

5 Minutes

At work with Tracey Fox, head of brand and integrated communications at SkyCity.



Creative work from SkyCity advertising campaigns produced by its in-house studio.

Louise Lawton \\ SkyCity has its own design studio, doesn't it? How did this come about?

Tracey Fox \\ The in-house studio was initially set up in early 2009 to handle the high internal volume of print and collateral that SkyCity required. At the time, though, SkyCity also still worked with external agencies, so the team here was quite small.

I joined 18 months ago when the decision was made to expand. Now we have a team of around 13, which covers studio, print production, digital, advertising and design. So basically it's a mini version of a full-service agency.

LL \\ Do you have your own in-house creative teams?

TF \\ We have copywriters and art directors, but the team arrangement is less formal. We have very flexible working groups where people can swap around, dependent upon their skill set and the work required. Often a job will be worked on by everyone in the studio. Many projects involve everything, from traditional above the line print and radio through to point of sale, both print and digital and standard digital channels, web and email marketing.

LL \\ Does your studio function much like an agency – with a number of different clients?

TF \\ SkyCity has over 20 bars and restaurants, two hotels, the casino and the theatre. Plus there's the convention centre and SkyTower. So we are like an agency with multiple clients,

all of whom are very active, particularly at the moment, as there are a lot of new developments underway!

Fortunately, as we are all part of SkyCity Marketing, our communication lines are very direct. We understand the SkyCity brand, so there tends to be less wastage on time spent on jobs. Plus, getting your ideas in front of the key decision maker is much easier!

The whole process is quite efficient, with a level of collaboration and honesty that only comes from a team of people all working together and having shared objectives. We're very much on the front-line with our colleagues in marketing and we take a lot of pride in being so responsive.

We have a traffic person who manages the workflow, which is essential, as we can have up to 100 jobs a month pass through the studio. The process is very similar to an agency with regard to briefings, creative reviews and presenting the work, but much, much faster in most cases!

LL \\ Is the trend changing – whereby larger corporations are building in-house environments, rather than outsourcing to advertising and design agencies?

TF \\ Our studio has the ability and the critical mass to get things briefed, created and put into market incredibly quickly – sometimes literally in hours. This is something that an external agency would find incredibly difficult to do –

unless they charged a lot!

My feeling is that a lot of larger companies may well start looking at this model as it clearly has an advantage in cost and speed, but it's a question of getting the balance right. The creative standard needs to be at least on a par with the commercial marketplace. I think we've certainly achieved that here. The key is getting talented creative folk, and to attract that talent, you need to demonstrate that this is not a second-rate operation.

We are constantly striving to improve the creative product and have made some significant changes to the SkyCity brand over the past 12 months. It's also heartening to see that we got four finalists in the RSVP marketing awards – so we know the quality is improving. And we have fun.

LL \\ What is the biggest challenge in running an in-house team?

TF \\ Setting up the infrastructure and getting people used to dealing with us rather than an external agency. The biggest ongoing challenge is timing – everybody in the industry talks about how deadlines are getting shorter and shorter, particularly in the business that we're in, which is quite retail focused. So if you can't do it quicker, you have to do it smarter – and that's really what we're about.

Louise Lawton is a consultant at Auckland-based recruitment agency Portfolio Recruitment, which specialises in the advertising and design industries. Visit portfoliorecruit.co.nz.