

# Diversify and thrive

**R**ECENTLY, as vice president of Nippa, I was lucky enough to be invited to attend Acup's 48th conference, held in Minneapolis, United States. With over 80 in-house print managers from 25 States plus representatives from Scotland and England, and me representing Australia and New Zealand you can imagine the diverse accents filling the air.

With a conference theme of Fishing for Ideas this event was all about networking and discussing the problems and solutions of in-house print shops. The members were so positive about the current state of the industry, I found this to be more than interesting given the turmoil the inplants within Australasia have been experiencing over the past few years - restructure after restructure. After talking to some of the larger print shop managers they didn't seem to be, at least not yet, worried by the ever increasing threat of print going to the cloud and impacting their operations.

With breakout seminars ongoing over three days there was never a shortage of workshops to attend, where it was clear that regardless of what side of the world we operate on strategic print management, managing MFD fleets, and addressing management problems, to name but a few, still throw up the same issues worldwide.

It was interesting to note that many of the inplants in the States had adapted to change by branching out to print on other consumables other than paper. For example, t-shirts, caps, even mouse pads. Interestingly, the investment required for merchandise style printing was low level entry and affordable, allowing for many print shops to branch out into this option of printing, something for other inplants to consider.

Nippa vice president Craig Gibbs went to the US to check out the way the Americans are dealing with the issues facing inplant printers



Ideas: Craig Gibbs, vice president, Nippa, with Clint Marquet from MacroPro DM, at the ACUP awards night in Minneapolis

It was also of interest that a large percentage of US in-house print shops also control and operate the university/colleges mail rooms, which allows for a higher level of service, meaning they can receive, print and deliver a print job within hours of receiving the initial request. This is something which I'm sure universities across Australasia could look at replicating.

All in all I was impressed with the professionalism of which the inplants at US universities and

colleges operate, and the way they are able to adapt to minor change. Yet I feel concerned that they are still to show any real worry in regards to the fast changing environment of print moving to the cloud.

The biggest thing I took away with me is I firmly believe that inhouse print shops across Australasia can be proud of what we do.

Rest assured, we can mix it with some of the best print shops in the world.

## APME 20/20 Vision Conference UK

MAX Chiodo was fortunate enough to represent Nippa at the Association of Print Managers in Education (APME) conference in Harrogate, Northern England in June, and files this report.

The conference hosted 60 plus delegates, along with more than 50 suppliers and exhibitors. I was pleasantly surprised to find the vast majority of members I spoke to were upbeat, and believed the worst in terms of job security, and market turbulence was behind them. This, in stark contrast to the Australian and New Zealand equivalent inplant sector, which is constantly under review and seemingly always in the thick of it.

The United Kingdom education sector has undergone major reform over the past 10 years, and as a result many print facilities within educational organisations have undergone reviews and restructures. The sector has shrunk and although

there were casualties, the inplants that have come out the other end of this process seem to be prospering, and in general have the support of their host organisation.

The common thread through most of the inplants was the ability to adapt, and diversify. I found very similar patterns of evolution, from traditional offset moving to more digital short run set ups, which has also been the trend in Australia and New Zealand. The big difference I witnessed was the variety of value add services and products that the print shops were offering to students and staff. Everything from mugs and t-shirts, to photos and signage.

With the decline in print volumes, the opportunity to explore new income streams has led to diversification. The front end of the business remained very similar, just the variety of product

range has increased.

The move away from a print centric service, towards a merchandise/marketing service is definitely the direction that the majority of the inplants are travelling. In several of the institutions, the non-traditional print side of the business has actually out performed print in the last few years.

Overall I was impressed to find our British counterparts were quite savvy when it comes to change, and it gave me a real positive outlook to the short term future of our sector. It cemented my belief that inplants are still very relevant, and certainly can adapt and offer plenty to their host organisations now and into the future.

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