

POWER PROFILE



Photo: Berton Chang

# INTELLIGENCE TESTS

Ewan Ross, Greater China area director at Meltwater, is making a mark in the region’s media monitoring sector, writes **John Cremer**

## HIGH-FLYERS

**D**ecisiveness is a key trait for any aspiring executive, and it didn’t take Ewan Ross long to decide that banking wasn’t for him.

With a five-year master’s degree in economics and economic history from Edinburgh University, it had seemed obvious to accept a coveted place on Standard Chartered’s management trainee scheme. But despite the attractive salary and generally bright prospects, he started having second thoughts even during the new joiners’ on-boarding programme.

“I just couldn’t see myself in that kind of environment and didn’t aspire to be someone further up the chain,” says Ross, who now, just a few years later, is Greater China area director for media intelligence firm Meltwater. “Growing up, I played in bands, wrote songs and scripts, made videos, and even had a go at film and TV production. I wanted to do something which was more creative and allowed for initiative and ideas.”

Though born in London, Ross was raised in Kinross, an “unremarkable” small town north of Edinburgh. While it made for a happy upbringing, he felt early on that he had to get out and see more of the world.

“I was ambitious and knew that whatever I achieved in life would be through my own efforts,” he says. “In my school and community, if you wanted something, you had to make it happen. And though I chose

to study economics because I was good at maths, I also thought it would open up other avenues.”

That proved so in the form of an internship with FMCG giant Procter & Gamble. Those few weeks were a real eye-opener, introducing Ross to the possibilities of marketing, PR, international assignments, and the keys to a BMW.

“Perhaps I had my head turned a little,” he says, noting the contrast with a previous volunteer stint teaching English to 10-year-olds in Romania. “But anyway I joined Standard Chartered in 2008, just as the financial world was collapsing all around, and soon realised it was no place for the part of me that wanted to make an impact and have a real influence.”

So, changing tack, he opted to join Meltwater in Edinburgh, initially in a sales role. Within seven months, though, he was promoted to manager and, not long after, was on the plane to Cape Town to run the main South African office.

The firm, founded in Norway in 2001, uses software to monitor news and social media so as to give clients usable intelligence, analysis and market insights. With companies in every sector realising the importance of tracking and interpreting online data in the digital era, the scope for growth was almost limitless.

Reflecting this, Ross was transferred to New Delhi barely 12 months on to start a new office from scratch. He hired an eight-person team and steadily developed products

and strategies tailored to the needs of the Indian market.

The next stop, about a year later, was Hong Kong. Since arriving, Ross has also overseen the expansion of offices in Shanghai and Beijing, taking total headcount to 60-plus, with plans to move into evolving areas like talent analytics.

“There’s no doubt it’s challenging to run a ‘software as a service’ company dealing with mainland China; language is always a big issue,” he says. “But it is also a huge opportunity. You have to take it and run with it, and I’m lucky to have one of the better markets in terms of growth.”

The head office is currently investing millions in R&D to build a new platform and is considering how best to capture and include extra data from sources like patent offices, job adverts and LinkedIn. “We can see that general business strategy will be increasingly

shaped by insights from online data. Data analytics can also play a key role in recruitment and HR by reporting what exists and predicting what could or should happen.”

Away from work, Ross still finds time to play the guitar and go diving and hopes to get further involved in creative projects and TV production. And when Meltwater’s “project China” nears completion, he would like some time to take stock before committing to further challenges.

“My personality type finds it difficult to do something that would be a step backwards,” he says. “But I’ve always been interested in teaching, mentoring and developing people in a business context. That’s a key part of my role now, and I hope to do more in future.”

For the full story visit [www.cjpbs.com/hk/highfliers](http://www.cjpbs.com/hk/highfliers)

## HAVING AN IMPACT

**Ewan Ross gives his five factors for success.**

- Discover your calling** “I find it sad that people feel a lot of pressure to follow a career path that won’t let them make the most of their talents ... we should have the courage to do something a bit different.”
- Get your hands dirty** “We emphasise that you learn this business by getting experience ‘at the coalface’. That means doing sales, meeting clients, and understanding what makes them tick.”
- Drive returns** “When we hire, it’s because we believe the individuals will help grow the company as a cashflow-positive model.”
- Be ambitious** “The aim is to keep attracting high-calibre young candidates who are hungry to do something challenging and looking to run their own business unit.”
- Show spirit** “We mainly hire fresh graduates, who can be from any discipline. The most important things for us are character, personality, attitude, integrity and willingness to learn.”

## NEWS BITS



**Starbucks to hire 10,000 refugees worldwide after Trump ban**

NEW YORK – Starbucks plans to hire 10,000 refugees worldwide over the next five years in response to President Donald Trump’s travel ban.

Starbucks chairman and CEO Howard Schultz announced the news in a letter to employees posted on the company’s website. He said the hires would be fleeing war, persecution and discrimination in the 75 countries where the company operates.

“We will start this effort here in the US by making the initial focus of our hiring those individuals who have served with US troops as interpreters and support personnel,” Schultz said. *AFP*



**EU nurses registering in UK falls by 90 per cent post-Brexit**

LONDON – The number of European nurses registering to work in Britain has fallen by 90 per cent since last June’s Brexit vote, says the British Nursing and Midwifery Council (NMC).

A total of 101 nurses and midwives from EU nations registered in December, down from 1,304 in July, the month after the referendum. The National Health Service (NHS) already has a staff shortage, with 24,000 nursing vacancies.

Other possible reasons for the drop are the toughening of the English language test in 2016, or the pound’s sharp decline, which has cut wages in euro terms. *AFP*



**China trade gap cost 3.4m US jobs from 2001-2015, report says**

WASHINGTON – A yawning trade deficit with China cost 3.4 million US jobs between 2001 and 2015, according to a report published Tuesday, coinciding with White House efforts to retool trade policy.

Mounting US reliance on Chinese imports and unfair Chinese trade practices helped hollow out the US manufacturing sector, which accounted for nearly three-quarters of all jobs lost due to the trade gap, said the report by the non-partisan Economic Policy Institute (EPI).

The EPI says that between 2001 and 2015 the US trade deficit with China more than quadrupled to US\$483.2 billion. *AFP*

Photos: SCMP, Thinkstock, Reuters

## CASE STUDY

# Take heed of new legal developments in 2017

**W**ith the New Year well under way, now is a prime time to focus on key employment-law developments and identify matters to watch out for in the Year of the Rooster. The following may provide some food for thought.

**Minimum wage and upskilling**

A statutory minimum wage has been in place in Hong Kong since May 1, 2011. The current minimum wage is HK\$32.50 per hour. Subject to approval by the Legislative Council, this will be raised to HK\$34.50, with effect from May 1, 2017. This is the smallest increase since the baseline was introduced five years ago.

While the news will come as a disappointment to low-wage workers,

it could also cause concern among labour-intensive businesses, given rising labour costs. As more companies look for ways to improve labour efficiency, the future of work will continue to change with globalisation and with the increased use of smart machines and robotics.

Employers and employees should all be alert to the fact that some types of jobs will eventually be phased out and that skill mismatches will continue to grow.

Upskilling of the workforce is therefore key to overcoming skill mismatches, as businesses will continue to change and evolve very rapidly in the “gig economy”.

**Severance and long-service payments**

As confirmed by the chief executive in his policy address in January, the government is planning to abolish the mechanism allowing employers to use Mandatory Provident Fund (MPF) contributions to offset severance and long-service payments.

Currently, the formula for calculating severance payment or long-service payment is the employee’s number of years of service multiplied by either two-thirds of the employee’s last full month’s

## Employers should set standards by ensuring their company’s anti-fraud policy and code of ethics is adhered to

salary or two-thirds of HK\$22,500 – whichever is lower.

Employers are entitled to offset from the liability of paying a severance or long-service payment MPF contributions made in respect of any years of service for which the severance or long-service payment is payable.

However, the government is planning to progressively abolish the mechanism that allows employers to use MPF contributions to offset severance or long-service payments.

Once the offset mechanism is abolished, employers will be given subsidies for 10 years to deal with extra costs during the adjustment period.

The government also proposes to change the severance and long-service payment calculation formula by lowering the amount of severance and long-service payment from two-thirds of the staff member’s monthly salary to half a month as compensation for each year of service.

Scrapping the MPF offset scheme will likely win wide support from the public and

the legislators as this will result in better severance and long-service protection for employees. Since business restructurings will continue to gather pace this year and in the coming years, employers should definitely watch this space when counting the costs of redundancies.

**Corruption**

Going forward, greater resources will be devoted by the various regulators to combat money laundering and corruption. As such, shortcuts and greed could end up coming home to roost.

In the private sector, anybody who offers advantages to an employee in return for favours without the approval of the employer is guilty of bribery. Any employee who accepts or solicits such an advantage is also guilty.

In the last quarter of 2016, a businessman was jailed for six months for attempting to bribe a bank official with a bottle of perfume to help him open a bank account. The businessman apparently could not clearly explain the details of his

business or the services he required of the bank. In an attempt to expedite the process, he offered the bank employee the perfume as a “gift”. The matter was then reported by the bank to the regulators.

As high-profile fraud, money-laundering and corruption cases continue to make headlines, properly implementing an ethics programme is crucial to fighting corruption and fraud in the workplace.

Employers should set standards by ensuring their company’s anti-fraud policy and code of ethics is adhered to by integrating certain policies in employee manuals. These include raising awareness through staff training and building an internal compliance environment; conducting risk assessments to identify significant high-risk areas; providing whistleblowing channels; applying disciplinary action consistently; and regularly testing internal systems and controls.

Early planning is the key to success. As such, get cracking now because “the whole year must be planned for in the spring!”

The information contained in this article should not be relied on as legal advice and should not be regarded as a substitute for detailed advice in individual cases. If advice concerning individual problems or other expert assistance is required, the service of a competent professional adviser should be sought.



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