

COOL COMPANIES

Perks add pop to the workplace

Company name RedBalloon.

For the acting chief executive of RedBalloon, Kristie Buchanan, there's no question what the company is in the market to do.

"We're in the business of giving people a good time," she says. "For us that's about selling experiences."

It's an ethos she says translates to behind the scenes. "[Working here] is a haven for all things that are great about reward and recognition ... We recognise everyone comes to work as an individual: what motivates one won't motivate others."

The company - which sells activities for gifts - hires and fires based on values. "We have five core values and if we are struggling over a decision, we look at our values and think about it from that perspective," Buchanan says.

INITIATIVES

- ❑ Named in the top 50 of *BRW's* best places to work list four years running.
- ❑ Welcome process includes being given an iPad and being matched with a buddy.
- ❑ Founder takes new employees to lunch in the first week.
- ❑ Staff are encouraged to work to strengths: Gallup StrengthsFinder is used to track success.
- ❑ Values (leadership, sense of humour and fun, integrity, generosity and

"being a little dog with a big-dog attitude") is reinforced daily, as well as through monthly awards.

- ❑ Employee engagement score is 90 per cent-plus (from Aon Hewitt). The Australian average is 54 per cent.
- ❑ Lunch 'n learn program brings in speakers, from the Sydney Swans chief executive to forensic detectives, to share inspiration with staff.
- ❑ Internal learning "clinics" encourage shared knowledge across teams.
- ❑ Weekly, trimesterly and annual reviews allow individuals to be involved in decisions that affect them.
- ❑ All staff are offered flexible working hours; "career with kids" seminars are offered to expectant parents.

Although the company has quadrupled its revenue since Buchanan started almost five years ago, celebrations started way back.

"We celebrate everything ... In 2010, we had outgrown our current office, so we purchased one next door and put in a door to connect the two spaces. We had a door-opening ceremony, officiated by our founder, Naomi Simson," Buchanan says.

But the celebrations have a serious side. "It's about saying you spend eight hours of your day at work, so we'll make sure it's fulfilling and engaging. But it's not at the expense of what you've said you'll deliver."

SUE WHITE



Celebrate ... RedBalloon's Kristie Buchanan values office fun. Photo: Danielle Smith