

Opening Minds at The Academy

National Australia Bank's professional-development initiative, *The Academy*, harnesses the evocative power of sound and music to prime employees for personal and professional transformation.

Setting the Stage

To commemorate its 150th anniversary, National Australia Bank (NAB) launched *The Academy*, a progressive corporate training initiative designed to support and inspire employees as they strive toward their professional aspirations.

Using state-of-the-art technology and an experiential approach to training that includes improvised role playing and collaborative creative projects, *The Academy* effectively extends NAB's promise of "more give, less take" to its own employees.

This progressive mentality is also evident in *The Academy's* training spaces, which occupy over 40,000 square feet of NAB's Docklands headquarters in Melbourne. Specially designed rooms such as Zen, Lodge, and Sketch each have their own unique purpose and a distinctive mood to support the types of training activities conducted there. The goal of these imaginative spaces? Nothing short of facilitating progressive



The Academy atrium is wired for sound, creating a playful environment where employees can interact with the architecture.

transformation amongst NAB employees.

This ambitious spirit led NAB to ask, "How can The Academy use sound and music to challenge employees and inspire them to break out of the corporate mind-set and discover new ways to interact, collaborate, and learn?"

Taking the First Step: The Academy Stairs

The main entrance to *The Academy* is where the transformation begins for NAB employees. Timbre turned this sculptural, two-story flight of stairs (pictured above) into an interactive tunnel of sound lined with speakers, infrared sensors and body-detecting cameras.

As employees travel up and down, the staircase comes alive with three distinct rhythm-based compositions, based on the time of day—morning, noon or evening. As traffic increases and as employees discover they can "trip" a range of sounds, so do the number of activated musical loops and sound effects.

By forcing employees to run this interactive "gauntlet of sound," NAB encourages them to leave the corporate mind-set behind and transition to a more open, experimental frame of mind—one more conducive to learning and personal development.

"The outcome is nothing short of world class."

Maria Tassone, NAB General Manager for Strategy and Innovation

Keeping Ears and Minds Open: The River of Words

To keep *Academy* attendees on their toes in between training sessions, Timbre designed a second acoustic installation, *River of Words*, a sonic "stream of consciousness" that flows through the NAB's central atrium, where *Academy* attendees gather for breaks and lunches.



On a trip through *The Academy* atrium, the hum of NAB employees can be heard.

After recording employee testimonials about their professional goals and aspirations, Timbre used audio morphing technology and a series of strategically placed speakers to transform employees' voices into a watery "stream" that travels through the atrium. This stream is accompanied by snippets of additional employee dialogue, morphed to sound like the forest creatures of some alien planet, which surprise passers by as they walk through the space.

Interactivity and employee contribution are encouraged by the presence of a digital recording device at the Stream's "headwaters." A simple box with



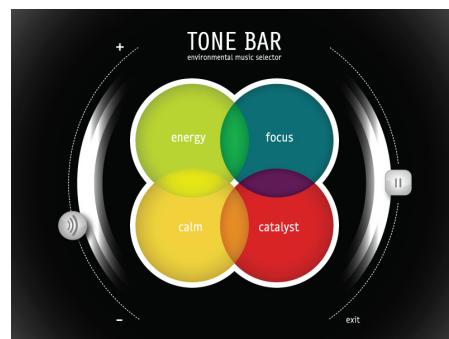
At the "headwaters" of the *River of Words*, employees can record their thoughts and send them "downstream" into the Atrium.

a glowing blue button invites employees to share their thoughts and opinions, which are then incorporated into the sonic experience that surrounds them.

Setting the Mood: Tone Bar

To help trainers and facilitators create the ideal atmosphere for their learning activities, Timbre designed a custom ambient music system for *The Academy's* conference rooms that delivers four hand-picked playlists via a touch-screen interface.

The playlists are divided into four distinct categories—Energy, Focus, Calm, and Catalyst—permitting *Academy* facilitators to easily select music that best suits their needs.



Within *The Academy's* many conference rooms, Timbre's customized background music system helps keep groups engaged and in the optimal frame of mind.

The Sound of Change

With two large-scale, interactive installations and a one-of-a-kind overhead music system, Timbre helped NAB deploy sound in an engaging and innovative way to support *The Academy's* mission of catalyzing its employees and motivating them toward personal and professional development.

As *The Academy* evolves to meet new demands and accommodate new modes of training, Timbre will repurpose the installed audio infrastructure with content that sets precisely the right tone—and frame of mind—for whatever NAB's goals are.

In the meantime, NAB employees are enjoying a corporate environment that sounds anything but corporate. And they're able to approach their professional development courses with the spark of inspiration; a more open and nimble mind; and perhaps an expression of wonder and delight on their faces.

Want to know more?

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