

The mother of all PR jobs

Great career, good salary, interesting clients. Tick the box marked “Joburg”. No cash, cool lifestyle, mellow work. Tick the box marked “Cape Town”. Right? Wrong. The PR industry in Cape Town has experienced considerable growth over the last two years, but now it’s facing a challenge – not because of the lack of new business but simply as a result of a shortage of quality consultants, according to PR agencies Sentient Communications and Atmosphere.

The Mother City can’t find good senior people fast enough. Clients are realising the strategic value of effective PR campaigns and budgets are getting bigger – but agencies need to find the right calibre of people.

Explains Sarah Rice, MD and founder of niche IT PR consultancy Sentient Communications, “In talking to other consultancies in Cape Town, we’ve realised that we are all facing the same challenges. Business in Cape Town is booming; we get weekly requests for credentials pitches, additional project work and alliances with advertising agencies to pitch for big corporate accounts.

Candidates reluctant to move

“But the lack of new entrants into the PR industry, coupled with the reluctance of Joburg candidates to move down here, has really impacted on our capabilities to service new business effectively. We have therefore declined several pitches for new business.”

The sentiment is was echoed by Nicola Nel of Atmosphere, which has offices in Cape Town and Johannesburg, who says there is a general perception that PR consultancies take a lot from their staff, but do not invest into their long-term growth.

So why do PR professionals in Johannesburg prefer to stay there? On any given day, you can find Jozi people wishing out loud that they could live somewhere nice, somewhere by the sea. But the thought of relocating to where it actually is nice to live is never seriously considered, because of the common misconception that there is little work in Cape Town, agencies are here-today, gone-tomorrow and salaries are much lower than in Egoli.

Willing to pay good money

What Joburgers don’t know is that not only are PR agencies in the Cape desperate for talented and experienced staff, they are also willing to pay good money for them (measured by comparing equivalent salary scales used by recruitment companies).

“We’ve recently done a quick round-up among the recruitment agents to determine whether our salaries are on par with what is paid in Joburg. More often than not, Joburg candidates can demand higher salaries as they have more in-depth industry knowledge. But we are determined to compete with the best and therefore we are willing to pay more for those exceptional consultants,” Rice adds.

Nel concludes, “Agencies in Cape Town are growing, investing in their staff and creating environments that are conducive to personal growth. We’d love to see more Joburg consultants taking the big step - work hard, play hard, live well, get a tan.”

That’s PR in Cape Town.

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