

# Skilling Australians: Workforce Development Case Study

## Newcastle Herald



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Chad Watson, editor, Newcastle Herald

### **Equipping the Newcastle Herald for the digital economy**

Any business with a 150-year history has faced many challenges and had to adapt to change – successfully. The Newcastle Herald can attest to that.

This award-winning regional newspaper, with about 140 employees across departments and associated titles, has responded to technological changes while keeping to its core business of providing readers’ with high-quality news, information and opinion from the Hunter Valley region, Australia and overseas.

Strong competition from other media is not new to the Herald or the newspaper industry but, in today’s economy, competition has expanded with breath-taking speed.

Audience habits have changed dramatically. They may still read a newspaper but often in digital format, and very likely sourced from the web or social media.

With the Herald’s long history and commitment to the Hunter Valley community, injecting about \$14million in wages and production annually, the

newspaper was determined to rise to the digital media challenge.

In 2013, the Herald became the first newspaper to collect Pacific Area Newspaper Publishers’ Association Awards for print, website and app in the same year.

The Herald recognised that its journalists had been crucial to the newspaper’s achievements and was keen to bolster the technical skills of the paper’s workforce in the face of industry-wide restructuring.

Equipping employees with such skills would not only allow them to participate in the ever-expanding digital economy; believing that a responsive workforce would ensure the paper’s future survival and success.

In addition, the Herald wanted to:

- improve productivity and efficiency,
- provide career progression opportunities, and
- implement succession planning.

The Herald went from publishing six print editions a week to also hosting a website with various specialised landing pages, plus utilising and maintaining

- Facebook
- Instagram
- Twitter
- smart phone app
- a social media aggregation service
- sports panel video shows
- moderated web comments,
- live blogging
- user-generated digital content
- online picture galleries and
- livestreaming of political debates
- community events and
- local sports matches

### **The workforce development solution**

The first step was to undertake a skills audit.

The audit of existing employees revealed many had qualifications which pre-dated the digital age.



Employees also provided input on the current skills required for their jobs in the digital context and the skills gaps to be addressed. For example, journalists highly experienced in reporting for print media needed skills to prepare their reports for digital media.

It was apparent that employee skills needed to be broadened, particularly around the use of new technology to achieve quality improvements in both product and service offerings.

The next step was to identify a training program.

Working closely with Hunter TAFE, the Herald decided on the Visual Communications Specialist Skill Set for people designing visual content for the web.

The Skill Set comprises three specific units of competency: preparing video material for the web, graphic design of components for digital or print media, and producing visual images for the web.

The Skill Set provided an ideal way to top up the skills of the newspaper's employees. The training was customised to the newspaper's requirements and deadlines,

delivered at its offices, and completed more quickly than a full qualification. At the same time, the units are components of nationally recognised training and can be supplemented as required.

#### **Successful outcomes**

The time taken to review workforce needs and commitment to developing their workforce has been a clear success. According to Chad Watson, the Herald's editor,

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Gabriel Wingate-Pearse, a Herald journalist and course participant, wholeheartedly endorsed the program, describing the course as 'practical, applicable, and timely'. She went on:

*"It was an excellent introduction to everyday multimedia tools and higher end equipment- just enough to arm a working journalist with the skills and knowledge to produce the sort of material our growing online audience is looking for (and a lot of fun). Highly recommended."*

# HERALD NEWCASTLE

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