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Bringing the concierge to the workplace

Carolyn Cummins

Commercial property editor

From finding a motorbike to test ride, a pony for a kid's birthday party to tickets for a Peppa Pig children's theatre show – which apparently sell out faster than Beyonce – a new breed of front desk staff is bringing a unique skill set to Sydney's office towers.

The concierge is stepping out from the rarefied world of exclusive hotels to ruling the marbled lobbies of office blocks around the city.

"A great concierge can change your perception of workplace culture," said Lee Gooda, who sees his role as pivotal at the 580 George Street HSBC Centre.

Gone are the days of a desk, usually unattended and a floor directory on the wall, to be replaced by what looks like an upmarket hotel lobby, complete with hotel-trained staff. The increased need for security has also created the demand for discreet staff that can have peripheral vision from the coffee shop in the corner to a bewildered-looking but important visitor.

High-end concierge services are now seen as a must-have for prospective tenants in the premium end of the corporate real estate market, and a deciding factor for major corporations when selecting their office location.

One of the pioneers of matching hotel-trained staff with an office tenant is the Melbourne-based First Contact, run by former hotelier Paul Schmeja.

His group employs 180 concierges and said business is booming. "Having a professional concierge manage the front desk is like having an IT expert on a help desk: you only have to ask once and if they are really good at their job you won't have to ask at all. A great concierge can change your perception of workplace culture," Mr Schmeja said.

Mr Gooda is an employee of First Contact as is Ahmed Belrhachi, who is head concierge at ANZ's Sydney headquarters 161 Castlereagh Street, Liberty Place.

"Once an assistant partner in one of the large accounting firms was so busy that she asked me to arrange a manicurist to come to her office. She had a mani-pedi while she finished her work deadline," Mr Belrhachi said.

"First impressions are our business and why shouldn't the customers, clients and employees in a corporate building environment be treated the same as a guest in a luxury hotel?" Mr Schmeja said.

Concierge services, comprise VIP support, client floor/meeting room management and reception services.

The services range from the basics of booking restaurants, dry-cleaning needs and IT issues, to meeting guests and escorting them to the executive floors and organising in-house functions. It's outsourcing what was once done by a range of staff as an add-on to their job, with much grumbling.

Now companies are willing to pay for the business to get a high-end, efficient and seamless service.

► **Commercial Property** – Business-Day, Page 24



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**Lee Gooda at the
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Photo: Kate
Geraghty