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When worlds collide – A voice in the wilderness: James Cryer

Monday, 27 May 2013

By Print21

With PacPrint13 and its dizzying array of new high-tech digital and digital-assisted machinery giving visitors a bright visual cue as to where the future of Australian print is heading, industry gadfly **James Cryer** suggests it's about time for the National Print Awards to reflect this future for print.

Astronomers are hard people to whip into a frenzy. But occasionally – just occasionally – something happens to excite their passions and make them sit up and take notice, or even duck for cover.

It's not often that you get two planets hurtling past each other – both going in completely opposite directions (although, I suppose that's what "going past each other" means).



But last Friday night [24 May] we had a near-miss of the most cataclysmic proportions, as 'planet PacPrint' soared at warp speed into the outer-limits of our imaginations, at once exciting and tantalising with glimpses of what 'the future of print' looks like.

Meanwhile, we had 'planet NPA' [National Print Awards] drifting slowly along in the opposite direction, desperately trying to suck us back into the vortex of yesteryear.

Never was the disconnect more dramatically illustrated, than by the difference in composition of these two bodies – PacPrint proudly presenting the exciting new face of print – 90 per cent digital and 10 per cent offset – while the awards continue to flog those two processes almost in exactly the opposite proportions. What's wrong with this picture?

Why didn't someone frog-march whoever it is that persists with these categories down the aisles at PacPrint to give them a taste of the sunlit uplands where digital is king because it generates so many new and exciting opportunities.

So let me cut to the chase. The real test for a category should be: Does it have the wow factor? If not, chuck it out.

Out would go 'One, Two or Three Colour Printing'.

Out would go 'Leaflets' (Really, leaflets? This is like being rewarded for getting up in the morning.)

Out would go four out of the five 'Magazines' categories (we don't need five categories, plus, they've got their own awards).

Out would go 'Labels-roll' and 'Flexographic' (these are specialist sectors that have their own, much better, awards).

Out would go the 'Small business' category.

Now – before anyone dies of apoplexy – there is a remedy. Let's discard (yes – let's be radical) the old model of gold, silver, bronze as we're kidding ourselves that we can really split the atom between them – and divide EVERY category into 'Large', 'Medium' and 'Small' sized printers.

By doing this you'd then encourage a greater number of smaller entrants (believe me, I've done the survey). Gold, silver and bronze is a hangover from the horse-racing industry – and look at the mess that's in.

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Eliminating these categories alone would save half the audience from nodding-off into their soup.

It would come new and exciting categories like 'Multi-piece productions and campaigns', which really does showcase what print is capable of – i.e. the 'wow factor'!

Somehow, we have to wean ourselves off this obsession with dishing-out rewards just for piling-up dots like pancakes, one upon the other, like a short-order pastry-cook.

We've come a long way – we can *all* do that now. The test of winning an award in a print industry awards event is NOT to impress one's fellow printers – so much as to impress the external print-buyers and even the public at large. *That* should be the acid test! *No wow – no prize.*

But now, this raises a thorny issue: until now, the judges have been instructed to look *only* at the "pancake-stacking" qualities – not if the 'pancakes' are juicy, mouth-watering or even edible. There is a strong case that there should be at least ONE category where the total concept and execution is taken into account and recognized, where everyone gets recognition – from the designer, the photographer, the pre-press – not just the printer!

They do it in the US 'Benny' awards, so why not here? It's called 'bringing the creative-process and the printing-process back together again', which is where they belong. It's something our "Justus" magazine is seeking to do, here.

And finally, still on this theme of catering to a wider audience – the Kiwis, in promoting their "Pride in Print" recently co-opted a daily newspaper to include a supplement promoting *their* awards, which landed squarely on the breakfast tables of half of New Zealand. How's that for a novel approach – getting a 'printer' to promote 'print'!

The NPAs could potentially be a showcase event, proudly displaying our wares to print buyers and the wider community. But nobody is going to get their rocks off while we persist with categories like 'Leaflets' or 'One, Two or Three Colour Printing.

Seriously, we must have a national debate on what we want from our showcase industry awards event. The current awards regime may be a good excuse for a get-together – of course it is! But, it is not a platform which reflects the industry's current abilities and (more importantly) nor does it hint at its future capabilities.

A walk down the aisles at PacPrint was exciting and inspirational, revealing a world of limitless possibilities. That should be the theme for the national print awards

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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3 Responses to "When worlds collide – A voice in the wilderness: James Cryer"

1. May 29, 2013 at 4:02 pm, **Rob** said:

Well said James.
Its time we embrace new technologies.

2. May 31, 2013 at 2:04 am, Stephen Mears said:

Interesting commentary James. Being a graphic designer from the last century you were taught to make the artwork 'idiot proof'. Having then worked in the printing industry you discover the reality is in the detail. Regarding the Benny Awards, D&D Global Group (a Melbourne based company) won numerous Benny awards and their projects were integrated masterpieces – in-house design + photography + print production. Unfortunately, they made an exit in 2007. However, your concept of an integrated media event to promote the industry's capabilities could be seen as a triumph – and a move towards boundary-less projects.

Stephen Mears

3. May 31, 2013 at 10:38 am, **Glenn O'Connor** said:

I tend to agree James, i think awards for technical excellence are important to us as an industry, but they are a pretty dry subject – particularly as most printing has become less craft orientated, and more grounded in technologies unknown even 25 years ago. Involving the creative industries on a broader scale is a great idea, but possibly split the judging – let the technocrats judge the 'pancake stacking', but bring in a panel to include marketing, design and advertising people to judge the creative use of print. Engaging the broader design community can only benefit us all in the long run.

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