

# BEST OF THE LOT

The winners of this year's awards for excellence are innovative and have an eye for opportunity. Report: Leo D'Angelo Fisher

● Australia's most successful private companies come in all shapes and sizes but the winners of the BRW-ANZ Private Business Awards share some common attributes: customer service, innovation, respect for staff, corporate citizenship and an eye for opportunity – not necessarily in that order.

**Private business of the year (turnover over \$100 million)**

The largest privately owned building contractor, Hansen Yuncken, posted revenue of \$1.26 billion last financial year. The company stays debt free, funds growth out of cash flow and focuses on strong relationships with clients and employees.

**Private business of the year (turnover under \$100 million)**

Law firm Middletons is a thoroughly modern enterprise. The firm has offered parental leave of 14 weeks for three years and has set a goal to double the number of female partners. It had estimated revenue of \$97 million in 2009-10.

**Excellence in customer service**

Porter Davis Homes' service innovations include guaranteed start and finish dates, real-time online tracking, 12-month warranties on defects

and an iPhone application to visualise dream homes. It is Melbourne's largest residential builder, with 2009-10 sales of \$380 million.

**Excellence in community practices**

Accounting firm PwC's community engagement program consists of four streams: helping non-profit organisations improve their management and governance, donating professional skills to 23 charities (worth \$15 million in 2009), community mentoring programs and donations.

**Excellence in environmental practices**

Accounting firm PwC was a foundation signatory to the Earth Hour program in 2007. The following year, when it was already operating on a carbon-neutral basis, PwC said it would reduce carbon emissions by 25 per cent by 2012 but has increased that to 50 per cent.

**Excellence in management innovation**

Siemens Group's online claims management system, IntelBuild, connects all the parties involved in insurance claims, allowing them to manage and monitor claims online. The system cuts average claim times by 60 per cent.

**Top private business trading in Asia**

Snowy Mountains Engineering Corp (SMEC)

was privatised in a management buyout in 1993 and today has a global workforce of 3800 and 2009-10 revenue of \$365 million. Activities in Asia include hydro-electric projects in Malaysia and the Philippines, infrastructure projects in Indonesia and a project in Hong Kong.

**Top private business trading outside Asia**

Overseas sales make up 22 per cent of skin care company Ego Pharmaceuticals' \$86.5 million revenue. Ego began exporting to the Middle East in 1994. Iran is its biggest export market, accounting for sales of \$4 million this year.

**Top private business in regional Australia**

Emerald Group Australia's business model is based on joint ventures with farmer co-operatives in several states, making it Australia's fifth-largest grain company with 2010 sales of \$550 million.

**Fastest growing private business (turnover of more than \$100 million)**

Hostplus, the superannuation fund for employees in the hospitality, tourism and recreation industries, has tripled in size since 2003 and now has \$8.3 billion under management. Chief executive David Elia says Hostplus provides its 970,000 members with "a genuine sense of ownership".

**Fastest growing private business of the year (turnover under \$100 million)**

Specialist travel company Sportsnet Holidays has profited from Australians' love of sport and travel. The company, started by Rob Cecconi in 1998, sells package tours to sports events such as the Australian Open tennis tournament, AFL and NFL grand finals, and international fixtures. Its growth doubled this year to \$30 million. **BRW**

**PRIVATE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR (TURNOVER > \$100m) FINALISTS**

AUSCOAL Super  
Clayton Utz  
Freehills  
GHD  
Hansen Yuncken

**WINNER**

Hansen Yuncken

**PRIVATE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR (TURNOVER < \$100m) FINALISTS**

Ego Pharmaceuticals  
Middletons  
TLC Aged Care  
Travelforce

**WINNER**

Middletons

**EXCELLENCE IN CUSTOMER SERVICE FINALISTS**

AUSCOAL Super  
GMHBA  
Herron Todd White

**WINNER**

Porter Davis Homes

**EXCELLENCE IN COMMUNITY PRACTICES FINALISTS**

Atlassian  
DLA Phillips Fox  
Hairhouse Warehouse  
PwC  
St John of God Health  
Care

**WINNER**

PwC

**EXCELLENCE IN ENVIRONMENTAL PRACTICES FINALISTS**

Complete Office Supplies  
Intermode  
PwC

**WINNER**

PwC

**EXCELLENCE IN MANAGEMENT INNOVATION PRACTICES FINALISTS**

AUSCOAL Super  
Complete Office Supplies  
Costa Group  
Magellan  
Siemens Group

**WINNER**

Siemens Group

**MOST SUCCESSFUL PRIVATE BUSINESS TRADING OVERSEAS (ASIA) FINALISTS**

ANCA  
Ego Pharmaceuticals  
Micromine  
SMEC  
Transtar International  
Freight (Aust)

**WINNER**

SMEC

**MOST SUCCESSFUL PRIVATE BUSINESS TRADING OVERSEAS (OUTSIDE ASIA) FINALISTS**

Ego Pharmaceuticals  
Micromine  
Ronstan International

**WINNER**

Ego Pharmaceuticals

**MOST SUCCESSFUL PRIVATE BUSINESS IN REGIONAL AUSTRALIA FINALISTS**

AUSCOAL Super  
Emerald Group Australia  
G&S Engineering Services  
Robson Civil Projects

**WINNER**

Emerald Group Australia

**FASTEST GROWING PRIVATE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR (TURNOVER > \$100m) FINALISTS**

Dental Corporation

BRW ANZ Private Business Awards, published August 26, 2010

**Distribution Central**

ERM Power  
Hostplus

**Richard Crookes**

Constructions

**WINNER**

Hostplus

**FASTEST GROWING PRIVATE BUSINESS OF THE YEAR (TURNOVER less than \$100m) FINALISTS**

Atlassian

AWX

Catch of the Day

Crust Gourmet Pizza Bars

Sportsnet Holidays

**WINNER**

Sportsnet Holidays

To achieve success in hard times, hang on to key partners, control costs and build counter-cyclical sources of revenue.  
Report: Judith Tydd

● The ranking's of this year's *BRW Top 30 Law Firms* survey prove bigger isn't always better as the heavily concentrated mid-tier capitalise on market conditions.

Revenue recorded by the top-tier echelon of firms, which is made up of Mallesons Stephen Jaques, Minter Ellison, Freehills, Clayton Utz, Allens Arthur Robinson and Blake Dawson, were the hardest hit. In the 2008-09 financial year, their combined revenue equalled \$2.8 billion but in the following 12 months, the same firms generated just \$2.6 billion.

Conversely, the revenue from the remaining 24 firms on the list totalled \$2.4 billion for 2009-10 – up \$100 million on the previous year.

Mallesons Stephen Jaques traditionally holds the coveted top spot in revenue but having posted an 11 per cent decline in revenue year-on-year, the firm has dropped to No.2 on the list. It's also one of very few firms to publicly disclose profitability, with this year's profit taking a hit and dropping \$15.4 million to \$229.1 million.

Revenue at Clayton Utz was down 10 per cent on the previous year, influenced no doubt by the high-profile defection of 15 partners to Allen & Overy. Chief executive partner Darryl McDonough, however, says the results reflect a "solid performance". "The issue of the impact [of the defection] is not one of the partners leaving, it is whether clients then follow," he says.

Minter Ellison was the only top-tier firm to record an increase in revenue over the past year. The firm's revenue rose by 2 per cent.

The firm's chief executive partner, John Weber, says the organisation stayed focused during the downturn, its size giving it the capacity to deal with counter-cyclical markets and its infrastructure, government and insolvency work propping up growth levels.

"We had our costs under control and that resulted in a successful year for us. I think those types of numbers are sustainable," he says.

Within the mid-tier, an active acquisitions drive over the past year has resulted in the largest listed law firm, Slater & Gordon, posting a 21 per cent jump in revenue.

Managing director Andrew Grech says organic growth helped and acquired businesses contributed \$6 million in fee revenue.

Single-state firm Henry Davis York has also continued its strong growth trajectory, reporting a 14 per cent rise in revenue to \$97 million – 4 per cent above forecast.

Lander & Rogers chief operating officer Grant Scott-Hayward says the firm's 20 per cent year-on-year revenue increase was a "very good" result but the firm didn't set out to achieve that level of performance.

Scott-Hayward attributes the growth to more investment in the Sydney office over the past year, particularly in areas of commercial disputes, workplace relations and insurance.

"It was a remarkable result but it's not our primary goal – any growth needs to be sustainable," he says.

Herbert Geer managing partner Bill Fazio says its 13 per cent revenue increase shows the firm has areas that are "pretty recession-proof", such as workplace relations and insurance.

This is the second consecutive year that the firm has generated a strong level of growth, although this past year couldn't match the 22 per cent recorded for 2008-09. *BRW*

## MID-TIER FIRMS GAIN GROUND

TOP 30 LAW FIRMS

Name of firm	Revenue 2009-10 \$m	Revenue 2008-09 \$m	Change %
Minter Ellison Legal Group	503.0	493.0	2.0
Mallesons Stephen Jaques	494.4	552.6	-11.0
Freehills	477.0	492.0	-3.0
Clayton Utz	442.0	490.0	-10.0
Allens Arthur Robinson*	390.0	405.0	-4.0
Blake Dawson	358.0	370.0	-3.0
Corrs Chambers Westgarth	234.2	235.0	-0.3
Norton Rose Australia	220.0	220.0	0.0
DLA Phillips Fox	195.8	198.9	-2.0
Gadens Lawyers	160.3	146.8	9.0
Baker & McKenzie	154.1	155.1	-1.0
Slater & Gordon	124.7	103.0	21.0
Gilbert + Tobin	123.0	113.4	8.0
HWL Ebsworth	107.2	106.9	0.3
Henry Davis York	97.0	85.0	14.0
Middletons*	97.0	97.0	0.0
Sparke Helmore	97.0	104.0	-7.0
Kennedy Strang Legal Group	93.6	94.1	-1.0
Maddocks	89.9	80.1	12.0
Griffith Hack	80.0	75.0	7.0
McCullough Robertson	76.0	73.1	4.0
Moray & Agnew	73.6	63.5	16.0
Herbert Geer	61.0	53.9	13.0
Lander & Rogers	60.0	50.0	20.0
Holding Redlich	56.8	61.2	-7.0
Piper Alderman	52.0	51.5	1.0
Arnold Bloch Leibler	50.2	47.9	5.0
Hunt & Hunt*	46.0	46.0	0.0
Colin Biggers & Paisley	37.0	28.0	32.0
Hall & Wilcox	34.5	30.9	11.0

Figures provided by firms \* BRW estimate *BRW Top 30 Law Firms*, published September 16, 2010

# CLIENT DRIVEN

The best professional service firms have the capacity to flourish no matter what the market conditions.  
Report: Judith Tydd

● The need for professional service firms to offer outstanding service is paramount, as without it they don't exist.

The 2010 Beaton Consulting/BRW Client Choice winners reflect the best firms in a sector that has the capacity to flourish irrespective of market conditions. They are nimble and are able to transfer expertise across business lines.

Many of these firms also have client feedback programs, some of which have been implemented over the difficult economic conditions of the past 18 months. The programs track performance criteria such as efficiency, client engagement and quality of work.

This has helped define this year's overall winners: PwC (revenue over \$200 million), PPB (revenue between \$50 million and \$200 million) and Bendzulla Actuarial (revenue under \$50 million).

Specialist accounting firm PPB also took out the attribute awards for outstanding client care and most innovative firm. Chief executive Stephen Purcell says: "Client rapport; client care and industry understanding are the three customer service attributes we prioritise above all else."

## ABOUT THE SURVEY

The 2010 Beaton Consulting/BRW Client Choice Awards assesses professional service firms from the perspective of the client. This year, clients submitted more than 21, 237 separate ratings of the firms they use. The ratings were collected through an invitation-only online study conducted in November 2009, which was live for three weeks. Overall, the study captured ratings for about 250 firms. In 2010, 89 firms were eligible for the awards from the areas of law, engineering, accounting, architecture, management consulting, patent and trademark consultancies, actuarial and IT consulting. Respondents were asked to rate the performance of one or more professional services firms they had worked with in the previous 12 months on a broad range of attributes, including innovation, market leadership, value for money, client care and service quality.

PPB uses industry benchmarking to measure customer service, as well as a formal client reaction program.

"Senior people meet with clients to find out what they need and what we could do better. We also do a stocktake of performance after every job – what the client liked, what could be improved," he says.

Bendzulla Actuarial was named Best Actuarial Firm, collected attribute awards for exceptional service and best value and won the Victorian state award. Chief executive Bruce Rose says simplicity is the key to providing superior client service.

"Ultimately, we're a client service company," he says. "We provide a telephone service where they ring up and talk to someone and don't have to work through a menu system. It's a case of keeping the client relationship as simple as possible."

Big four accounting firm PwC has had a bumper 12 months. The firm won awards for market leader (for the second consecutive year), best management consulting firm (revenue over \$500 million) and best West Australian professional services firm.

The past year has also forced the hand of many professional services firms to prove their resilience and avoid the urge to shave staff numbers.

Decimated practice areas of previous months, including mergers and acquisitions and property, left some firms with little choice but to cut staff numbers. While the few firms able to boast no redundancies were fortunate, partnership profitability within these organisations was the casualty.

According to Mallesons Stephen Jaques managing partner Robert Milliner, the firm's redundancy program was conducted on a voluntary basis. He says there was a "good response" and client services were maintained. Milliner insists there are some universal truths to providing great client service – technical expertise, responsiveness and strong relationships – but they need to be applied consistently for clients to notice the difference with competing firms. **BRW**

### OVERALL AWARDS

Best professional services firm (revenue over \$200m)	PwC
Best professional services firm (revenue \$50m to \$200m)	PPB
Best professional services firm (revenue under \$50m)	Bendzulla Actuarial

### PROFESSION AWARDS

Best law firm (revenue over \$200m)	Mallesons Stephen Jaques
Best law firm (revenue \$50m to \$200m)	Gilbert + Tobin
Best law firm (revenue under \$50m)	Cooper Grace Ward
Best accounting firm (revenue over \$500m)	KPMG
Best accounting firm (revenue \$50m to \$500m)	PPB
Best accounting firm (revenue under \$50m)	Vincent's Chartered Accountants
Best consulting engineering firm (revenue over \$200m)	Sinclair Knight Merz
Best consulting engineering firm (revenue \$50m to \$200m)	Golder Associates
Best consulting engineering firm (revenue under \$50m)	pitt&shery
Best management consulting firm (revenue over \$500m)	PwC
Best patent and trademark attorney firm	Davies Collison Cave
Best actuarial firm	Bendzulla Actuarial
Best IT services firm (revenue over \$500m)	Cisco
Best IT services firm (revenue under \$500m)	Datacom
Best specialist firm	Hender Consulting

### ATTRIBUTE AWARDS

Outstanding client care	PPB
Exceptional service	Bendzulla Actuarial
Best value	Bendzulla Actuarial
Market leader	PwC
Most innovative	PPB

### STATE AWARDS

ACT	Clayton Utz
NSW	Dimension Data
Qld	Golder Associates
SA	Sinclair Knight Merz
Vic	Bendzulla Actuarial
WA	PwC

Beaton Consulting/BRW Client Choice Awards, published March 18, 2010

# TRUST STAFF, BUILD A HAPPY WORKPLACE

## Building strong relationships pays off in terms of productivity and turnover. Report: Kath Walters

● Tell your accountant. Above-average pay, flexible hours and benefits such as extra maternity leave and lots of training will cut business costs, rather than increase them. Analysis of the companies on the second annual *BRW Best Places to Work* list reveals more secrets of a happy workforce and the financial benefits in high productivity and low staff turnover.

Some of the qualities that make workplaces great are intangible. Top of the list are trust and fun, according to analysis of companies on this year's list by Trish Dagg, the co-director of the Great Place to Work Institute, the research and management consultancy that conducted the research for *BRW*'s list.

Trust was most important, the survey found. It is created by building strong relationships between staff and managers through behaviour, not through policies. Trust improves everyday communication and solves problems quickly. "Relationships based on trust are willing to look for fair resolutions should any issue arise," Dagg says.

This year's list shows a 7 per cent increase in employees who say theirs is a fun place to work. In one company, the boss sings happy birthday to staff on their special day. In another, Friday is massage day. These are "high-touch" practices that cost little but mean the world to staff, Dagg says.

Companies surveyed do pay more, however. The average non-management salary is \$72,000 compared with the average of \$65,000 (according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics). Managers on average are paid \$114,000 and executives \$186,000. More than half offer flu vaccinations and one-third subsidise gym memberships. Employees receive an average of 66 hours of training a year and 28 per cent of companies subsidise non-job specific training.

The director of The Centre for Work + Life at the University of South Australia, Barbara Pocock, says: "Unhappy workers have high levels of absenteeism and leave jobs more frequently – both of which have bottom-line impacts. Engaged workers are more productive." *BRW*

**ABOUT THE SURVEY** Companies on the *BRW Best Places to Work* list are judged by their own employees. The results are evaluated against a proprietary trust index by the Great Place to Work Institute, which has been conducting such research for two decades. This year, 160 companies entered and 16,930 employees were surveyed.

### THE BEST PLACES TO WORK

Rank		Company	Head office	Staff*
2010	2009			
1	2	NetApp Australia	Sydney	146
2	4	Diageo Australia	Sydney	560
3	10	OBS	Melbourne	125
4	1	Google Australia	Sydney	350
5	N/R	Sentis	Brisbane	60
6	17	The LiTMUS Group	Melbourne	65
7	N/R	E-Web Marketing	Sydney	34
8	N/R	Manildra Roberts	Sydney	126
9	9	RedBalloon	Sydney	50
10	N/R	Lifebroker	Melbourne	45
11	N/R	The Nova Group	Adelaide	134
12	50	AUSCOAL Super	Newcastle	93
13	32	Swaab Attorneys	Sydney	65
14	11	Deloitte	Sydney	4500
15	8	MRWED Group	Brisbane	22
16	N/R	Inform Business Impact	Brisbane	108
17	26	Seymour Whyte Constructions	Brisbane	177
18	20	Coca-Cola South Pacific	Sydney	142
19	37	The Physio Co	Melbourne	28
20	22	Kiandra	Melbourne	41
21	12	OMD Australia	Sydney	319
22	15	Distribution Central	Sydney	77
23	N/R	Ezypay	Sydney	30
24	N/R	Austereo	Sydney	739
25	N/R	Silver Chef	Brisbane	69
26	N/R	Juniper Networks	Melbourne	73
27	16	Point Project Management	Canberra	44
28	N/R	Ubisoft Australia	Sydney	27
29	N/R	Bluefin Resources	Sydney	32
30	N/R	Wavelength International	Sydney	51
31	23	Morgan Stanley Australia	Sydney	302
32	N/R	Trilby Misso Lawyers	Brisbane	148
33	N/R	Morton & Morton	Sydney	45
34	36	Cornwall Stodart	Melbourne	116
35	N/R	Optiver	Sydney	200
36	18	Finite Recruitment	Sydney	78
37	24	Traffik Marketing	Sydney	43
38	N/R	Attwood Marshall Lawyers	Coolangatta	48
39	44	SAS Institute Australia	Sydney	192
40	N/R	Alluvium Consulting	Melbourne	32
41	N/R	SimCorp	Sydney	38
42	33	Viteklogies	Sydney	65
43	30	Diversified Exhibitions	Melbourne	67
44	N/R	oOh!media Group	Sydney	105
45	N/R	Altis Consulting	Sydney	67
46	31	Sound Alliance	Sydney	43
47	N/R	Readify	Melbourne	91
48	N/R	Horizon Foundation	Capalaba	130
49	49	Advanced Solutions International	Melbourne	28
50	N/R	JDS Australia	Melbourne	42

\* At February 2010. Source: Great Place to Work Institute Australia. *BRW Best Places to Work*, published June 24, 2010