name and their leader that you can’t help but envy.

“The company has changed so much since Greg joined us, comments Carolyn Miller, formerly a client of Aquent who was so impressed she joined the business.

“It was a fun, groovy company, now it’s fun and groovy but very successful. I joined Aquent because I was literally so

believe that I have the best job in world!”

As Marketing Associate for the Asia-Pacific region Miller appreciates that having Greg on board has not only enabled the company to achieve results through growth, it gave the profile of the then small creative firm a significant boost into the public eye.

“Greg’s profile in the industry has certainly had some impact on our profile – his name still tends to turn heads among clients.”

But fame however doesn’t always impress. Dakota Kennedy, one the longest standing agents and now team leader of the Aquent Sydney office was unconvinced, preferring to wait and see rather assume the best.

“We’d had quite a few managers come and go in the three years that I was here before Greg joined and I wasn’t in anyway under the impression that because he was well known he would be guaranteed to make a difference.”

Two years on and she needs little convincing, describing him as ‘inspirational’ and in many ways the saving grace of the