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Call for a public debate on a new Print Awards Program – James Cryer

Tuesday, 24 November 2009

By Print21

Recently, a member of the magazine printing fraternity raised an interesting point when he referred to how the newly adopted best-of-the-best national print awards may lead to discrimination against some states.

His suggestion is that "all ... entries that are highly commendable be included in the NPA, which will enable a result that is more indicative of the best of the best". He was referring to the apparent loop-hole where, by insisting on an entry from all states, it is theoretically possible for a lesser quality job to win a gold, merely because it is the only entry from that state, in that category.)

But while his remarks were focused on the web-offset segment, they speak of a bigger issue lurking in the background. I refer to the need for a fundamental re-think of the whole awards regime. Technology, in the form of so many new processes – and combinations of processes – has rendered much of the existing awards structure a relic from a by-gone era. Nothing wrong with that in one sense – it's probably a sign of a healthy industry moving forward.

As I've written extensively before, it is also debatable to have entries from different processes all competing against each other in the same category. A simple example is Annual Reports. More and more they're being produced via web offset. It's a bit meaningless to pitch them alongside a sheet-fed offset product – utilizing different processes, on different stocks. So we're effectively excluding web-printed annual reports, unless we introduce a sub-category for them.

In other words, there is a case for a more flexible, expandable framework which will accommodate future categories, without having to add patchwork solutions every few years – or every time there's a new printed product – eg, 1) newspapers printed by ink-jet, or 2) solar-panels printed by ink-jet (an exciting new initiative at the University of NSW).

Under the present regime, which consists of a mixture of products (eg, books) and processes (eg, flexo) you inevitably end up with a patchwork-quilt of awards, which requires constant fiddling every time a new process is developed.



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Let's see how the current regime would deal just with the two examples, above:

Regarding 1) newspapers printed by ink-jet, being a newspaper the natural fit would be to put it into web-offset uncoated, which would place it unfairly against cold-set. Or would you put it into digital printing inkjet, which would place it unfairly against, say, banners and posters and vehicle-wraps?

Again – what would you do with 2), solar-panels – ink-jet? Put it into digital printing inkjet or special or specialty printing?

This is the problem! Having a mish-mash of products and processes all mixed up in the same awards only leads to mayhem.

One fairer solution is to simply adopt a products-only approach, a list of visible, tangible, products.

Then, sticking with each product you simply have sub-categories – by process! Each entrant is placed in its respective process. Thus, there would be books printed offset and books printed digital. If we ever get a screen-printed book and it meets the judges' criteria – then it automatically goes into the books printed screen printing" category. If it's the only entry, meaning that printer is the only innovator in that category, it wins!

This approach has a side-benefit: encouraging innovation in our industry. Which won't happen if you are forced to combine a whole lot of products all printed by different processes into the one category.

There is a strong case that an awards program should actively encourage new and innovative combinations of printed products. This does not mean there need be more awards. Currently there are about 90-odd awards; 30 by three winners in each category. There is a case that we should only award a highly commended in each category, rather than having a gold, silver and bronze winner at the State level. That way, it's easy to send those finalists off to the Nationals and then you can dish out the Gold, Silver and Bronze. Just an idea, but that's the point, let's have a debate!

My belief is that there is a need for a public debate on what we as an industry want in an awards program. If you have any thoughts on what constitutes a better awards program going forward, let's have your ideas now! There's never been a better time. Send your thoughts to honorine@printnet.com.au or james@jdaprintrecruit.com.au.

The industry can't afford to lose talent such as Joan Grace
[.http://t.co/DuGDpXtwbC](http://t.co/DuGDpXtwbC)

Colin Longbottom heads towards the exit Good man Colin, hope your saddlebags are well loaded for the sunset ride.<http://t.co/d5oamorf2X>

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