



A BIGGER, MORE PROFESSIONAL TEAM

We Are Social is marking 10 years in Australia with a bigger office and more ambitious goals for the agency that's grown from a handful of staff to 50. *AdNews* sits down with its managing director, Suzie Shaw, to talk 2020.

WORDS BY
MARIAM CHEIK-HUSSEIN

A decade after We Are Social opened its Australian office, managing director Suzie Shaw says the agency is still riding the wave of growth in social media.

The UK-founded business recently moved into new offices on Sydney's Cleveland Street, complete with new production studios. The move accommodates its team of 50, which includes new executive creative director Edu Pou and head of strategy Gerry Cyron.

"In all the time the business has been open, it's been in growth with a few ups and downs," Shaw tells *AdNews*. "Part of that has been riding the wave of substantial growth that we've seen from social. But also, the scope of what is social has been growing and growing."

"In the early days, as a social specialist, it was about helping clients with their social media channels and creating content for the platforms. Whereas now, increasingly, it's much broader than that. It's about creating campaigns that are socially led, and that may or may not result in some content that lives on social media. It's more about getting people to talk and driving conversations around a brand."

The agency has 20 clients, including big names such as Netflix, Red Bull and Samsung. It recently completed a global campaign for the electronics company, enlisting *Stranger Things*' Millie Bobby Brown, gamer Ninja and Instagram personality Miquela.

Shaw says when her team creates a campaign, they focus on how to invite consumers to be part of the conversation – something brands still need educating on.

"A lot of brands still see social media as an advertising channel rather than a channel that operates with the opportunity to connect more meaningfully with your customer or to build a community around your brand," she says.

"Those sorts of things behave very differently from just advertising at someone. There's a long way to go, but some brands are doing it super well."

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Meet the Team



She says the failure to recognise the uniqueness of social has resulted in underspend in the medium, and she hopes to see more brands double down and invest in it more seriously. According to a report by Zenith, social media will remain one of the fastest-growing channels, along with online video, from 2019-2022.

In an effort to keep up with the sector, We Are Social recently restructured its team around clients, rather than by departments. The new structure means there are multidisciplinary teams sitting together working on the same client.

"This is about being able to move at the pace of the culture," says Shaw. "You need to create content fast and move at the pace of the internet. You can't be genuinely culturally relevant if it's taking you weeks and months to think of an idea and respond to an audience."

TikTok has been the latest development in the space, which has created a new format social media specialists need to adapt to. While We Are Social's work remains spread out evenly between the main platforms of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter, it expects TikTok to have a big 2020.

"TikTok has become an important player and it's going to be a huge year for platforms like it," says Shaw. "TikTok is driving new behaviour. It's not just getting people to shift platforms – it's connecting audiences to new people according to their interests."

The new decade ahead

To complement the new office space, Shaw says her team are also eyeing a bigger client list for 2020.

"We moved in response to us growing as a business, but also trying to step up and be in a space that's representative of the business we are today," she says. "And that's a bigger, more professional business."

Her goals for the new year include nabbing clients across telco, financial services and alcohol companies.

"We have a gap in telco and believe there's a strong opportunity for that category to better engage customers and develop stronger relationships through social thinking," she says.

"Financial services organisations are notoriously risk-averse, as they should be, but they're particularly risk-averse around their use of social. They see the risk of something going wrong as greater than the reward of potentially building a stronger audience or building community around the brand."

"There's downward pressure on the beer and booze category in terms of lifestyle changes that are occurring, which is good, but also marketing challenges. Brands in that category are some of the most challenged by the

changes in the media landscape and I don't think there's many brands that have yet nailed how to use social thinking to build affinity with a new audience outside television and traditional formats."

Shaw says her industry faces its own challenges, which carry on from the previous decade into the new: short-termism and the demand for content.

"The industry has been challenged and will continue to be challenged by the fact that brands need more stuff, more of the time, and they don't necessarily have more money to pay for it," she says.

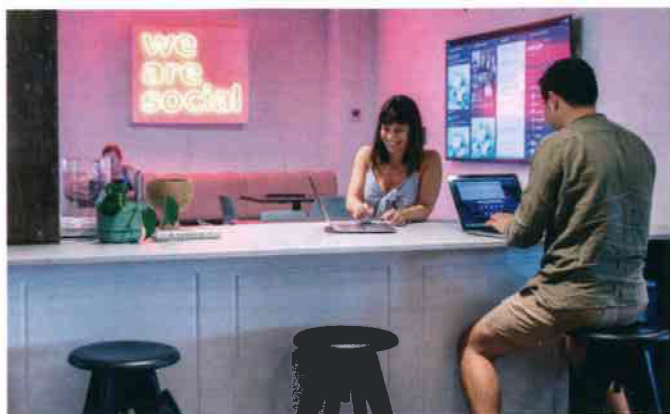
"We continue to see a proliferation of channels and content, and it's moving really fast. And what that means is there's often limited time and resources to think about it and deliver really valuable content.

"As agencies, we're making sure we're keeping brands honest and saying, 'How can we make the biggest impact for you?' Sometimes it's not doing everything cheaply.

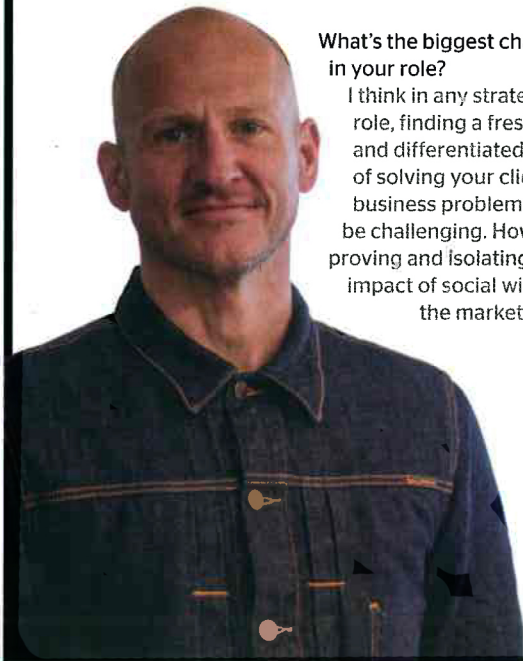
With social continuously evolving, Shaw says there's often a lot of roles being created across agencies and businesses faster than people can be skilled up for. However, she says being part of the global We Are Social team helps it meet these challenges.

"Making sure we're at the forefront of the discipline that never sleeps is a challenge," she says.

"But for us, having the network is really helpful because we don't just have 50 people, we have 850. That really helps us keep our finger on the pulse of what is a very fast moving discipline." A



GERRY CYRON • HEAD OF STRATEGY



What's the biggest challenge in your role?

I think in any strategy role, finding a fresh and differentiated way of solving your client's business problem can be challenging. However, proving and isolating the impact of social within the marketing

communications mix is the biggest challenge and of paramount importance. It helps to position social above and beyond community management as a social force that drives real business results.

What is your favourite part about your role?

The beauty of being a strategist is the variety of business problems you are exposed to. *Every. Day. Is. Different.* Yesterday an energy drink captured your undivided attention and imagination, today you focus on an airline destination, and tomorrow you find yourself in the pressure cooker that is pitching for an entertainment brand. Throughout this potpourri of challenges, you work with

incredibly talented humans who teach you a thing or two along the way. What's not to love?

What's been one of your favourite campaigns to work on?

Wow. That's an incredibly difficult question to answer. Campaigns are like children — you love them all (with the exception of the really annoying ones, of course). If I had to pick one, it probably would be "Share a Coke". The campaign was social by nature but started on the shelf, not on Insta. With that said, the campaign blew up on social media. It's the bane of my existence that we weren't able to do more with the amazing UGC as the media buy was heavily skewed towards traditional, non-conversational media.

EDUPOU • EXECUTIVE CREATIVE DIRECTOR

What brought you to Australia?

Moving to Australia needs little convincing. Creatively, I've always been a fan of the work coming out of here, and some of my favourite colleagues in Amsterdam and the US were Australian — I consider Eric Quennoy, ECD and partner at Wieden+Kennedy Amsterdam, one of my mentors. I also love the rich and distinct Aussie culture and the inviting nature of the people. The mind-blowing nature doesn't hurt, either. The fact my wife is Australian and we have two half-Australian boys may have helped a little, too.

After working in New York, how would you describe Australia's creative scene?

In Australia, there's a strong sense of identity that permeates through every layer of society. One of the

key elements is the self-referential sense of humour, which advertising embraces wholeheartedly. On top of all that, having a smart and active audience creates an ideal playground for social-first ideas.

What's one trend to watch in 2020?

Brands going beyond their comfort zone. Whoever coined the expression "better to be safe than sorry" couldn't anticipate the impact of social media. Today, if you're safe, you'll be sorry. Trying and failing is better than not trying at all. Expected is boring, and boring doesn't get any attention. Remember how Elon Musk smashed the windows of his new pickup truck live on stage to demonstrate they were bulletproof? Well, he still got record-breaking sales. We better get our steel balls ready.



SUZ TUCKER • EDITORIAL DIRECTOR



What's the main focus of your role?

At the start of 2019, I visited my 90-year-old grandmother in Texas and in describing my job to her I said something to the effect of: I use the same principles and creative disciplines from the world of journalism (great storytelling, finding the angle, tone of voice, writing craft and, importantly, servicing the audience first) and apply them to making content for brands that help the right people notice them and like them. She patted my hand and took a sip of white wine. She's a shrewd woman.

How does an editorial director fit into an agency?

I'm only 5'2" so I don't take up a lot of physical space.

How do you stay on top of the latest trends/topics consumers care about?

I come from a digital publishing background so following the news cycle is an ingrained part of my

routine. And, like most people, I'm genuinely interested in what's happening in the world so I read the broadsheets, Twitter, Reddit, a sizable collection of e-newsletters, magazines, Yelp reviews, the comments section of our clients' social pages, and so on. I also have an excellent team of super switched on people who are into culture, art, politics, celebrity, technology, videos of dogs reuniting with their owners after lengthy separations... all the stuff people are talking about, which means staying on top of trends and topics is a collaborative effort.

Any goals for 2020?

Make work that real people genuinely give a shit about. And, with all due respect to data and the algorithm, in 2020 I also want to continue working with clients who are keen to create new trends, not just respond to existing ones. That's exciting to me.

MICHAEL BATISTICH • HEAD OF RESEARCH & INSIGHTS

What's kept you at We Are Social for nine years?

Being part of a network growing at the speed of social has been an amazing opportunity, allowing me to work with smart people and smart brands. As social platforms have evolved, so has our approach to measurement. Back in the early days, we spent most of our time wrangling spreadsheets, counting clicks and conversations. Today, we're automating our analytics and working hard on measuring what matters to brands.

What's something brands misunderstand about social media?

With organic reach approaching zero, brands need to understand that organic social is a low-to-no

value investment of people, time and money. Brands need to rebalance their investment in favour of campaigns over always-on, and consider amplification as part of every brief.

Trends to watch in 2020?

We'll see social platforms relying more and more on machine learning to tweak the algorithms and drive greater engagement, return visits and future usage. More brands will rightly jump on TikTok, which is the fastest-growing social network and the most "addictive" one. We'll also see a shift in how influencers monetise their popularity, using direct selling, subscription and membership models, and tipping and gifting.

