



## What next-gen print talent expects from employers

By Lindy Hughson | 11 February 2024



Industry leaders and emerging professionals came together in Sydney last night for the latest Inkers Bring Your Boss event, part of The Inkers – Make Your Mark showcase series, hosted by Konica Minolta in partnership with the Visual Media Association (VMA).

Held at Konica Minolta's Macquarie Park premises, the event focused on one of the sector's most pressing challenges – how print businesses can better attract, engage and retain the next generation of talent, while building sustainable pathways for the future.

Welcoming attendees, Konica Minolta chief sales officer Dean Hosking said the company's long-standing partnership with the VMA reflected a shared commitment to the health of the print industry.

"We're really proud of the relationship we have with the VMA and excited by the Inkers program," Hosking said. "At Konica Minolta, we talk about kenkei – mutually beneficial partnerships – and that's exactly how we see our role with the industry. It's about giving back and supporting what comes next."

Hosking said attending Inkers events around the country had highlighted the depth of effort already underway across the sector to nurture emerging professionals.

VMA chief executive officer Kellie Northwood told the audience the Inkers initiative had been six years in development and was created in direct response to long-standing workforce challenges.

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and younger employees.

"They're not emerging," Northwood said. "They are the talent – right here, right now. And as an industry, we need to be listening to them."



Industry leaders supporting next-gen talent: Kellie Northwood and Dean Hosking

"We hear business owners say they can't attract apprentices or graduates, or that they don't have time to build structured pathways," Northwood said. "At the same time, young people are telling us they want meaningful roles, development and a voice."

She stressed that the program was deliberately designed as a two-way conversation between employers

## Reframing print as a career of choice

The headline presentation came from Sonia Schwabsky, chief executive officer of Kwik Kopy, who shared insights from her own leadership journey and from Kwik Kopy's approach to talent development.

Reflecting on her early career, Schwabsky said opportunity and trust had been pivotal.

"Someone took a chance on me early in my career," she said. "If they hadn't, I probably wouldn't be where I am today. Every generation gets judged by the one before it, but we have to ask whether different ways of working are actually wrong – or just different."

Schwabsky said younger generations often bring strong digital skills, new perspectives on productivity and a more entrepreneurial mindset – qualities the print industry should be embracing.

"They find smarter ways to work," she said. "They might value work-life balance differently, but that doesn't mean they're less effective."

Having entered print from a digital and marketing background seven years ago, Schwabsky said she was determined to reposition print as a creative, commercially relevant and rewarding industry for young people.

"This is a great industry – it's creative, it's problem-solving, and you get to see your work come to life," she said. "In print, you're learning customer service, production and business skills all at once."

### Building pathways beyond traditional roles

A key theme of Schwabsky's address was the need for flexible career pathways that reflect how younger people want to work.

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*"They're not all looking for*

corporate ladders," she said. "Many want to run their own businesses. Australia is a nation of SMEs, and this generation is even more entrepreneurial."

She pointed to recent examples within the Kwik Kopy network, including a 20-year-old and a 24-year-old who had recently taken ownership of centres.

"We need to ask: where are our future owners coming from?" Schwabsky said. "And how do we create the training and confidence to support them?"

She also highlighted the importance of structured learning and development, including formal business certification programs delivered through registered training organisations.

"You can't just throw people in and expect them to figure it out," she said. "Learning and development has to be intentional."



Sonia Schwabsky: Next-gen employees bring strong digital skills, new perspectives on productivity and a more entrepreneurial mindset



Proponents of learning and development for next-gen: Yohei Konaka, Konica Minolta CEO, Sonia Schwabsky and Kellie Northwood

## Next-gen perspectives from the floor

The second half of the evening featured a Q&A with two Sydney-based Markers from the Inkers program: Olga Plastourgos, marketing executive at Kyocera, and Zaf Haq, project manager at IVE Group.

Asked what next-generation employees expect from management, Plastourgos emphasised the value of openness.

"Being open-minded is incredibly important," she said. "It's very easy to say, 'We've done this the same way for 10 years'; but sometimes there are faster, more collaborative ways to work. Younger people bring those ideas, and they need to be heard, not dismissed."

She said diversification, particularly through technology and brand development, also helped build confidence in long-term career pathways.

"Younger people need to see where the business is going before they can see their place in it," Plastourgos said.

Haq highlighted the importance of having a voice and using it.

"I don't stop until I'm heard," she said. "And it's not just about my voice. If someone else brings something to me, I make sure their voice is heard too."

Both speakers stressed that influence often comes through action rather than position.

"If you start using smarter tools and processes yourself, people notice," Plastourgos said. "You become faster, more effective... and people listen."

### Culture counts

The discussion also underscored the role of culture and visible leadership support in engaging younger employees.

Plastourgos shared an example from Kyocera, where she was entrusted to manage a major product launch outside her usual marketing role.

"That trust made a huge difference," she said. "Feeling seen and supported matters."

Haq described involvement in continuous improvement teams and employee-led initiatives at IVE Group as key to building engagement and recognition.

Northwood closed by stressing that the lessons shared were applicable to businesses of all sizes.

"This isn't about being the big end of town," she said. "It's about making deliberate, visible cultural commitments – whether that's involving younger staff in decisions, investing in skills, or simply listening."



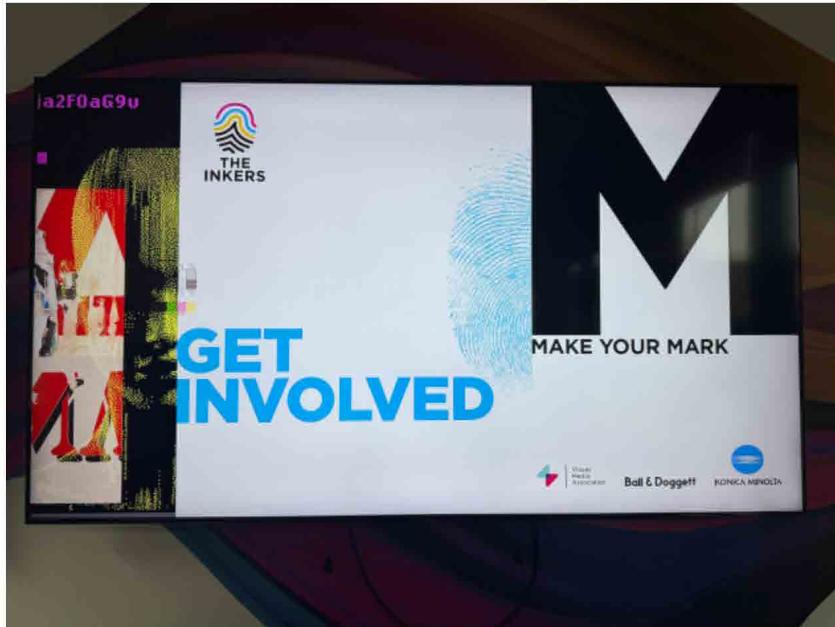
Voicing their insights, making their mark: Olga Plastourgos and Zaf Haq



Influence through action: Nicole Jandik, Zaf Haq, Kellie Northwood, Simon Bailey



Olga Plastourgos: Feeling seen and supported matters



Calling all of industry: Get involved

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