



PRESS RELEASE

FOCUSED & ADAPTING: MFA CENSUS SIGNALS INDUSTRY RESET

24 March 2026: Australia's media agencies are reshaping for what's next, with the latest MFA Media Communication Industry Census showing a more focused workforce as technology, automation and new operating models redefine roles.

Released today, the 23rd annual MFA Census reports that as of September 2025, MFA agency members employed **4,411 people**. This represents a 5.1% decrease from 4,650 in 2024; however, with 350 vacant roles currently being recruited, the total workforce would rise to 4,761 once filled.

Providing a comprehensive overview of the industry's health, the Census captures all MFA agency members, spanning organisations of all sizes, and including both independent and multinational agencies.

The overall decline in headcount was driven by reductions in Sydney and Brisbane, partially offset by growth in Melbourne. This shift reflects a softer advertising market, with headcount broadly tracking the decline in ad spend.

Further key MFA Media Communication Industry Census findings

Vacancies rising despite workforce contraction

While overall headcount has declined, media agency vacancies have increased to 7.8% (up from 4.9%), pointing to structural resizing and operating model shifts rather than a short-term hiring lag.

More than three quarters (76%) of vacancies sit in Activation, Implementation and Client Service, underscoring sustained demand for client-facing and delivery expertise.

Workforce mix shifting towards delivery roles

The workforce mix in Australian media agencies is evolving in step with the growing complexity of a fast-paced, data-led media landscape. As clients demand sharper insights, faster optimisation and clearly measurable impact, agency roles are expanding beyond their traditional boundaries. Activation and Implementation are no longer purely executional; they are becoming increasingly technical, sophisticated and specialised.

This trend is reflected in strong growth in Activation roles (+19.8%), while Client Service, State Management, SEO and agency support functions – including research, admin and finance – have



declined, indicating consolidation and increased automation. Overall, the shift points to flatter structures, with a greater focus on execution and fewer support roles.

Gender pay parity has strengthened

The gender pay parity gap has reduced to 1.4% from 2.8%. Gender pay parity compares the pay of women and men **in similar roles**, unlike the gender pay gap as measured by the Workplace Gender Equality Agency (WGEA), which measures the difference in median hourly earnings for men and women. Over the past eight years, pay parity within media agencies has ranged between -1% and 4%, reflecting sustained effort to strengthen gender equality.

The Census also confirms the industry remains female majority (65%), with women holding 46% of CEO, MD and GM roles – down slightly from 48% the previous year, but significantly higher than 37% in 2018.

Diversity makes gains

23.1% of media agency professionals are from an Asian cultural background – up significantly from 14.6% five years ago. A further 28% speak a language other than English at home, and 6.86% live with a disability. Encouragingly, 86% of respondents agreed with the statement: “I have not experienced ignorance, prejudice, insensitivity or exclusion in the media agency industry in the last 12 months.”

Tenure continues to grow, highlighting growing stability

Encouragingly, workforce stability is improving. Average tenure has risen for a third consecutive year to 4.1 years (from 3.8 years), while regrettable loss has eased slightly to 24% (from 25.3%). However, the number of people leaving the media agency sector has increased to 18.3% (from 16.1%), highlighting retention and pipeline challenges.

Non-regrettable loss remained steady at 6.2% (down slightly from 6.7%), with 273 exits, the majority concentrated in leadership and support roles – particularly Group Directors, Management and Assistants – suggesting deliberate structural and performance-based changes to the workforce.

More experienced entrants for more complex work

In 2025, agencies recruited 317 entry-level professionals, representing 7.2% of the total workforce – consistent with the previous year. Notably, 22% of new recruits are aged 27 or older (up from 15%), indicating a shift toward more mature entrants – reflecting the growing demand for expertise to support increasingly complex work across the industry.

No notable difference in average age and experience

Employment remains concentrated in Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane, accounting for 96% of media agency roles. The average industry age has edged up to 33 years, while average experience has dipped slightly to 7.6 years.



Commenting on the Census findings

Aimee Buchanan, MFA Chair & WPP Media ANZ CEO

“The Census shows an industry that is purposefully reshaping for the future and building the capability, technology and operating models that will carry us into the next decade. The shifts we’re seeing in workforce structure reflects an industry that is actively adapting, not reacting to new realities. What stands out most is our commitment to progress: strengthening gender pay parity, welcoming greater cultural diversity, and investing in the people and roles that will define the modern media agency. As technology, automation and AI accelerate, our opportunity is to keep shaping the future of our industry with intention.”

Sophie Madden, CEO, MFA

“The Census highlights an industry in transition, with clear consolidation and a tightening of structures focused on delivery expertise. In tougher trading environments, agencies are demonstrating real adaptability while continuing to invest in the capabilities that matter most. The data also highlights a watch-out for agencies. Reduced entry-level hiring alongside increased career exits creates a pipeline risk, making succession planning and leadership development critical priorities for the industry. Encouragingly, rising tenure and strong female representation in leadership signal a stable and inclusive foundation – and the resilience needed to support sustainable growth.”

Imogen Hewitt, MFA Deputy Chair, CEO Spark Foundry ANZ, Chief Media Officer Publicis Groupe

“The MFA’s **Media Workforce of The Future** work shows that our industry is navigating a period of profound change – driven by technology, evolving client needs and new ways of working. The Census reflects an industry already leaning in and adapting in real time. Media agencies are reimagining their role, finding smarter ways to partner with technology, and doubling down on the skills that matter most. By continuing to invest in creative thinking and technical capability, we are well placed to keep our industry robust and relevant as the landscape continues to evolve.”

A full infographic of the Census data, including the Media Diversity & Inclusion Survey results, is available on the MFA website:

https://www.mediafederation.org.au/images/2026/census/MFA_2025_MediaAgencyIndustry_Census_Infographic_FINAL.pdf

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**About the MFA**

The Media Federation of Australia (MFA) is the peak body representing media communication companies. The MFA is a non-for-profit organisation established in 1997 with a current membership base that represents over 90% of all media billings placed by media agencies in Australia. The MFA's vision is to encourage operational excellence in the field of media communication connections and to define and develop best practice standards to support its members and the role they play in servicing their clients.