

A Review of Web-Based Job Advertisements for Australian Event Management Positions

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ABSTRACT

Strong growths in the Australian event management industry, ongoing technological changes and the internationalisation of the market place has spurred the need for appropriately educated and trained event managers and for a re-evaluation of educational and job training curriculum to meet these new challenges. In order for Australia to position itself as a world leader in event management, it is important to provide consistent high professional standards and event managers that not only meet, but exceed the demands of the industry. While there is some literature that focuses on the tourism and leisure job market (Crossley, 1992; Keung & Pine, 2000), and a small but developing literature base that focuses on event management training (Harris & Jago, 1999; Hawkins & Goldbatt, 1995) relatively little consideration has been given to a national agenda for event management skilling.

To provide an indication of current employer requirements, a nationwide study of job advertisements in event management has commenced. The aims of the study are to further the understanding of the educational needs and training requirements of the industry; to ascertain the learned skills and personal attributes sought from event managers; to determine the compatibility of industry demands with current educational and vocational provisions; and to suggest post-secondary institutional avenues through which event management education and training needs can be pursued. This is an ongoing study and it is hoped that it will contribute towards a broad scale understanding of the event management job market. More importantly however, it can be used as the basis for curriculum evaluation and training needs, and create a better understanding and compatibility between event management education and industry practice.

This paper reports the preliminary results from a content analysis of approximately 100 web-based job advertisements. Email alert accounts were established with several search engines to gather a sample of event management related job advertisements from around Australia. An analytical framework was devised for the analysis of the advertisements themselves. The results reveal several interesting trends including the geographical concentration of the event management job market, the range of industries that require event management specialists or event management skills, and a series of required skills and key attributes of event managers. The results of this study establish a platform from which to develop a classification of event management skills required by the industry.

BACKGROUND

Employees and organisational vitality

As Newell & Shackleton (2000: 111) report, people are central to organisations: “when we talk about ‘organizations’ we are obviously talking about people who make up organizations, since by definition an organization cannot act. Continued success is dependent on attracting and retaining high-quality individuals who can respond effectively to ... dynamic environments”. Conversely, employing individuals that do not meet the job requirements can be detrimental to organisations. They may cause disruption to the workplace, increase training costs, contribute to a loss of productivity and high turnover rates (Mathews & Redman, 2001).

It is therefore vital that the qualities that discern effective from ineffective employees are identified for particular organisations and industries, including the event management industry. This is imperative, as event management has emerged to become a significant player in the Australian tourism sector (Getz, 2000a). As the field of event management grows and matures, it is important that high-quality individuals are trained, qualified and employed. This will help to ensure professionalism in the field, equip managers with the necessary skills to deal with new challenges (such as ongoing technological change and the internationalisation of the market place) and will ultimately help to sustain the delivery of high quality events (Harris & Jago, 1999).

However, discerning the skills and attributes of event managers may be as hotly debated within and between academia and in practice, as (Snyman, 2001) reported for information managers. Nevertheless, there is growing demand for greater collaboration between academia and event practitioners to increase the uptake of research findings (Getz, 2000b) and to produce graduates that are equipped with the skills to handle the challenges of the industry (Neale, 2000).

A small but increasing number of Australian studies have responded to the above calls and have included the perspectives of practitioners to ascertain the skills and personal attribute requirements of event managers. Harris & Jago (1999) provide a succinct overview of three survey-based studies that have been conducted in Australia. Included in their review were Perry, Foley and Rumpf's (1996) survey of 53 event managers that attended the Australian Events Conference in Canberra that year. These managers were asked to rank 19 pre-defined requisite knowledge and attributes and they identified the following 10 as being of importance to event managers: project management, budgeting, time management, relating to the media, business planning, human resource management, contingency management, marketing, sponsorship and networking. Perry et al., (1996) further reduced these knowledge and skill requirements into five main knowledge domains of an event manager. Listed in order of importance, these are: legal/ financial knowledge, management knowledge, public relations / marketing knowledge, economic / analytical knowledge and ethical / contextual knowledge. However, when managers were asked to list the essential attributes of good event managers, Perry et al., (1996) found the following in order of importance: vision, leadership, adaptability, high organisational skills, good communication skills, marketing skills and people management skills.

Royal & Jago's (1999) study of 42 special event practitioners in Victoria rated all their eight listed skills as being very important to their profession. They included in order of importance: planning, organisational, sponsorship knowledge, marketing, human resource management, administration, public relations and finance skills. More than half the respondents also listed additional skills, the most common being: time management, leadership, flexibility, communication and people management skills (Royal & Jago, 1999).

Harris and Griffin's (1997) study of 84 event organisers in New South Wales found that most respondents classified their 11 pre-defined knowledge and skill categories to be of either significant or moderate importance to event organisers. These included: general management, planning and organisation of events; event development and programming; finance; marketing; event operations; understanding of community expectations and support; event monitoring and evaluation; professional knowledge and event bidding and feasibility analysis. Respondents did not mention additional skills (Harris & Griffin, 1997).

The above studies therefore show a level of consistency with the appearance of several skills in all studies. However analysis of the skill and attribute requirements of event managers remained at the periphery of these studies, with the main foci being the development of training and education needs. This may account for the prevalence of learned skills in pre-defined categories and the appearance of personality traits when respondents answered open-ended questions. There has not yet been a nation-wide study of the event management job market and skill requirements and this is critical given that Australian occupational standards for event management positions have yet to be established. This is despite the existence of Canadian, American and British occupational standards for several event management related positions such as 'special event manager' and the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA) having covered about 78% of Australian industries with competency standards by 1997 (Smith & Keating, 1997).

It is hoped that a nationwide study of event management job requirements will help provide further support to the current literature, contribute towards a broader scale understanding of the event management job market and thus provide further leverage for the development of Australian occupational standards for event managers. To gain an indication of current employer requirements, a nationwide, on-going study of job advertisements in event management has commenced. This paper specifically reports the main trends that have emerged from the preliminary findings of 105 web-based job advertisements.

METHODOLOGY

National studies of event management skills and attributes are difficult to conduct because it is rather a disparate field. Getz (2000b: 11) states that this is common amongst "emerging fields or quasi-professions". Debates about whether or not the scope of events should include the general leisure field or be strictly confined to the tourism industry continues (Tassiopoulos, 2000) and several authors have noted a lack of standard terminology to describe and define events (Arcodia & Robb, 2000; Jago & Shaw, 1998). While an all-encompassing definition of events may not be possible (Jago & Shaw, 1998), for the purposes of this study, events are defined as a "unique form of tourism attraction, ranging in scale from mega events such as the Olympics and World Cup Rugby, through community festivals to programmes of recreational events at parks" (Getz, 1991 in Tassiopoulos, 2000: 10). It encompasses all event types listed under Arcodia & Robb's (2000) three broad categories of events, including: the Meetings, Conventions, Incentives and Exhibitions (MICE) sector, the festivals and events categories. Therefore activities such as sporting events, community celebrations and conferences were included.

Job advertisements - an untapped resource

As a popular yet research neglected recruitment medium, job advertisements provide current and accessible data (Mathews & Redman, 2001). It is during the initial recruitment phase that companies are able to specify the required skills and personality attributes of event managers. Not only do job advertisements contain information to attract appropriate individuals, they can also represent occupational, organisational, industry and societal artefacts and can therefore contain rich and insightful information (Rafaeli & Oliver, 1998).

Yet only a few job advertisement studies in tourism and leisure have been identified. Crossley (1992) analysed recreation and tourism related job advertisements of a major U.S newspaper for a year to guide course development at the University of Utah. Whilst Keung & Pine (2000) provided a longitudinal study of hotel job advertisements listed in a major Hong Kong newspaper to indicate changes in hotel recruitment over a 10 year period.

A possible reason why a nation-wide study of job advertisement has not been attempted until recently has been the share time and amount of labour resources needed to process newspaper advertisements. The advent of on-line recruitment advertising or 'cybercruiting' allows for considerably easier and faster access to job advertisements over a much broader area (Jarnis, 1996). While still fairly new, there is growing usage of the Internet as a recruitment medium. A survey conducted by the Australian Graduate School of Management (University of New South Wales) and CCH Australia Limited in 1999 indicated that more than half (57%) of the 344 Australian companies surveyed utilise the Internet or their Intranet for recruitment and selection purposes (Wallace et al., 2000).

The ANZ Bank has analysed the number of Internet job advertisements in major Australian cities on a monthly basis since July 1999 (ANZ, 2002). These figures are combined with the number of advertisements in major daily newspapers over the same time period to predict changes in national employment growth (ANZ, 2002). To provide a more in-depth analysis of event management job advertisements several steps had been taken. Email alert accounts were set up in September 2001 with several popular job search engines, including: CareerOne, TourismJobsnet and Employment.com as well as meta-search engines such as Monsterboard, Seek and Alljobs. However as TourismJobNet returned previous years and thus irrelevant results, it was excluded.

All email alert accounts were given the same keywords for which to search. These included: events, event management, conference, festivals, banquets and later the keywords of communications and public relations were added. A nation-wide search and jobs of any duration (full-time, part-time, temporary, casual) were other search criteria that were given. These broad sets of criteria were chosen, as the aim of the study was to provide a sample of event management related job advertisement at a particular point in time. Browsing of newspapers advertisements indicated that event management positions were also listed under the communications and public relations sections, hence the inclusion of these keywords at a later stage.

Advertisements were downloaded on a fortnightly basis when possible, only those containing the above keywords in the job title or in the opening paragraph of the advertisement were chosen. For those job advertisements that may not be directly applicable to event management (such as communication and public relations) those that included these keywords as well those directly applicable to event management (such as conference and festivals) were included. Upon review duplicate advertisements, overseas advertisements and advertisements that provided too little information were excluded.

To date, 105 of these advertisements have been analysed using content analysis, a commonly used method in advertisements studies (Crossley, 1992; Demets et al., 1998; Headrick, 2001; Mathews & Redman, 2001). For all advertisements, general information were recorded when provided, including the job title, location and industry type. Job and candidate specifications were classified into skills and personal attributes respectively and were classified into more specific criteria's that emerged from the data. Pre-defined criteria were avoided, in order to allow employer requirements of event managers to emerge. The resulting categories were not mutually exclusive, for example marketing skills require communication skills. However, when a specific criterion was mentioned in an advertisement, it was thought to be important in its own right and was therefore recorded.

FINDINGS & DISCUSSION

Geographical Distribution

As shown in Figure 1, more than two thirds of event management positions were advertised in New South Wales, one fifth in Victoria and only 7% in Queensland. Job advertisements in other states and territories remain negligible at this stage. The preliminary findings thus seem to indicate that most event management web based job advertisements are concentrated in high population density areas, a reflection of the general job market in Australia.

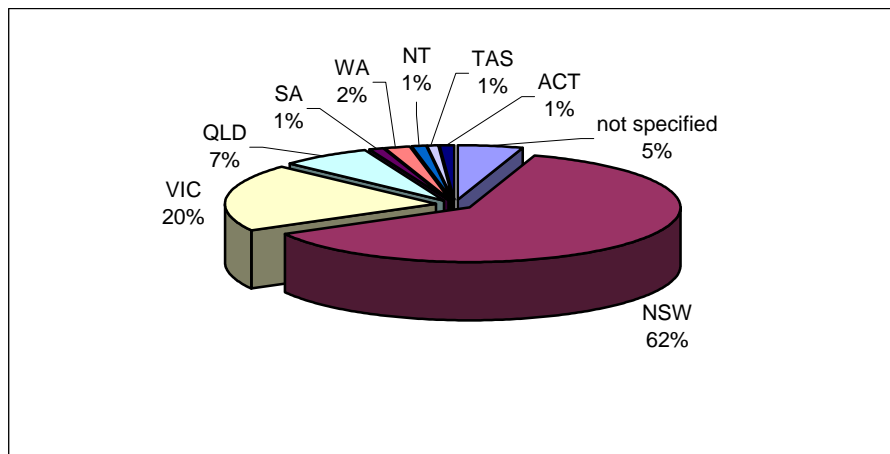


Figure 1. Job Advertisements by State and Territories

Figure 2 seems to support this idea, indicating that most advertisements are located in major cities along Australia's east coast. More than half are located in Sydney, nearly a fifth in Melbourne and eleven per cent of advertisements did not actually specify their exact location. Few regional towns and localities featured, this again may suggest the dominance of major centres or could raise the issue of web-based job advertisement representativeness for regional Australia. To what extent the latter is a contributing factor needs to be further studied.

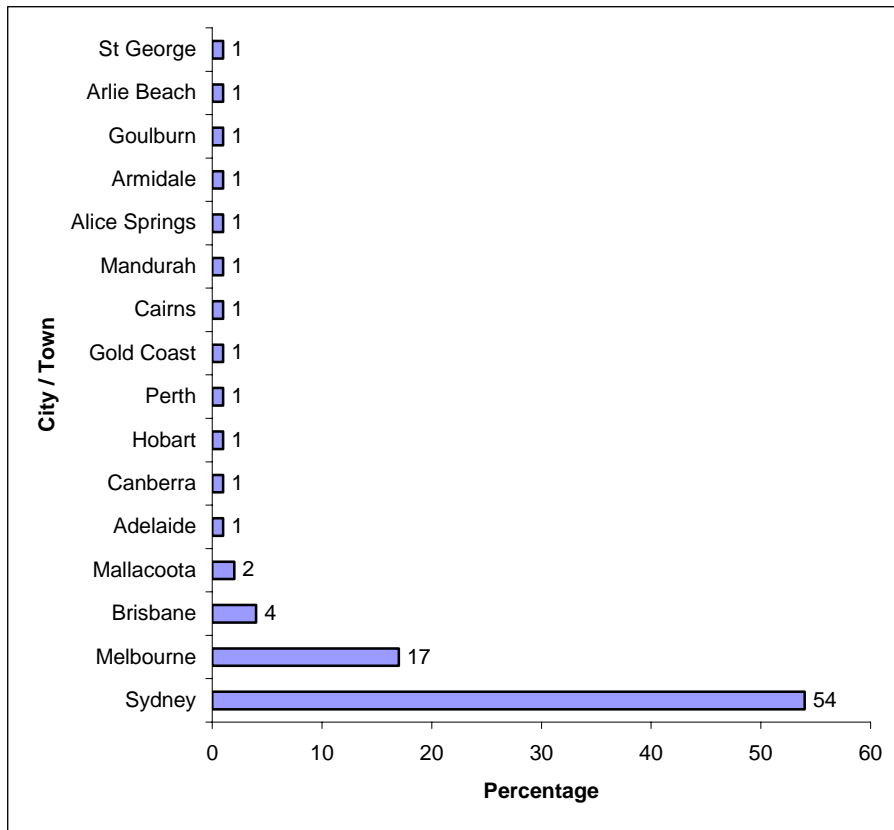


Figure 2. Job Advertisement by City and Towns

Industry representativeness

More than a quarter of advertisements were advertised in the event sector, the main employment stronghold of the event management industry (Figure 3). Event management companies that advertised included conference and banqueting production companies, event coordinators, sporting event companies and corporate entertainment and functions companies. Thirteen percent of advertisements were contained in the hotel and resort industry and a similar percentage of advertisements did not specify the industry or name of an organisation. Non-profit organisations contained 8% of the job advertisements, representing charity organisations in general or specific non-profit organisations such as hospital foundations, youth networks, religious and environmental organisations. Financial and management companies such as insurance and fund management companies contained 6% of the advertisements and government agencies including regional and city councils and territory tourism promotion agencies 5%.

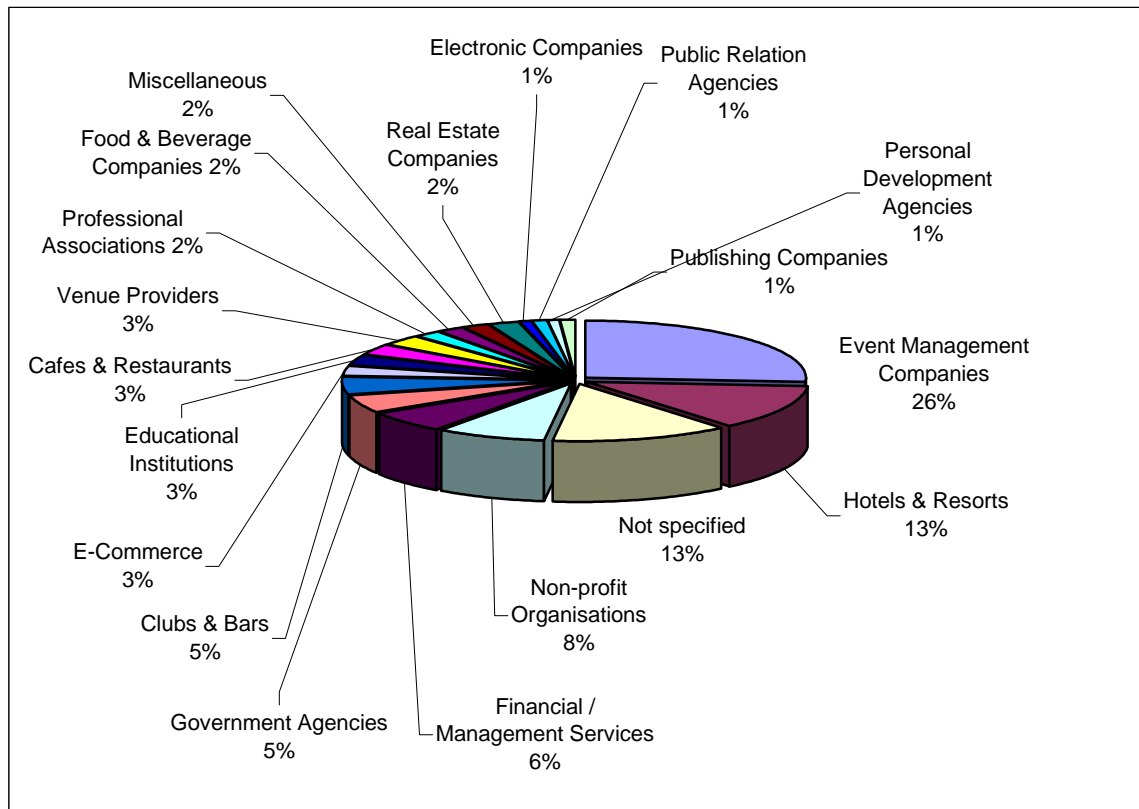


Figure 3. Job Advertisement according to industry

Skills and Attributes

Two main elements of human capital can be deciphered from job advertisements – skills and personal attributes. Skills are tangible and measurable and have been referred to as the visible competency component (Spencer & Spencer, 1993). As Perry et al., (1996) infer, knowledge and skills can be taught and through training and experience can be learned and developed. Personal attributes on the other hand are synonymous to the personal characteristics of an individual. They represent hidden and innate qualities such as personal attitudes, traits and values that are more difficult to develop and have been referred to as the invisible competency competent (Spencer & Spencer, 1993).

Skills

By far the most frequently cited skills required of event managers were organisational and planning skills (Table 1). Eighty-eight per cent of employers were looking for people who were highly organised, able to plan and coordinate events, manage multiple tasks and time or a combination of the above. Advertisements either stated the need for these skills explicitly or implicitly. For example, one advertisement stated that ‘your ability to multi-task is extremely important as there will be various events to manage at one time’ (Events and Sponsorship Manager, October 9, 2001). Whereas another advertisement stated that this is a role ‘which will keep you on your toes!’ (Public Relations Co-Ord. Event Co-Ordination, August 18, 2001).

Table 1. General Skill Specification in Event Management Job Advertisements

Event Management Skills	Percentage of Advertisements
Organisational and Planning	88
Communication	85
Leadership and Decision-making	38
Budget and Financial Management	31
Marketing	30
Team	29
Customer Service	26
Building Relationships	23
Problem Solving and Analytical	18
Funding and Sponsorship	17

The above results are a reflection of the importance of planning and organisation to event management. As Wanklin (2000: 98-99) states: 'planning is essential to manage time, prevent waste and to achieve efficient economics in the development process. Without planning, there would be chaos and a breakdown in elementary systems and infrastructure'.

Communication skills ranked a close second, with over four-fifths of job advertisements citing this as a requirement. Advertisements either specified the need for general communication skills, written communication skills, such as the 'preparation of invitations and flyers for functions' (Functions Coordinator, September 27, 2001); oral communication skills, such as being 'articulate and persuasive' (Junior PR Consultant, October 15, 2001) presentation skills or negotiation skills.

Thirty-eight per cent of job advertisements specified the need of leadership and decision making skills for event managers. Employers were looking for individuals that were able to 'assume overall leadership of this dynamic and important corporation' (CEO, Canberra Tourism & Events Corp., November 11, 2001), to 'supervise the banquet floor operations' (Banquet Floor Operations, September 7, 2001) or whose 'leadership style ensures that the team achieves optimum outcomes' (Public Relations Manager, December 5, 2001).

Financial and budget management skills were cited in nearly a third of advertisements. The advertisements either specified that individuals were required to operate within their set budgets, for example: 'you will be responsible for meeting revenue targets' (Catering Sales Executive, September 7, 2001) and 'your primary focus will be on ... cost effective delivery of a wide range of tourism promotion, marketing and event initiatives' (CEO, Canberra Tourism & Events Corp., November 11, 2001) or individuals were charged with the responsibility for financial management, for example: 'account management is encouraged as ongoing sponsorship will make your job easier' (Corporate Sponsorship Sales, November 8, 2001) or 'you need good budgeting skills for ordering supplies and arranging events' (Functions Coordinator, September 27, 2001).

Marketing skills is the fifth most frequently cited skill requirement. Depending on the type of position and organisation, advertisements either needed event managers who were solely responsible for their marketing campaign, for example: 'market the venue and make it number one in Brisbane' (Marketing / Events Manager, November 1, 2001) or individuals that formed part of a marketing team: 'form a critical part of the organisation's marketing program' (Events and Sponsorship Manager, October 9, 2001). Not surprisingly, team skills featured in event management job advertisements. Successful events are often dependent on the successful cooperation between individuals in and outside of an organisation. Advertisements either stated that individuals needed to have an understanding of the importance of a team, had prior experience working as an effective team member, or were able to lead and manage a team (Banquet Manager, November 1, 2001; Senior Accounts Manager, October 31, 2001).

Customer service skills were mentioned in over a quarter of advertisements. Advertisements mentioned such requirements as the need for 'exceptional people skills, including an appreciation of the customer service ethic' (Functions Coordinator, September 27, 2001) and the 'provision of quality service to both internal and external clients in terms of arranging catering and catering-related supplies, meeting and functions' (Functions Coordinator, September 27, 2001). The need to build effective relationships with clients and stakeholders was mentioned in 23% of the advertisements. The need to establish, nurture and build strong relationships is viewed as a key skill in these advertisements. For example, 'building strong relationships with the media, the community and key stakeholders' (Communication Manager, October 5, 2001) or the need to have a 'flair for networking' and to 'develop business networks' (Conference Producer, November 1, 2001).

Problem solving and analytical skills were mentioned in 18% of advertisements. For example, 'your creative approach to problem solving is a must' (Sales Manager – Event Management, October 5, 2001) or the successful applicant will require 'well developed problem solving skills' and 'provide effective conflict resolution' (Conventions & Banquets Supervisor, September 25, 2001). Analytical skills were implied by the need for research skills in several advertised positions. For example, the need to 'research and produce legal conferences that will benefit the industry' (Conference Producer, November 1, 2001) or to 'conduct a thorough examination of the corporate / conference market and industry trends' (Meetings, Conference & Events Sales Manager, September 18, 2001).

Funding and sponsorship skills were mentioned in 17% of advertisements. The role and responsibilities part of the job advertisement either stated this as a requirement of the position, for example: 'you will be responsible for securing corporate sponsorship for conferences' (Corporate Sponsorship Sales, November 8, 2001) or potential candidates need to demonstrate prior experience in securing funding and sponsorship. For example 'demonstrated capacity to attract corporate sponsorship for communication programs' (Team Leader Cultural Development, September 27, 2001).

The most frequently cited practical skill requirement was computer knowledge and skills (Table. 2). These requirements ranged from working knowledge and experience with Microsoft office programs to 'web skills' (Event Manager, December 3, 2001) 'web strategies' (Communications Manager, October 5, 2001) and 'strong knowledge of computer hardware and software' skills (Events – On Site Project Manager, September 12, 2001). Bar and food serving, policy development and media relation skills also featured, but preliminary data provided small percentages for these categories.

Table 2. Practical Skill Specification in Event Management Job Advertisements

Practical skills	Percentage of Advertisements
Computer knowledge and skills	36
Bar and Food serving skills	8
Policy Development skills	7
Media Relation skills	5

Attributes

Twelve personal attribute categories also emerged from the data (Table. 3). The most frequently mentioned attribute was motivation, with 29% of all advertisements citing this as a requirement. Employers were seeking individuals who were 'self-motivated' (Public Relations Manager, October 31, 2001) who have a 'drive or desire to succeed' (Conference and Events Services Manager, September 5, 2001) and for senior management or supervisory positions, individuals that were 'able to motivate a team' (Banquet Manager, November 1, 2001). The need for a pro-active attitude may be indicative of the seniority and independency of event management positions.

The second highest ranked attribute was positiveness (16%). These job advertisements specified the need for 'high levels of enthusiasm' (Functions Assistant, September 27, 2001) the adoption of a 'positive approach to issues' (Conventions & Banquets Supervisor, September 25, 2001) and the need for a 'can do attitude' (Personal Assistant, August 18, 2001). Creative, commitment and initiative attributes closely followed (12% each). 'Highly creative individual' (Personal Assistant, August 18, 2001) and 'creating original, engaging and successful functions and events' (Functions Coordinator, September 27, 2001) are indicative of the creative needs of event organisers. Whereas 'commitment to excellence' (Events Logistics - Events Coordinator, September 8, 2001) and 'a strong work ethic' (Functions & Banquets Manager, September 14, 2001) refer to the standards and level of work requirements. Possession of a 'forward thinking attitude' (Banquet Manager, November 1, 2001) and the 'ability to use your initiative' (Conventions & Banquets Supervisor, September 25, 2001) were also mentioned. Eleven per cent of job advertisements mentioned flexibility as a required personality attribute. This is likely a reflection of many events occurring after normal working hours. As stated in an (Events Coordinator / Personal Assistant, September 25, 2001) advertisement: 'naturally many functions occur in the evening and on weekends so you should be prepared to tailor this with your lifestyle'. The appearance of the 'flexibility' attribute corresponds with Perry *et al.*, (1996) survey of event management respondents who also nominated adaptability as an essential attribute for event managers.

Table 3. Personal Attributes Specification in Event Management Job Advertisements

Personality Attribute	Percentage of Advertisements
Motivation	29
Positiveness	16
Dynamism and Energy	13
Commitment	12
Creative	12
Initiative	12
Flexibility	11
Accuracy	9
Respect / Maturity	8
Friendly	8
Trustworthiness / Responsibility	5
Sensitiveness	3

CONCLUSION

As mentioned at the outset, the purpose of this study was to undertake an investigative study of event management skills and attributes sought by Australian employers. The preliminary results indicate a concentration of Internet derived event management advertisements within major cities along Australia's east coast. A range of industries has also been represented, with the event sector itself representing the major source of employment. Several reoccurring skills and attributes requirements of event managers have emerged. Some of these skills such as communication, problem solving and leadership skills have previously been identified as being generic professional skills (Hearn et al., 1994). Others however, support previous findings of event manager's requirements, such as the importance of planning and organisational, marketing and financial skills (Harris & Griffin, 1997; Royal & Jago, 1999) and the emergence of computer skills as the highest ranked practical skill requirements is a new but expected result.

Overall, personal attributes featured less frequently in the advertisements than skills. This may indicate that relatively greater importance is given to the latter. However, the listing of such attributes as motivation and positiveness adds another important dimension to the requirements of event managers. Further data collection and analysis are needed to ascertain the significance of these results and the relative ranking of the skills and attributes.

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