

THE INKERS EVOLVES: YEAR TWO BUILDS A STRONGER PATHWAY FOR EMERGING TALENT SUPPORT

The Inkers moves into its second year with a twelve-month mentoring program, building on a successful inaugural year and creating a structured national development pathway for emerging talent across paper, print, packaging, signage and visual media.

The Visual Media Association (VMA) has announced the next evolution of The Inkers - Make Your Mark, with the successful emerging talent initiative moving into Year Two through a new twelve-month mentoring and professional development program.

Launched in 2025/26, The Inkers established a national network of emerging professionals, brought young talent and their employers together through the Bring Your Boss events, and gave its inaugural Markers a direct voice into the industry. The first year was about building the framework, testing what worked and, importantly, listening to what emerging talent wanted from their industry.

Year Two turns those learnings into action.

The new twelve-month model combines monthly mentoring, industry connection and a six-part professional development series, providing participants with access to industry leaders, specialist training, major manufacturing sites and a national peer network.

VMA Chief Executive Officer, Kellie Northwood, said the progression reflects exactly what The Inkers was established to achieve - creating a program that evolves with the people it supports.

“The first year proved there is an appetite from our emerging talent to connect beyond their own businesses, learn more about the wider industry and have a stronger voice in its future. We built the framework, listened to our Markers and employers and learnt from that first year. Now we are putting structure around those learnings,” commented Northwood.

“The mentoring program is the next step. It moves The Inkers from connection into structured career development, while retaining the energy and industry voice that made the first year successful.

“We talk a lot about workforce shortages, attraction and skills, however retention is just as important. We have talented people already choosing careers in our industry. Our responsibility is to invest in them, broaden their networks, build their confidence and show them how many opportunities exist across paper, print, packaging, signage and visual media.”

The program will be led by VMA GM – Operations, Phillip Mariette, as Program Director, coordinating mentors, participants, employers and industry partners across the twelve-month program.

Beginning in October, the development series will connect the industry's past, present and future. Participants will tour one of Australia's largest commercial print manufacturing sites at IVE Group's Kemps Creek facility following a visit with the Australian Print Museum in Penrith, bringing together the heritage of print with the technology and scale of modern manufacturing.

The following months will deliver Mental Health First Aid Certificate Training with Steven Gamble of Anchor Health; AI Learn & Train with Swipe Digital; Sustainability and Print 101 with Zaidee Jackson of Ball & Doggett; and Workplace Environment and Career Pathway Setting.

The development series will conclude in March with *Print is Sexy - Let's Take It On*, led by Northwood and drawing on VMA-commissioned consumer research to build participants' confidence in communicating the value and relevance of print to modern customers and audiences. Monthly mentoring and industry engagement will continue across the full twelve months.

Proudly supported by Konica Minolta and Ball & Doggett, with further partners to be announced, the program brings employers, suppliers, trainers and industry leaders together around a shared investment in the next generation.

The VMA has also briefed the Hon Andrew Giles MP, Minister for Skills and Training, on The Inkers and its continued development as part of the Association's broader engagement with Government on industry skills, training and workforce development.

"No single organisation can solve the workforce challenge. The strength of The Inkers is that we are bringing employers, industry partners, trainers, government and our emerging professionals into the same conversation and then turning that conversation into action," furthered Northwood.

The next phase has been shaped with great thanks from the VMA and industry, by the contribution of founding Markers Zaf Haq, Olga Plastourgos, Jiann Mobbs, Laila Stevens, Angas Adcroft, Isobel Clark, Stella Chau, Trent Bowes and Melissa Foord, whose participation and ideas helped establish the program and inform its evolution.

"Their legacy is that The Inkers is stronger in its second year than its first and that is exactly how a successful industry program should evolve," Northwood concluded.

Emerging professionals, employers and industry leaders interested in participating in The Inkers can contact hello@visualmediaassociation.org.au.

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ABOUT VISUAL MEDIA ASSOCIATION

The Visual Media Association (VMA) is the recognised peak industry body for the paper, print, mail, publishing, packaging, graphic design, distribution, and media technology industries across Australia.

Operating for over 144 years, the VMA is a registered organisation with direct signatory to the nine (9) Awards across our industry and membership. VMA offers an end-to-end industry association solution that is relevant in all that it undertakes: advocating the relevance of the established media – print – that we all belong to; developing global partnerships and translating to regional requirements; awarding excellence; investing in products; and arming our industry with sales tools, sustainability collateral, industrial relations representation and more.

The VMA is the largest print industry body, committed to building a stronger united leadership to deliver the goals of our members. United we lead strong advocacy, government advisory, skills and training programs, protection, and promotion of our industry channels and more to ensure our members' businesses operate within a future-proofed strategy for success.

For more information contact: hello@visualmediaassociation.org.au.