

ENTER THE DRAGON



Patrick Stahle, Aegis Media APAC's new CEO, is no stranger to travelling. Which is just as well since his position takes him regularly around the 13 countries he heads, leaving little spare time and a nagging feeling that he can never do enough.

Despite this, he enjoys the fast paced market and is especially proud of his new Chinese given name: 'The Big Dragon'. Stahle is optimistic about the region's business potential and opportunities for Aegis Media.

Perched on the 36th floor of his open-plan, glass office in Singapore, Patrick Stahle seems to have Asia at his feet. As he watches hundreds of ships entering the harbour below, he reflects that he is lucky to see this view once a week. But despite the frenetic pace, he is exuberant about his role in this exciting, culturally rich region and envisages a future of unlimited potential.

"I absolutely enjoy being here," enthuses Stahle; "The region is so vibrant and the people here are very receptive to challenges, new ideas and finding new solutions to the market. So, it's very rewarding to be a manager in this type of culture.

"We have a strong team," he continues. "Our clients are very impressed with our ambitious staff. They are also impressed with the high quality work we produce. Generally, it is a positive view and we must remember that we operate in a very complex and competitive market here. Some of the markets have a staff turnover of 50%, which is the industry average. It is a challenge to build consistent service but, so far, we've managed very well." The APAC region is continuing to see significant progress. Average growth for the media and marketing sector is performing at

7% annually, but faster moving sectors such as China, India and the Philippines have seen growth reach 15-20%. This trend has been reflected in the ambitious goals within Aegis Media APAC; growth targets are set at 30% organically for 2007.

Aegis Media APAC has progressed from a small operation to being the 5th ranked media agency in the region. Their broad offering makes them a very attractive collaborative partner for clients. But growth is certainly not a given and measures to improve infrastructure are well underway.

In order to support the expansion of staff from 1600 to 3000 over the next 3 years, APAC will be welcoming their first locally based Regional HR Director and extensive training programs for management staff have begun.

"We are comprised of many units in this region and the key thing is to make sure everybody is running in the same direction," says Stahle. "So, we are spending a lot of time aligning strategies across the region, thereby strengthening our position overall. We've already completed initial management training to align our vision and ambition as well as to clarify management criteria and our expectations of management. With so many units, we must focus on empowering our people.

"The environment places a lot of strain on HR and management to be able to recruit, train and retain people," he continues. "And within such a complex HR environment, management must also be highly trained because that will make the biggest difference." Stahle says his company vision can be easily articulated as "1-2-3".

- 1. To be seen as the most advanced communication agency in the region**
- 2. To double revenue**
- 3. To triple profits**

"The biggest challenge is that there are so many opportunities and we need to prioritise correctly," explains Stahle, "to do the right thing at the right time.

"As a company I would say we have a good, solid platform from our heritage in Europe both in terms of our ability to challenge the established, networks, and our ability to attract very good people because we are seen as a challenger. We are also leveraging on strong products from the more established markets. I think that is what sets us apart."

Digitally Hip

Regional PR has been focused on communications planning. "And here we can be quite attractive compared to our competitors," explains Stahle. "We are 'digitally hip' because we have the strongest digital network of all our competitors here in Asia and we are focusing on being more strategic and more digital.

"In some markets, we are actually deselecting media buying. This is necessary because the markets are so consolidated that it's very hard for a small agency like Carat to be competitive in media buying. We would rather be strong on communication planning and on digital where we can make a bigger impact. To this end, we are also continuing to train our staff in communications planning including the 3C programme."

Cultural assimilation has been enjoyable for Stahle but not entirely easy. Historic tensions between countries must be navigated with deft diplomacy and, in an effort to gain more knowledge, his spare time is spent reading books in order to better understand Asian business practice. "There is a great deal of subtlety within Asian culture and most people are so polite that if you offended them they wouldn't tell you. They would just stop doing business with you," he laughs.

"I try to meet with all major clients personally in order to see what they think and what their future expectations for us might be. The only way to understand their needs is to meet and participate in what they do. But I still think I'm only scratching the surface on how to understand the Asian business culture," confides Stahle.

"I decided to go to APAC because I found the

different markets in this region very challenging and there is opportunity to make a real difference here using some of the experience of Europe, which is a mature market. I can also learn how European strategies can be applied in the very different cultures and environments I manage. I have a great respect for all the cultures within APAC and I'm really looking forward to learning and contributing much more over the next few years," he concludes.

Patrick Stahle

Patrick Stahle rose through the ranks of the Swedish navy to become lieutenant commander, trained as a helicopter pilot and – after leaving the navy – worked in commercial aviation. With a degree in economics, Stahle then joined Aegis in 1995, building up the Swedish media research department before becoming COO of the Nordic region and then CEO.

In between were two breaks where Stahle first worked as CEO of a pay TV channel, then rejoined Aegis, then left again to develop an e-learning programme. In 2002 he returned to the Aegis fold once more.

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