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### One more time – James Cryer to Rod Urquhart

Thursday, 20 May 2004

By Print21

It's tough being a messenger!

My Open Letter on the Print Awards certainly evoked a response – indicative that, hopefully, our industry is emerging into maturity from its 400 years of unchallenged dominance as a communication medium and is able to tackle uncomfortable issues openly and candidly.

(To review the correspondence to date type *Open Letter* in Archive Search)

And this need to address new and confronting issues will only get stronger. *Quality* – so dearly cherished as the Holy Grail to which we've all paid our dues – has been a useful expression of our collective talents for many years. What Rod Urquhart may be confusing however is the pursuit of quality with the quest for excellence.

In this modern, complex, multi-dimensional world, companies have to excel on a variety of fronts to succeed, not just one. Sadly, to prove my point, let us consider the fate of several prolific 'award-winning' companies (according to a quality-driven criteria) of recent years. Let us focus on three of the greatest icons, representing the pinnacle of quality-award winners – Pot Still Press, RT Kelly and Websdales.

Where are they now? Consigned to the dustbin of history. Although, according to Rod's criteria (all were multi NPA winners), they should have been the most successful, robust and indestructible of companies – 'bullet-proofed' by a mantle of quality.

Cynics are now saying that the most successful companies (and I could name a few) don't care about winning National Print Awards. They're too busy delivering *commercially acceptable* quality jobs (not necessarily award-winning) on time and at a fair market rate, to worry about awards. Their awards are winning customer satisfaction.

My point here is that quality – that most elusive object of our desires – is a relative thing that exists in the mind of the beholder. Whereas the Awards, by their very nature, promote quality as some absolute goal, to be obtained at any cost.

As I mentioned in my original comments, anyone can win an award if they hot-house a job.

I have no fundamental quarrel with Rod, however – we are all seeking to promote our industry in its quest for survival. And nobody should interpret my remarks as anti-quality.

My purpose in airing these thoughts was to invite discussion on options available to us. To me, excellence requires achievements in a number of areas – including benefits to customers, to employees, to suppliers and to the environment. It may include such things as technical innovation, developing in-house training schemes (a badly needed area), employee profit-sharing arrangements, use of the internet in building customer rapport, export success, etc, etc. Digital printing should also get more recognition.

The fertile minds of the judges, I'm sure, could easily develop a new template-for-success, and if in doubt they could always turn to the Brits, who went through this painful reality-check five years ago.

As for the Bogong moth (*infusa agrotis*), I invite Rod to come cross-country skiing with me so as to inspect these little beauties at close quarters.

Food for thought?

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