

Website rolls out the welcome mat

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Date: 08/04/2006
Words: 827
Source: AGE

Publication: The Age
Section: My Career
Page: 13

An online relocation tool is helping people to make a smooth transition, writes **Wendy Taylor**.

MOVING to another country can bring some significant unforeseen changes. Everyone is certain to have questions as they prepare to move and then settle in.

Usually the information they need extends well beyond the basics of renting a property, buying a car and using public transport.

The complexity of moving countries is well understood by relocation consultants but not by many employers. As a result, the amount of support employees receive from employers when moving countries for work varies enormously. Sonia Anderson, business director at Hays Accounting & Finance, a global recruitment firm, says many large listed businesses and professional services firms move staff from overseas, but the support they provide varies from "very broad packages to virtually none". She says relocation is most common among upper-echelon staff, but in some jobs such as risk management, transactions services or corporate finance, companies are prepared to move people "at a more junior level."

"In terms of relocation packages, in some cases we are seeing people's flights being paid for and their accommodation upon arrival, but in other cases organisations are prepared to sponsor someone, but the person has to relocate themselves."

Shani Alexander has worked in relocation for more than eight years, including five in Melbourne "shifting the cream of Australian executives".

Ms Alexander a few years ago noticed a significant change in the job types and people companies were transferring or sponsoring to relocate to Australia. It was no longer just senior executives, but more professionals and trades-people were being recruited to fill skills shortages in Australia. It was a change that she says "created a massive gap" in the relocation market.

"The relocation products are fantastic but employers don't necessarily want to give them to every level of staff. Corporations will pay the money for the executives but in terms of having a corporate account, a relocation company hasn't been able to have a product that services the entire account. Corporations won't pay for some of the moves by lower levels of staff," she says.

"They know they have to do their visa, provide two weeks' accommodation, move their furniture and give them their flight, but they won't give them any other help."

Without the help of a relocation consultant such as senior executives and families have access to, other employees are usually left to find information as best they can.

Seeing an opportunity to develop a new product for a mushrooming group, Ms Alexander quit her job and spent the next two years designing an online, do-it-yourself resource that would answer all the questions she

had fielded as a relocation consultant.

The result is a virtual relocater resource called relocations-made-easy.

The aim of her resource is to provide help for relocating personnel from three months before they leave home until three months after they arrive, she says.

Relocations-made-easy covers information and links that answer thousands of questions that crop up when a person or family moves to a new country, such as: What suburb would suit me? Can I bring my dog, and if I can, how long will it spend in quarantine and what company will move it? What are the laws on car restraints for babies? Will I need an adaptor if I bring my Xbox? How do I pay to use CityLink? What is Medicare and will I need private health insurance?

"All our information is in the public domain, but unless you are in Melbourne you don't know what you are looking for," says Ms Alexander.

She says organisations signing up for corporate memberships for their staff have included those bringing in nurses, engineers, mining staff and accountants to Australia.

She initially saw her primary client group as companies looking for a low-cost solution to support their non-executives to relocate to Australia, but she says the product is also aimed at skilled migrants arriving in Australia without sponsorship.

According to Department of Immigration and Multicultural Affairs statistics, this group is much larger than the group of people coming to Australia with the support of their employer.

In the 2002-2003 financial year more than 60,000 skilled migrants settled in Australia and fewer than 10,000 were sponsored by an employer.

The growth in the number of skilled migrants entering Australia further fuelled Ms Alexander's optimism that relocations-made-easy has been launched at the right time and will fill a significant gap in the relocation field.

"The skilled migrant that has no sponsorship and is looking for answers will pay for a low cost on-line product," she says.

More information: relocations-made-easy.com

Shani Alexander is a presenter at the fifth RCSA symposium, titled "Workforce Wanted: Australia's skill and labor shortages in a global context", on Tuesday.

Visit <http://rca.com.au/symposium/speakers.asp?ID=17>