



# More

Pictures often say more than words and these photographs are proof. Elaine Quinn is a boxing enthusiast and Gareth Coombes-Olney has a passion for tennis. They are part of mobile phone company 3's strategy for increasing engagement, by illustrating how employees are more than just workers in the office.

This photographic study of staff in their non-work environments, 'More than a Number', is one of several initiatives led by Di Macdonald, 3's director of learning and development, and designed with this goal in mind. The portraits, taken by the company's photographers, show a huge diversity of interests. They are on display around the building, along with artwork and biographies. 'It's to show that employees have other lives and other skills and talents and we value that as well,' says John Vickerman, people and property director at 3.

Showing employees that they are valued has become a key concern for 3 as it has gone from technology pioneer to mass consumer brand. The culture change has been huge. Five years ago it was a start-up with no customers, no network and barely 100 employees. Armed with one of the five UK licences for third-generation (3G) telephony – the mobile phone equivalent of

broadband – and no shortage of enthusiasm, 3 set about building its business.

The company has taken a few knocks along the way – surviving the trauma of the dotcom crash and subsequent recession – but now it is almost unrecognisable. It has a national 3G network and more than three million customers who can use their phones as a multimedia hub, downloading anything from *I'm a Celebrity... Get Me Out of Here* updates to Madonna's latest single. Its employee base has grown to 2,500 staff in the UK, including about 650 in the chain of retail stores and roughly 500 in its contact centre in Glasgow. Next year the company is looking at listing on the Stock Exchange.

Such rapid growth has been accompanied by significant changes in the way 3 works. The company has shifted from a start-up culture in the first couple of years to an operational business since the launch of the network in March 2003. 'Growth has been huge – we've gone from a project environment to an operating business with a successful customer base and successful revenues, and that requires a lot of change,' admits Vickerman. 'We constantly revise our products to meet customer demand, and every time we do so we have to reconfigure the business.' Although not without its share of challenges, Vickerman believes the constant growth and change is part of what makes 3 a 'fun and exciting' place to be.

Like any company, 3 has some core roles, such as finance and human resources, but there are many that previously did not exist. This has given staff, who are mostly aged between 26 and 32, the chance to carve out a niche in an



# than a number

When a company is small, internal communications isn't a problem. But when it undergoes rapid growth, it has to make a bigger effort to keep its workforce engaged. Caitlin Fitzsimmons reports on the innovative way in which mobile operator 3 has tackled the problem

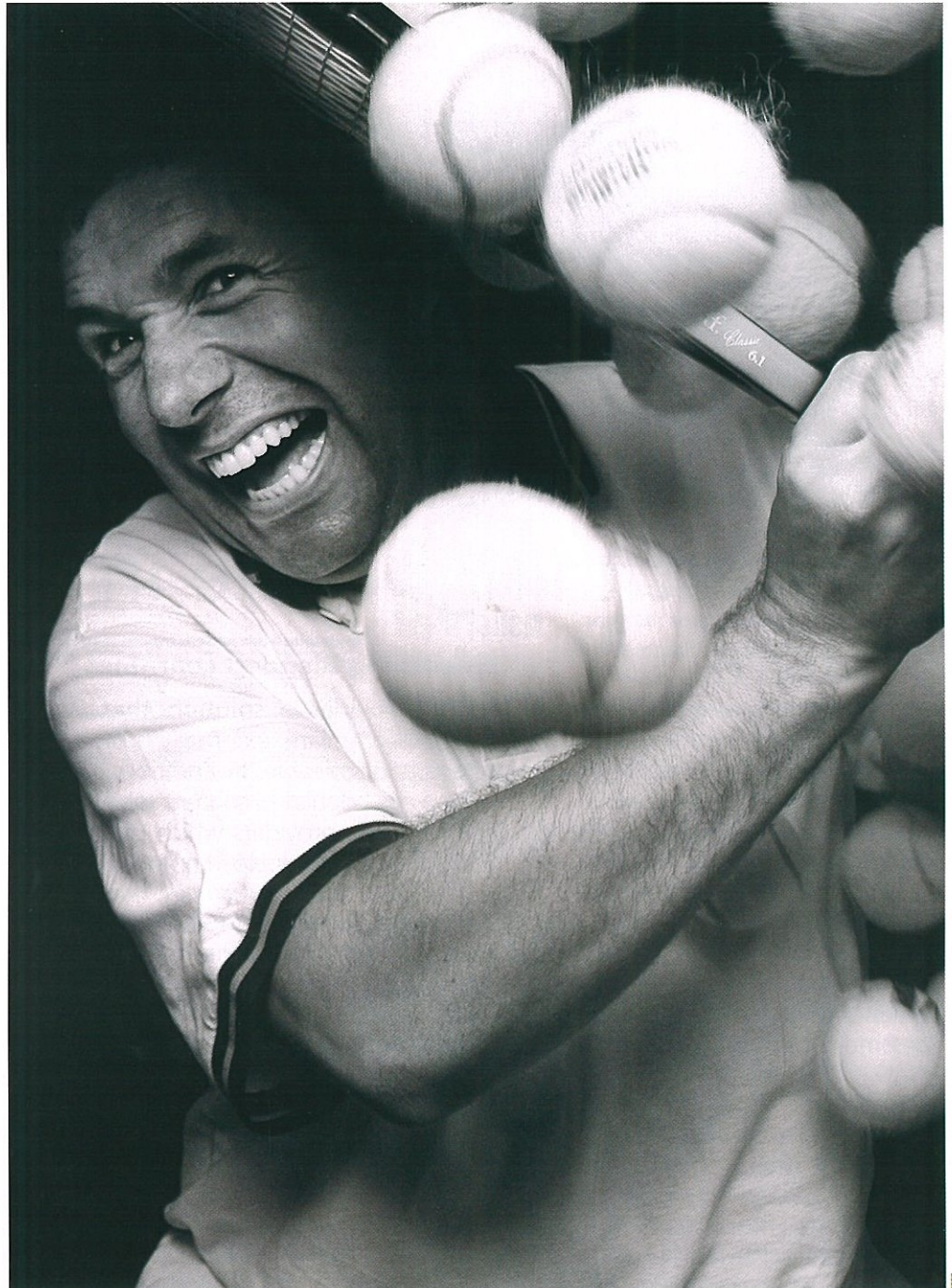
area of particular interest, such as music, and run significant parts of the business on their own. 'We've got a lot of young, enthusiastic people with their own ideas, and what we've got to do is harvest those ideas and turn them into productive output,' he explains. 'Our challenge is to make it a fun place for people to be, but also to get the job done.'

The move from technology start-up to high-street consumer brand has inevitably brought cultural change. A large, established company needs certain rules and processes, and the biggest challenge for 3 in terms of people management has been implementing that, and keeping its young workforce motivated at the same time. Naturally there have been growing pains.

In 2004 the company decided it needed a clearer picture of its employees and their concerns, and commissioned Getfeedback to conduct a major survey. Ali Gill, co-founder of Getfeedback, says 3's approach differed to most companies' because it spent several weeks making sure it was asking the right questions.

'What often happens is people use stock questions and end up with very long surveys. About 80% don't act on the research because they haven't asked what's important to them,' Gill explains. 'We kept it very short and to the point, to find out what was important to 3 and its workforce.' The result was a survey with 45 questions, focused on how engaged employees were with the company and whether they were happy and proud to work there.

Some surveys suffer from employee apathy or reluctance to speak out, but





## Recruitment – only the technology-savvy need apply

You expect a fast-growing company such as mobile media operator 3 to be innovative in its approach to recruitment. Like the company itself, the existing workforce is young, largely aged between 26 and 32. It seems logical that 3 should use its own 3G applications to attract technology-savvy candidates who will be the right fit for this youthful culture.

The approach to recruitment, which won the company 'Best Recruitment Innovation' at the Recruitment Advertising Awards, **targets 3 video mobile-phone users by giving them access to information on their phones about jobs at 3.**

The idea was the result of a meeting between Will Barribal, managing director of video company In2Vista, and John Vickerman, people and property director at 3, to look at ways of improving the recruitment process. 'Instead of agencies just sending CVs of candidates they had short-listed, we came up with the idea of making a three- to five-minute video of them being interviewed by the agency,' recalls Barribal. At the same time they looked

at ways of getting better information to candidates – hence the video job description, he explains.

These video job descriptions are accessed from 3 handsets by means of a short code. The idea was tested by recruitment agencies working with 3 in Glasgow, giving out the codes to suitable candidates.

In the videos members of staff describe their jobs. 'Having our employees talk about the roles in their own words gives candidates a street-level view of the job,' says Vickerman. 'We know of examples where employees have shown their friends recruitment videos on their mobile and they in turn have applied for roles. It's a great way of generating applications from our target audience,' he adds.

The method has been in use for approximately six months and has worked particularly well, the company claims, for contact-centre roles where there are a number of jobs to be filled on a regular basis. It obviously takes a certain amount of time and effort to put together these video so it is considered less cost-effective for one-off positions.



A dedicated channel – '3ville' – has been created on the intranet for retail staff

the company realised that it needed to focus on cross-working and ensuring better inter-departmental communication. 'We needed to break down the barriers between teams, mix them up a bit, get them working across functions – and it seems to be working a lot better,' Vickerman says. The company has also increased communication to its retail employees who are spread out among 170 stores across the country. This includes the creation of '3ville', a dedicated retail staff channel on the intranet.

Vickerman adds that the corporate values, which include a strong focus on



**We'd fallen into that trap of just putting the values up on the wall... What we've had to do is live them a bit more**

John Vickerman, people and property director, 3

speed of delivery, have been refreshed and restated. 'I think we'd fallen into that trap of just putting the values up on the wall. People were a bit cynical about that, probably rightly so,' he admits. 'What we've had to do is live them a bit more to get people more engaged.'

Another revelation from the survey was that some respondents were keen to become more involved in designing the reception space and café area. The result is that the interior now changes every four to six weeks, with a different theme, from basketball to music. The company has commissioned Getfeedback to repeat the survey in May but Vickerman says that the questions are likely to be slightly different.

The past year has brought enormous changes, with new products and services, the acquisition of another million or so customers and the extension of the 3G network to 86% coverage. The pace of change is such that the staff survey will now become an annual event, Vickerman explains. 'We've had a lot of business improvement this year, and it really is a radically different place to what it was a year ago. We're not a bank; we're not going to stay the same for another five years.' ■

Vickerman says this was not a problem 3 encountered. More than 80% of staff completed the survey, a fact he attributes partly to the youthfulness of the workforce. 'What we found with this age group is that they're very, very upfront and ballsy,' he says frankly. 'They have no problem at all expressing themselves, and they're actually looking for any vehicle to do so.'

The survey, which was conducted online over two and a half weeks in December 2004, suggested that 3's workforce was generally happy and engaged with the business. Almost four out of five (78%) of respondents were proud to work there, citing factors such as confidence in 3's business success and feeling challenged by the job. Similar numbers (79%) enjoyed working at 3, which was based on the co-operation of colleagues and again, confidence in 3's business success. The survey was not entirely positive, however: internal communication was rated a lowly 44% and company values scored just 55%.

Vickerman had not expected the company to score badly on communication given its day-to-day business. This was not good news. 'That really came as a surprise,' he admits. 'We have face-to-face meetings with employees, a quarterly roadshow, a weekly newsletter, a website and yet at the end of that we had people saying: "I really need to know more about the business".' Letting everyone know more presents problems, he points out, because of the need for business confidentiality. For commercial reasons you can't share everything with everyone.

Vickerman explains what has been done to tackle other issues raised. While the company had always been good at keeping staff informed about what was happening the following week, since the survey the focus has shifted to explaining strategy and the reasons for particular decisions.

The survey had also highlighted tensions between departments – for example, the technology team might be working on a product, while another team waits for them to deliver it. Instead of more teambuilding exercises,