

## 2023 President's Report

**2023 will no doubt be remembered as the year we finally moved into a post-pandemic world. At Visual Connections, it has been a year of successfully adapting to change and rising to the challenges which persist, and I am delighted to report on that success tonight.**

A clear highlight this year was the success of Visual Impact Sydney in early May. The industry's favourite print, signage, display and graphics show returned to the Sydney Showground for the first time in nearly five years, providing industry businesses with the opportunity to experience the latest technologies, connect with the experts, and explore opportunities to improve their profitability and create valuable new revenue streams.

More than 3000 visitors attended the show and millions of dollars in sales were transacted over the three days, with thousands of leads generated that kept exhibitors busy for weeks and months afterward. Its success was a testament to the commitment of our sponsors and exhibitors, many of whom overcame significant supply chain delays and other challenges to bring their latest and best to Sydney, and we thank them most sincerely for their support.

As well as the usual business conducted at trade shows, and some exciting new initiatives launched this year, one very important event – the Industry Education Round Table - highlighted what would become a constant theme for us this year.

The session drew people from a wide range of businesses and industry associations to participate in an important conversation about industry requirements, current staffing challenges, new talent, upskilling, and the availability and appropriateness of current training offerings. A productive chapter in an important, ongoing discussion.

The theme continued with the 2023 Visual Connections / ASGA Education Initiative, a careers program that seeks to attract new talent to the sign and graphics sector. Run in conjunction with Australian Skills & Industry Partnership (AusSIP), the program was piloted more than 10 years ago now, and has evolved and grown into its current, successful format thanks to the input and commitment of our Visual Connections team, our partners at the Australian Sign & Graphics Association (ASGA), TAFE colleges around the country and, of course, the AusSIP team.

This year, the program saw us host more than 100 students at Visual Impact for a tour, a Try-A-Trade experience, and a careers luncheon, with many of those who attended registering their interest in an industry career. This was followed by participation in Careers Expos around the country in the middle of the year, and Industry Taster Days more recently. The expressions of interest from students continue to be received, and we are already working with well over 100 young people, and a similar number of potential employers, to ensure these bright and motivated young people are connected to the training and employment opportunities they need to build successful careers in our sector.

Since 2015, this innovative program has increased the number of sign and graphics apprentices enrolled in the Certificate III for Sign & Graphics from just over 200 to more than 700 in 2023. These figures are testament to the hard work of the entire team in building the program 'from the ground up' to meet the needs of industry, and it is extremely pleasing to be able to report that following an approach from Visual Connections to our fellow industry associations, the initiative will next year be rolled out across the entire print and graphics

sector in collaboration with FESPA Australia, the Flexible Packaging & Label Makers Association (FPLMA), the Lithographic Institute of Australia (LIA) and the Visual Media Association (VMA - formerly PVCA). This industry-wide commitment and cooperation is a rare achievement, and speaks to the skill of our team and to the importance of the challenge ahead. We are excited to see how this develops in 2024 and beyond.

While the impact of COVID continued to impact on our finances, it was good to be able once again to support a wide range of other industry initiatives, resources and events through sponsorships, grants and in-kind assistance.

As well as the education initiative, Visual Connections has this year invested heavily in a range of projects including initiatives run by our partners at The Real Media Collective, sponsored the ProPrint Awards, ASGA Awards, FPLMA Awards & Conference and the NZSDA Conference and Awards. We provided the \$10,000 LIA National Graduate Scholarship Prize, supported WorldSkills Australia and F1 in Schools, and funded a number of other industry education and networking events.

Focusing on our mandate to 'contribute to a sustainable future for the print, sign and graphics sector', we will continue to collaborate closely with our fellow industry associations and to assist in delivering projects which have real and measurable benefits to our sector.

Of course, there will be challenges ahead. Economic conditions are not as they were even 12 months ago. Global instability and the horrific wars in the Ukraine and the Middle East are impacting supply chains and creating uncertainty. Add in energy shortages and price hikes, data security breaches, natural disasters and a rapidly changing IR landscape here in Australia, and there will be plenty for us to tackle next year.

As we face the future, however, we do so with optimism and determination – not the least because of the support and the commitment we see in our Members. We thank you most sincerely for your support and your contribution this year.

I would also like to take the opportunity to thank Peter Harper, Sarah Moore and our entire operational team. They are a small team who work incredibly hard, rising to every challenge and punching well above their weight in delivering real impact and value for our industry.

We remain committed to delivering that value in 2024...and beyond.

**John Wall**

President, Visual Connections