

"DIGITAL MEDIA ARE HAVING A PROFOUND EFFECT, CAUSING PRINTERS TO START REINVENTING THEMSELVES AS COMMUNICATION PROFESSIONALS"

think tank

Tim Drake looks at an initiative designed to boost the industry's effectiveness

The Print and Paper Think Tank was founded in 2004. It followed on from the success of two earlier ventures I set up: the Sports Trade Think Tank, and the Outdoor Think Tank, with members such as Berghaus, Hi Tec and Blacks.

All these Think Tanks share some key defining characteristics. The two most important are that, firstly, the members come from across the supply chain, so brands, retailers and suppliers are all involved. Secondly, they are for Chief Executives only. This

gives CEOs the opportunity to have discussions with their peers about the industry they are in. Yesterday's sales figures can be temporarily put on the mental back burner while issues that affect the health and future of the whole industry can be discussed.

A valued forum

The members of the Print and Paper Think Tank tend to cluster into two types: major players and smaller companies. In many cases, though, both groups are lively, enterprising and committed:

pioneers of the industry's future. The major players include such names as St Ives, Trinity Mirror and Williams Lea, while the smaller ones include W & J Linney, Pensord and Webmart (whose Simon Biltcliffe won the IOD Director of the Year Award in 2010). It's probably no surprise that Michael Johnson, CEO of the BPIF, is also a member.

The main purpose of the Think Tank is to increase the effectiveness of the print and paper industries. It does this by offering insight into leading-

edge thinking on commercial and societal issues. It also provides stimulating professional development for CEOs and creates networking opportunities within and outside the industry.

Defining the value chain

CEOs can come with open minds and learn, and take advantage of the ideas generated. There is no preparation required and no papers to prepare. Members are open and frank about the challenges of the industry and their companies within the

industry. Crucially, the definition of the industry is evolving as we struggle to define what the value chain will look like. Digital media are having a profound effect, causing printers to start reinventing themselves as communication professionals rather than simply producers of print materials.

The value chain is surprisingly fluid. A key goal therefore is to invite visionary speakers who can generate informed, insightful discussion of likely developments and close off unproductive cul-de-sacs.

Varied topics

Subjects and speakers vary from industry-specific topics, through to business and societal trends and leadership skills. The first speaker, back in 2004, was the leadership guru Jeff Grout, who examined the Characteristics of Success. Subsequent meetings heard industry-focused presentations from Jaakko Poyry and PIRA. Marcus Child, one of the best positive thinking exponents in the country, addressed another meeting on You Can if You Think

You Can.

More recently, Nick Mockett of Europa Partners gave a somewhat gloomy view of the future of investment opportunities for print as an industry; and Melanie Howard of Forum for the Future looked at Current Social and Economic Change for the paper and print industries. The pre-dinner speaker from the Think Tank membership for that meeting was Siimon Biltcliffe, whose subject was What is Really Happening, and What Should We Do About it?

At our most recent meeting, Miles Linney spoke about Lies, Damned Lies, and the PrintWeek 500. He was followed by Simon Ward and Paul Kearney, of the Inspired Think Group, taking as his subject Walking through a Minefield: The Future of Print.

We have three meetings a year, and enjoy them. And there is space for one or two more around the table.

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Tim Drake at a glance

Tim set up his own sports retail chain in the early 1990s. He was looking at other opportunities when he was approached by some of the CEOs of major companies in the industry – many of whom he knew well – to set up and run a forum where they could meet to discuss some of the issues confronting them.

The forum had to be one where both retailers and brands (and other players in the supply chain) could meet and discuss the industry as a whole, without spending time confronting each other over the daily gripes of late deliveries, discounts, margins, etc. The Sports Trade Think Tank is still going, almost twenty years later, and numbers brands such as Nike,

Adidas and Sports Direct as members.

Tim founded the Print and Paper Think Tank in May 2004. He comments: "I was and still am an outsider to the industry, but I'm intensely interested in its evolution and the challenges it faces."

