

Solid candidate focus pays off for agency

It may be small, but McLaren Associates is very big on achievement.

MCLAREN Associates is riding the wave of success after taking out two of the three categories it entered in the recent Seek Annual Recruitment Awards.

The Wellington-based recruitment and HR consultancy won 2014's small recruitment agency of the year and excellence in candidate care titles, while managing director Peter McLaren was one of three finalists in the recruitment leader of the year category.

Having entered the awards for just the second time, operations manager Kirsty McLaren says the results were exciting.

"As a smaller boutique agency that is New Zealand-owned and operated and being compared against our industry peers, some of which are global companies, to come out on top is exciting."

She says the awards also reflect McLaren's emphasis on candidate care.

"That's something we pride ourselves on, something that differentiates us against our peers," says senior consultant Nikki Walshaw.

She gives the example of the fact that every application and inquiry gets acknowledged and responded to in a timely manner.

"One of the frequent complaints candidates have of recruitment agencies is that they send applications through and they go into a black hole, they never hear anything, but we ensure prompt turnaround so that people feel that they have been treated with dignity and respect."

To date, feedback from clients and candidates alike has been positive, and in line with McLaren's tagline "trusted people". "We consider ourselves to be a trusted adviser to both parties and

since our brand refresh a lot of our clients and candidates have told us they really do agree with our tagline, they come to us because they trust us," says Kirsty McLaren.

With such a focus on candidate and client care and relationship building, McLaren's has earned a solid reputation over the past two-and-a-half decades.

Since its inception 26 years ago, the company has offered a full range of recruitment, selection, assessment and HR consulting services.

"At the moment there's a significant amount of change within many organisations, so in addition to recruitment services we're working with a number of clients to guide them through the change management process, undertaking remuneration reviews, writing position descriptions and the like," says Walshaw.

McLaren's recruits candidates for graduate roles through to chief executive and board-level appointments across all industry sectors though it's particularly well-known for its track record and experience in the not-for-profit and NGO space.

Its state-of-the-art technology not only enables McLaren's to easily continue its rapport with past and present candidates, but the agency boasts market-leading search functionalities that help clients as well.

"Over the years recruitment has changed in that clients frequently look after easy-to-fill roles themselves and they go externally when they need help with harder-to-fill roles," says Kirsty McLaren.

"With our state-of-the-art technology and our well-established networks and search skills we are well-positioned to find candidates that employers might not be able to find themselves."

"In fact, in the last two years nearly 40 per cent of placements have been candidates we've sourced through our existing networks or our search capabilities."

The job market at present, says Walshaw, is experiencing a high level of growth.

"In Wellington particularly that's evidenced by the number of newly-created roles that we're working on with a variety of clients – people aren't just replacing those who move on but they are creating new positions within their organisations."

"That's a pretty good signal as to where the market's going," says Walshaw.

In most demand are workers within the health profession, especially nurses and staff within the mental health area.

Walshaw strongly advises any job seekers to first phone and inquire about any opportunity they see advertised well before they start typing.

"Candidates really need to get an understanding of what it is the employer is seeking so that they can ascertain as to whether it's a really good fit for them, and if it is, then they can really tailor their application so that it's clear to the reader of their application where their skills and experience align with the opportunity."

"We see a lot of generic covering letters and it really doesn't tell you the most relevant skills and experience they can bring to the competencies we're looking for," says Walshaw.

"Sometimes we've had clients overlook candidates because they haven't been able to articulate enough or they've sent a cover letter through without targeting it to the job they're applying for."

"The volume of applications we've had for a few roles around Christmas is huge."

"We've had 120, 105 and there's a tier two role at the moment that's had 65 applications – there's still competition out there for candidates, so they need to make sure their cover letters are really targeted."

Employers too need to take stock heading into the new year, says Kirsty McLaren.

"Typically with the new year being a time where employees



Award-winning work: Kirsty McLaren, left, and Nikki Walshaw from McLaren Associates.

Photo: JOHN NICHOLSON/FAIRFAX NZ

consider their career options, it's a good idea for employers to reassess how they're rewarding their employees in order to ensure retention and attraction of suitable candidates."

With the average national

salary rise being seven per cent last year, if an employer is unable to negotiate on the salary front she advises them to look at other non-monetary ways to reward their employees.

"Get creative, it could be

anything from offering extra annual leave, flexible working arrangements or professional development opportunities.

"Non-monetary rewards have been rated right up there, if not more important than salary, for a

couple of years now and that will continue into this year."

For more information phone Kirsty McLaren or Nikki Walshaw on 04 499 1069, email mcla@mcclaren.co.nz or go to: www.mcclaren.co.nz