



OPINION

Is the Australian ad industry more woke than their UK or US peers?

Matt Lawton, managing director of Five by Five Australia, takes a look at how Aussie adland measures up against its UK and US counterparts, in addressing the big issues including gender equality, mental health and the environment.

July 31, 2024 7:00
by MATT LAWTON



It's no secret that many marketing services agencies are struggling to defend their propositions and profit margins against a range of threats.

Beyond the commercial challenges, the industry is also in the cross hairs of environmental and social advocacy pressure groups. We're a good target because of the influence we can have on culture through our media literacy and ability to impact behaviour change.

And to our industry's credit, we often see unprompted efforts to lead initiatives.

Creative people might indeed be best placed to help solve issues linked to climate change, homelessness and ageism but it can feel a bit of an overwhelming expectation when the day job isn't exactly a walk in the park.



I was curious to understand if the saturation of issues tackled by the Australian ad industry is seen in other markets. Who else is doing their bit? The UK and US are home to thousands more agencies and so I expected to find many more examples of collective effort than in Australia.

In fact, it was the opposite.

Before I continue, I have to hold my hands up to the clickbait headline. I despise the word 'woke' as it diminishes the merit of a grateful and compassionate mindset. It's often used to dismiss those of us who are aware of issues that are bigger than our self by those who can't see beyond self.

I've largely found, people who work in our industry are well grounded and generous-hearted. In the US, UK and Australia there are many examples of agency founders who've made great strides on issues important to them.

These individual agency efforts include Analogfolk (UK) using AI to depict some of adland's high-profile male creative leaders as women in a new campaign aimed at tackling the lack of representation and visibility of female creative leaders.

In the US we've seen Stoltz run a program called *Returnship* where they hire people that have been out of the workforce for a while (eg women taking leave to raise children).

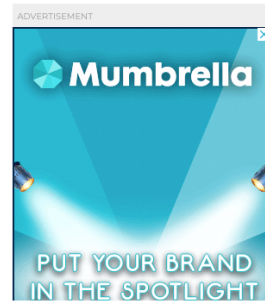
And here in Australia, UM staff support victims of domestic abuse with an annual impact day. Brilliant.

But that's all different to a concerted community effort to address an issue.

What my initial research efforts have revealed is that neither the US or UK can boast the same number of industry led, collective, volunteer initiatives designed to address today's important societal issues as the Australian advertising sector. Surely, this can't be the case?

I've found 16 Australian initiatives vs 7 in the US and 5 in the UK. Although some initiatives (eg Ad Net Zero) are global.

Please add to each list in the comments to ensure each country's efforts



PLEASE ADD TO EACH DAY OF THE COMMENTS TO ENSURE EACH COUNTRY'S CHALLENGES are properly represented.

UK

Gender equality

- [Women in Advertising & Communications Leadership \(WACL\)](#)
[Women's' Health Hero](#)
- [Snowflake Women in Data](#)

Environment / Climate change

- [The Payback Project](#)
- [Change The Brief](#)

Ageism

- [Placement Poverty Pledge](#)

US

First Nations / Racial equality

- [Opening shot](#)
- [BLAC Internship Program](#)

Environment / Climate change

- [Clean Creatives](#)
- [Global Alliance for Responsible Media \(GARM\)](#)
- [Ad Net Zero](#)

Gender equality

- [Own It](#), an initiative to increase the number of women owned ad agencies

Ageism

- [Ageism in Advertising](#)

Australia

Domestic violence / Homelessness / Youth

- [The Laptop Initiative](#) - included based on [TrinityP3](#) advocacy efforts to engage around 40 agencies in the cause (including [Five by Five](#))
- [UnLtd](#) helping children and young people at risk

Environment / Climate change

- [The Payback Project Australia](#)
- [The Independent Media Agencies of Australia environmental initiatives](#)

Mental health

- [36 months](#)
- Support Act's "[Mental Health and Wellbeing in Music and the Creative Industries 2024 survey](#)" partnering with the Centre for Social Impact Swinburne and Entertainment Assist
- [Love our Work](#) industry charter
- [Never Not Creative](#)

Gender equality

- [Women in Media](#)
- [Advertising Council Gender Pay Gap reporting](#)
- [Snowflake Women in Data](#)
- [F*ck the cupcakes](#)
- [The Aunties](#)

First Nations / Racial equality

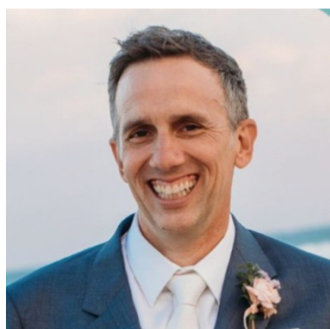
- [Born Blak](#)

Obesity

- [The Outdoor Media Association \(OMA\), Health and Wellbeing Queensland and Nutrition Australia's annual health initiative to encourage Australians to eat more fresh food](#)

Ageism

- [The Experience Advocacy Taskforce \(EAT\)](#), in partnership with [Advertising Industry Careers \(AIC\)](#)
- [Youngbloods Australia](#)



Matt Lawton is the managing director of Five by Five Australia.

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Cindy Gallop 31 Jul 24

UK, Gender Equality:
Creative Equals

<https://www.creativeequals.org/>

Bloom

<https://www.creativeequals.org/>

Women in Marketing

<https://womeninmarketing.org.uk/>

Ageism:

Visible

<https://www.visible-inc.com/>

Mental Health:

NABS

<https://nabs.org.uk/>

US, Gender Equality:

3PercentMovement

<https://www.3percentmovement.com/>

SheRunsIt

<https://sherunsit.org/>

MKTG WMN

<https://www.mktgwmn.com/>

Racial Equality:

Asians In Advertising

<https://www.asiansinadvertising.com/>

Asian American Advertising Federation

<https://www.3af.org/>

AdColor

<https://adcolor.org/>

Gold House

<https://goldhouse.org/>

Blackweek

<https://www.blackweek.co/>

Hispanic Marketing Council

<https://hispanicmarketingcouncil.org/>

MAIP

<https://foundation.aaaa.org/maip.html>

Ageism:

GirlsGone50

<https://www.girlsgone50.com/>

Many causes:

The Ad Council

<https://www.adcouncil.org/>

I've listed only the ones that sprang to mind immediately. I can promise you that in both the UK and the US there are many, many more.

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Racism, Ageism and Gender Inequality exists big time on media side 31 Jul 24

Australian media publishers are the worst when it comes to hiring and promoting people of colour, women and especially women over 45! Check out the latest headlines of the failing TV, Radio and Digital companies – all led by old white men! When they do bow out or should I say – are finally forced out, they are arrogant enough to think they are going to make great mentors.

We have long way to go in this country – men will still support men!

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James McHolly 31 Jul 24

"Creative people might indeed be best placed to help solve issues linked to climate change" – Yeah Naaa, have they been to the slums of Mumbai lately?

Mike 31 Jul 24

Now show the metrics of the goals defined and the material change that's been achieved among the hand wringing on the Wikipedia of "social" issues mentioned here .

LATEST



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'It's been a bad investment': Nine's Catherine West and Matt Stanton grilled at shareholders meeting



Mick Molloy back in Melbourne for Triple M breakfast



Travel Marketing Summit: 'Boring is a waste of space' - Emily Taylor and Cam Blackley on challenging marketing's conservatism



'I knew it was going to be a big change': Chris Freel talks making the move oOh!media