



The Saturday Age Saturday 9/07/2016

Page: 10
Section: Business News
Region: Melbourne, AU
Circulation: 241029
Type: Capital City Daily
Size: 469.00 sq.cms.



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Concierge comes to the office

Services Carolyn Cummins

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 Australia's office towers.

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

"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 in Sydney.

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.

Business-savvy tenants are also demanding professional concierge services at the lease negotiation stage.

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 across the country 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.

GPT Group's Mr Gooda at 580 George Street is an employee of First Contact as is Ahmed Belrhachi, who is the 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 Contact staff also operate in buildings in Melbourne's Docklands office precinct.

DEXUS Property also offers a concierge service at its expanding DEXUS Place concept.

"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.

"A corporate building has many permanent guests, employees and executives that expect, as part of their lease, great facilities that they can easily use."

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

Opportunities for foyer activations are at the forefront of workplace experience strategy, and professional concierges are central to forming lasting connections within a building's community.

As the staff are all trained as hotel concierges, they understand what is required by the building occupants.

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 is 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.

The new St George office at Barangaroo in Sydney has one for its staff as well as a general concierge in the foyers.

According to office tenants and landlords, offering concierge services for staff and visitors is the next step from the now-expected building amenities such as retail outlets, gymnasiums, shared meeting and conference facilities.

GPT Group head of asset management, office and logistics Andrea Roberts said tenants are increasingly looking not only for office space but improved amenities and services in their buildings.

"We seek to offer services that are relevant to our customers and this includes having hotel-standard concierges in all of our office buildings in the Sydney CBD," said Ms Roberts, whose buildings include the MLC Centre and 580 George Street.

"The biggest luxury available to most people is time, so our response to this is having concierges to help make things run easier for our tenants."



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ants, whether it be helping to welcome and direct their customers, to ordering a takeaway coffee or making a restaurant booking.”



Lee Gooda has been a concierge at the HSBC Centre for the past three years. Photo: Kate Geraghty