



Kate Byrdy

People's Choice Award – Best Employer of Choice

Jeanswest

While most of the FEMA judging was done by an expert panel which met in Melbourne, the judges for the People's Choice Award for Best Employer of Choice came from 49 countries.

The debut award was decided by the online votes of more than 5000 people who viewed the two-minute video prepared by each of the five finalists. Fairfax sent a film crew to each and the videos, promoted to the MyCareer subscriber database, on Facebook and Twitter, were placed on the FEMA website for voting.

Driving force behind the fun video prepared by award winner Jeanswest was the company's recruitment officer, Belinda Loftus, who not only directed it and wrote the script, she acted in it. "I was one of the bum wiggles," says Ms Loftus, of an hilarious sequence featuring denim-clad staff members' bottoms.

But although the video is a laugh, it has a serious message. Kate Byrdy, Jeanswest general manager, human resources, says it aimed to be short and snappy, but encapsulate the perks of working at Jeanswest, the strong team culture, the fun environment and the value it places on its employees.

It also included the training offered through the company's Denim University, so staff in any of its 230 stores, whether in Melbourne and Sydney or Karratha, have the same career opportunities.

"There is a stereotype that it is just retail, but there are so many opportunities," Ms Loftus says.

Ms Byrdy says although the company recruits staff from a range of age brackets because its brand suits a wide variety of ages, it employs many young people and, with their urge to travel and lack of ties such as mortgage and children, staff retention can be challenging.

"An encouraging thing is that we get a lot of people coming back to the business," she says. The company offers paid maternity leave and Ms Byrdy hopes that among the returnees will be the young mum-to-be, pregnant with twins, who features with her maternity bump in the video.

"Belinda did a lot of work putting the video together to capture the Jeanswest environment – that we have a fun environment, but we work hard as well!"