

If you see performance manager for Altis Consulting, Roy Hammett, walking around with a smile on his face, there is good reason for it. With a tight-knit team, Altis has grown into a successful Australian consultancy offering specialist expertise in data warehousing, business intelligence and information management. They also happen to be a company that takes very seriously the all-round wellbeing of their most valuable assets: their employees.

This personal touch has rewarded the company with a citation in *BRW Magazine's* 2010 list of best places to work in Australia; they made the list on their first attempt.

Hammett, who was the first manager employed at Altis during the company's 1998 formatting, has watched it grow from a small team of 15 to a bustling centre of 80. He and his team were quite adamant from the start that the company would be one that people worked for by choice. This mantra has seen it grow from strength to strength.

So just how did Altis manage to make their workers so satisfied? Hammett says first and foremost teambuilding events are a major contributor to the company's success. "The key aspect we scored highest in was camaraderie, which is very much

about people being themselves in the organisation, people thriving by enjoying the people they work with, having a fun work environment, and being made to feel welcome at work," Hammett says.

In light of recent Gallup poll results that show one in six Australian workers identify their manager as the most disliked part of their job, Altis Consulting bucks this trend.

Positivity is in fact so strong that employees bring suggestions spurred on by satisfaction directly to management. "One of our employees made the suggestion that we should enter the *BRW* best places to work survey, being just one of many [surveys] that we could have chosen. So that's what we did; it seemed high profile and we wanted to see ourselves sit in the ranks. We made it to the top 50," Hammett proudly says.

Keeping your catch

Hammett says that a number of HR initiatives at Altis have created an environment that he believes is pivotal for the company's ability to attract and retain top talent. He's well aware that in a climate where skilled labour shortages are rife, attracting and retaining talent is a top priority. "It's hard to get people on board - our sector is data warehousing and

Can't get no satisfaction?

At Altis Consulting they sure do. **Clare Costigan** asks how they've achieved the Holy Grail that is employee satisfaction

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business intelligence, which is quite niche,” he says. “More than that, what differentiates our sector from most other IT sectors is that most of our clients are in fact business people, and the systems we deliver require significantly more interaction with non-technical business users than technically-minded ones. That means we need to employ IT specialists who have exceptional client-facing skills, which is not often the case. It’s hard to find the right mix.”

To keep talent once on board, Hammett has developed a career framework. This is essentially a feedback loop between managers and employees about where the employee wants their career to go, and building career development programs around those goals. “It’s helped quite a few of our team members get the most out of their careers. It’s led to much better focused training assignments in career coaching, which we believe is a major factor in our ability to motivate and maintain our staff,” he says.

Who says you can’t mix business with pleasure?

Hammett says that at Altis mixing business with pleasure is a way of bringing staff together. “We have a big emphasis on team events, which are generally social events. They take place every couple of months in every region,” he says.

However, employees were not the only people taken into consideration. Hammett knew that by nurturing a quality work-life balance, employee satisfaction would continue to grow. This spawned the refreshing mentality that, at Altis, family matters. “We put a lot of emphasis on being a family. As a result of that, there are a lot of social events and a lot of interaction between individuals, their families and the rest of the team. Only yesterday one of our team members and his wife came in with their new baby and we spent a couple of hours as a team with them. We have quite a few young people having families now. Our CEO is a family man, and he’s keen that we value our family members,” he says.

The happy generation

With such a broad range of employees, Hammett is well placed to comment on how to satisfy that notoriously finicky bunch known as Gen Y. In an environment like that found at Altis, do they thrive or do they dive? Hammett says Gen Y excel amongst the company’s inclusive management style where open expression and innovation is encouraged. “We know it’s important for Gen Y to feel that their work is an extension of their private life. Our office



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is very much an environment where people can be themselves. We encourage people to use our facilities, our assets, and to consider it a home away from home,” he says.

Trust above all else

Trust in the workplace is important – we have all heard this before but Hammett believes this overused and often undelivered word is mandatory for creating the elusive positive workplace. “We believe teambuilding is much easier when there’s strong evidence of trust between team members, so to engender trust it’s not just about socialising at events, it’s about focusing on sharing knowledge,” he says.

Share and share alike

Sharing of knowledge is high on the priority list at Altis. Hammett says successful sharing of information is done through face-to-face meetings, whether they be for a project kick-off or a simple catch up. “It gives other members of the team ideas on how they can use that experience in their own environment,” he says. Hammett also doesn’t shy away from technology to share worker knowledge. “The company has a sophisticated knowledge sharing technical forum and knowledge database that promotes a virtual teambuilding environment, which is aptly named virtual teaming,” he says. One could look at it like an internal Facebook or Twitter where employees post comments covering a wide range of issues. This clever technology that moves with the times beautifully has a double effect in spreading knowledge across fields and unifying workers at the same time.

The road ahead

The path lying before Altis Consulting has every reason to look bright. While rapid growth companies often lose key elements of their culture as they grow, Hammett says the aim of the company is to retain its ‘family’ feel whatever the future holds.

“It’s very much the intention of the directors to continue to be focused on the quality of people’s work-life balance rather than the size of the company,” he says. “While growth is a necessary aspect of any business, we’re not going to sacrifice the staff for the sake of growing the company. During the GFC we were proud of the fact that we did not lay anyone off. It’s very much bunker down during the hard times, and during the good times grow organically,” he concludes. **HC**