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A printing industry by other names – James Cryer

Monday, 10 November 2014

By James Cryer

Industry gadfly and guru, James Cryer, wants to redefine the printing industry by its constituent parts and expand its borders to include the growing segments that are driving more of the current employment opportunities.

How should an industry best reflect its priorities and aspirations, especially when it comes to the associations that represent it members? The first problem is that many of these associations grew off the back of an era which pitted boss against employee and were really power-blocs to advance the cause of companies, as distinct from showering benefits upon the actual slaves who did all the work!

I think we've moved beyond those times. Even the revered *Printing Industries* is only open to companies not individuals. Although I think the mood has shifted away from the old them and us mentality, where what was good for the bosses, was, by definition, bad for the workers. Nowadays, I'd at least like to think we're all in the same bucket.

But *Printing Industries*, which I think is doing a great deal to adapt, still has its roots in the traditional sheet-fed offset sector, and arguably, should really be re-branded as the *Commercial Printed Media Association*. We can't include processes in the name as both offset and digital play a vital role.

Associations are faced with an invidious decision to either expand their frontiers and become more all embracing and thereby become too diffuse and diluted as they stray too far away from their core of true believers and risk becoming marginalised trying to please everybody. Or, do they stick to their knitting and stay true to their original constituents who can gain comfort and camaraderie from mixing with their own kind.

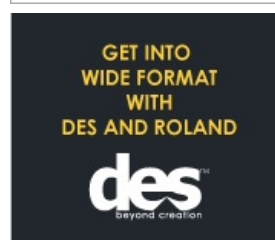
For a long time I was in favour of the all-embracing approach. But we are birds of a feather and try as we might to convince our brethren from diverse and far-flung sectors such as the label sector, or small-format digital or wide-format signage, they themselves find succour in clinging to their own familiar brothers and sisters.

I don't think we're going to change people's DNA after 3 billion years – however annoying that may be. We are tribal and we do tend to favour mixing with our own. It's almost as if we've got to have someone to hold up as an imagined enemy: letterpress fought against offset; offset fought against digital; printing companies fight against print managers.

But there's no reason why one sometimes can't have one's cake and eat it, too. There's no reason why there still couldn't be an over-arching organisation, made up of all the separate tribal associations, which would meet only as required to tackle global problems/opportunities affecting the broad printing industry. Its president would be rotated among each of the various participating sector associations. The industry is maturing into a range of fragments, all of which have their own gravitational orbits and which are no longer satellites of what we used to call the printing industry.

For what it's worth, I view the print industry through the following prism -

- Commercial
- Packaging
- Signage
- Print management
- Suppliers



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Certainly commercial print still dominates in terms of numerical scale – representing approximately 65% by turnover or total employment. However, having undertaken my own survey of jobs in print, this sector is only responsible for about 30% of all new job requests in print and is declining. That 30% includes a large proportion going into small-format digital, so the proportion going into pure sheet-fed offset, the *Printing Industries* traditional base, may be only half that, say 15%.

Signage may only represent approximately 10% by size, but punches above its weight by generating about a quarter of all new jobs in print. That is if we regard Signage, which includes such things as installers, vehicle-wrappers, etc. as part of the print industry. You can see how hard it is to really get a sense of unity or common purpose, if and when the *Printing Industries* or any other large umbrella group seeks to speak on behalf of the printing industry.

Yet, as its name suggests, it must speak for all, as it's called the Printing Industries (plural) Association of Australia suggesting some grand all-embracing mandate. (The print industry equivalent of Team Australia, perhaps?)

So, what is my preferred option to better reflect the modern printing industry or industries of tomorrow? Retain *Printing Industries* but rebrand it more in tune with its traditional DNA – the *Commercial Printed Media Association of Australia* (CPMAA – or CPM for short).

Then create a super-association that would be formed only from the heads of all the existing/participating print associations across commercial, packaging, signage, print management and supplier spheres. In so doing you'd create a body of such scale and unambiguous representation of the entire print spectrum, that Canberra would have to sit up and take notice whenever it spoke. Note, this is not creating a new bureaucracy. It doesn't need a new building or paid staff or other bricks and mortar overheads.

And what would this new umbrella entity be called? Why, the *Printing Industries Association of Australia*, of course! Among its first duties would be to create an exciting, new interactive website portraying all the exciting job opportunities which exist in print, across all the sectors from magazines to labels, to signage to direct mail to augmented reality and maybe even 3D printing!

That is what the future of the industry/industries deserves: a restructuring of its associations to better reflect the growing importance, particularly in employment terms, of some of the newly emerging sectors. And it definitely needs an umbrella-group to give a coordinated voice to the printing industry, when we have to compete with other industries in the race to attract new entrants. Print has a wonderful message to sell if only all the tribes could occasionally get together to discover our similarities outweigh our differences.

James Cryer,

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2 Responses to “A printing industry by other names – James Cryer”

1. November 12, 2014 at 7:37 am, Lance White said:

Hi James,

Interesting to see you included 3d Printing in the mix. It will be / is a pretty diverse area itself. It might be a challenge to bring it into the 2d Print community. It is bound to have a lot of unique needs being on a growth trajectory, rather than a mature industry. The pace of change and commercialisation angles would be a challenge to integrate. But none the less a good thought to try to tap into a growth engine.

Regards,

Lance White

2. November 12, 2014 at 7:03 pm, **Andy McCourt** said:

Quite right Lance. A paper company – PaperlinX has just announced in UK it will offer 3D printers and consumables to its customers, via a reseller deal with Stratasy. It's a beginning.

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

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

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