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media release

Discrimination dilemma as companies seek to plug skills gap

Australian companies want to hire mature professionals to address the growing skills shortage but are being hampered by the very industry established to service their recruitment needs, according to new research by mature age recruiters, Adage.

In a survey of nearly 1,000 mature professionals, more than half the respondents claimed they had experienced discriminatory practices at the hands of the recruitment industry, thwarting attempts to connect successfully with organisations.

The disconnect represents a dilemma for corporate Australia as it comes under increasing pressure to mitigate the economic risks to their business as more than 4.1 million Australians retire over the next decade and 85% of new labour force growth comes from the over 45s.

The research was conducted by Adage.com.au, the recruitment initiative of leading mature age consultancy SageCo Pty Ltd.

Director, **Alison Monroe** says "We included a survey of senior decision makers too, representing 220 Australian organisations. This ensured we were getting both sides of the story and were able to understand where business priorities and barriers lay."

The results revealed 91% recognised that creating age balance in their organisation would be integral to future success and sustainability and 67% were already developing strategies to attract mature workers to their company.

The findings represent a significant shift in attitude according to **Professor Louise Rolland**, CEO of Business Work and Ageing at Swinburne University. "It's encouraging after years of talking about the subject that organisations are recognising that if they ignore age management they will face the loss of people, knowledge and experience as the baby boomers retire" she said.

"Organisations who do nothing will find it increasingly difficult to secure the most skilled and appropriate workers as their competitors target their employment offer to attract and retain mature people," said SageCo Advisory Panellist, Rolland.

Monroe agrees the research confirms anecdotal evidence collected by Adage since going to market in May 2005. "We are hearing both sides of the dilemma – mature workers willing to work and companies willing to hire them. But somehow there is a disconnection and neither party is satisfied with the end result," she said.

Adage.com.au seeks to address this gap and with the support of corporate sponsors **AMP** and **Insurance Australia Group (IAG)**, is quickly gaining a reputation for placing high calibre mature professionals into organisations serious about hiring experience and wisdom.

"Adage.com.au is Australia's first and only online mature age recruitment site where companies can source professional mature job seekers, and mature professionals can access resources, training, job leads and the support to ensure they are marketable to employers," said Monroe

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Adage is an initiative of SageCo Pty Ltd

"Adage bypasses the traditional problems facing mature people trying to navigate a recruitment industry where the average age of a recruiter is 27.

"The latent age discrimination faced by mature workers, is something the recruitment industry is starting to recognise and address, but there is a long way to go before we see the average agency extending the same opportunities to baby boomers as are given to generations X and Y," said Monroe

Monroe believes the risks to companies are enormous, and are not just related to economics and reputation. "Companies can face significant legal risk too. Only this week the Anti-Discrimination Board reported increases in the past year of complaints relating to age discrimination. This should be a wake up call for companies and the recruitment industry," she said.

The Adage research also discovered:

- 51% of mature job seekers (45yrs+) were seeking full time, permanent employment
- 49% were seeking flexible options including contracting, consulting or project work
- 95% strongly agreed there was a need for specialist mature recruitment initiatives such as Adage.com.au
- 86% of respondents were more likely to purchase products and services from organisations that employed mature workers.

"We found it startling that the spending habits of baby boomers could be so strongly influenced by whether they perceived a company as empathetic and understanding of the employment needs of their generation," said Monroe.

"It's apparent that if companies hire the wisdom and maturity of the baby boomer generation, and in so doing, mirror their customers in a society where the population is ageing, they can win on all fronts", said Monroe.

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Page 2 of 2 (08.09.05)

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