

On advocating for print

It was Wednesday in Melbourne and it proved easiest to meet at the Notting Hill Hotel, in Mount Waverly. The Nott, a generic suburban pub, is close by the offices of Salmat whose CEO, Craig Dower, is chairman of the Australasian Catalogue Association. This was the only time available in the packed calendar of Kellie Northwood, CEO of the ACA. The following day she was north to Canberra fronting a Keep Me Posted community meeting to pressure the government to do more about businesses transiting from paper communications, in her role as convenor of the pressure group. While there she was meeting members of Federal Parliament to lobby for a variety of print related issues in her position as executive director of industry advocacy group, TSA Limited (Two Sides Australia). Then it was over the Tasman to present to PrintNZ's Industry Forum.

Advocacy with energy+

It's a full life being a committed and passionate advocate for printing. The energetic young executive keeps up a punishing pace juggling her many roles. She works in a peculiar space moving between the associations, the corporates, community actors and government regulators as well as running Sierra Delta, a brand and design business, with her partner in Melbourne. The frenetic pace plays to her strengths, which she early on identified as strategic and administrative, rather than in the roles she started from as journalist and advertising copywriter. Her recognition of exactly where her talents lie is

At a time when print is under increasing attack from electronic media, it's vital to make the case for its effectiveness as a communication and media channel. For too long the industry has relied on claims of unsubstantiated benefits for printed material in the face of sophisticated modelling from electronic media. Now Kellie Northwood is preparing to match the other media channels with a new research-based strategy on how effective printed catalogues and brochures are in the marketing mix. She speaks with Patrick Howard about the importance of research and positioning print as a media channel.

part and parcel of an assertive and impressive sense of self. Northwood is best recognised as a powerful industry resource, a focused and dedicated professional who seems to be everywhere. There are few individuals with a higher profile, or more instantly recognisable in the industry. She has become the voice of print, taking up the banner to promote its benefits as a communications medium and defend it from the self-serving attacks of 'green-washing' promoters. If it's a burden, she appears to carry it lightly; if her

continuing enthusiasm is a measure, it's a mission she believes in completely.

Radical ACA restructure

One role more than others defines Northwood's engagement with the industry – her cool and effective performance as the executive officer for the Australasian Catalogue Association. This high-powered but 'under the radar' organisation brings together perhaps the most senior group of industry executives. As is the way with the wider printing industry there are relatively few women in the mix but that doesn't faze her. She is accustomed to fighting for her own agenda and making her views known.

Over the past year she facilitated a radical overhaul of the organisation that involved re-writing its charter, changing the structure and expanding its remit. Working closely with her chairman and deputy chairman, who traditionally have been the senior executives of Salmat and PMP, she has helped recreate the ACA, making it more responsive and flexible. From an original board of over 20 industry representatives from every part of the production chain from paper merchants and ink suppliers to printers and distributors, has evolved a two-tier structure. The larger grouping is retained but now feeds suggestions and recommendations up to a new a 10-person executive board that reviews them and assigns priorities.

"We wanted to be a more influential association; we wanted to be a bit more hard hitting. We developed some ideas and the thinking was that we needed a board that was

more senior. Last year we went through the process, working with all our members in the industry to achieve that," she says.

"The past six months has been the time to sort ourselves internally. In 2017 we can get on with focusing on the external things we want to do, being more client and customer focused. We've gone through to Consumer Affairs, rewritten our constitution, it's broader than it was in the past. Arguably, the ACA board is now one of the most powerful boards in the industry."

The quality of the office holders makes her case and reflects the new dynamic of the web printing industry. Craig Dower, CEO of Salmat, is chairman, while Kevin Slaven, the new CEO of Digital and Distribution, PMP is the deputy chair and treasurer. In addition to Northwood, the executive board has Bob Lockley representing Fairfax, Ive Group has two members – Phil Taylor and Matt Aitken. PMP also has Craig Dunsford, David Webster, from Salmat, Mark Roberts from Australia Post, and representing the NZ Board is Bernie Roberts of Webstar.

"We've some serious heavy hitters on the board, and all are very focused on the commitments that we made around the consolidation [of the web sector]. Now we're ready to build a really robust sustainable industry for catalogue and letterbox marketing," says Northwood.

Print media currency

An essential requirement for that sustainable future for catalogues and letterbox marketing, indeed for printing as a whole in the media mix,

is the need to develop what Northwood describes as its own "media currency." This is a set of metrics that can back up claims for the effectiveness of printing, in this case catalogues and letterbox leaflets.

"We must present ourselves as an effective media channel and to do that we need to have the sophistication and the tools"

That the medium works is beyond question. Retailers recognise that sales jump in the days following a catalogue run. What is lacking is a comprehensive package of statistics that can be assessed in comparison with the analytics from other channels such as television and outdoor media.

There are around 8.7 billion units, catalogues or leaflets, delivered to letterboxes every year across Australia and New Zealand from ACA member companies. Another 650 million catalogues go into newspapers. These figures are relatively stable, although last year there was a slight dip of 1.26 percent with an expected two to three percent fall coming this year. This is mostly as a result of the failure of two big catalogue customers, Dick Smith and Masters. PMP, Salmat and Reachmedia account for most of these deliveries, while Australia Post and Leader Newspapers between them do around 15 percent. These are massive numbers.

"We know that catalogue marketing works and we recognise it's remained resilient in the face of other media. There »