

OPENBOOK HOWDEN

Transforming the business for the market

This successful Adelaide print business is on a transformation pathway

Print businesses that are seeking to move forward in these rapidly changing times should be having a look at the Adelaide-based

Openbook Howden story.

This family-owned business is on a transformation journey, and in fact has always sought to evolve, recognising that standing still is not an option if you want to grow a sustainable business.

Celebrating more than 30 years in business, the company began in 1986 when Ashley Richards bought Howden Printing, which at the time was a typical small print business. Along with his business partner Keith Kemp the duo spent the next two decades building the business, until in 2006 they bought what was the Lutheran Church's printing business, then known as Openbook Australia, formerly the Lutheran Publishing House, which was one of the first book businesses to open in the country, founded in 1913.

It also since bought the client list of another local business which closed its doors, and is always open to acquisition for business development according to opportunity.

Over the years, Openbook Howden has seen market demand change dramatically. In response, the company has grown into much more than a print service provider, today offering a suite of print, design, interactive and e-comms solutions, as well as stock management, distribution and mail services.

Openbook Howden has been one of the first printers to take advantage of the Future Print Transformation project, which saw the government pay half the cost for personalised business consultants to input a raft of print

factfile

Age: 31 years

Staff: 55

Owner: Private

Location: Adelaide

Speciality: Books, cross media

Strategy: Invest in learning, focus on today's customer requirements and market demands, operate outside print



business thanks to a deal engineered by then PIAA CEO Bill Healey.

Some 13 sales and management staff undertook courses with Leadership Management Australia (LMA), accessed under the Future Print Business Transformation project.

Sarah Leo, general manager at Openbook Howden says, "Like many companies in the graphic communications sphere, Openbook Howden is faced with the constant challenge of coping with change. Purposeful training like that offered through the Future Print Business Transformation Project has become a key part of our response."

Back in the 1980s the business started off as a two-colour general jobbing printer, then moved into four-colour work, and these days is a major player in the book printing sector. Books are far from its only field though, with general commercial work and label printing also growing markets.

The original owners have handed over day to day control to Michael Richards and Sarah Leo.

Today there are 55 people operating in the business, with the book production accounting for a large part of the activity. The company works for a

range of publishing houses large and small, with a surprising number of self-published books rolling off the presses. The company even has its own online bookshop.

Sarah Leo says, "We have always been open to new ideas and outside input, and the senior management team has a culture of teachability, we recognise as an SME we may benefit from spending learning time. Even if it is only five per cent worthwhile that is worthwhile in our view."

"We have always been happy to invest in professional development, but opportunities for subsidised training are rare – so when we found the right kind of training courses, offered by quality providers, under the Future Print scheme, we grabbed them with both hands. In the past, we have focused mainly on reskilling and upskilling production staff, but this was the perfect opportunity for us to extend that opportunity to our sales and management teams."

"We acknowledge that printing is undergoing massive changes, and we want to make sure we are on top of those changes and fully equipped to move the company forward."

The entire Openbook Howden senior



management team went through the Future Print Transformation programme, which comprised three or four structured seminars followed by plenty of one on one sessions. Leo describes the programme and the consultant that was appointed to the company as 'brilliant' and wonders why every print business did not sign up.

She says, "Our consultant did not tiptoe around issues, he was straight in with forceful analysis, but he made sense. For us there was no root and branch change, it was more a case of tweaking. It is practical, for instance we reviewed the whole customer process from every angle and scenario. We also looked at how to discern what makes certain people tick. Michael and I worked from an overall management perspective, whereas other managers were more specific."

The course was run under the auspices of the LMA Leadership Management of Australia, and saw a management consultant come to the business every fortnight. She says, "Our three team leaders all found it useful. Any small business will tell you finding time is not easy, however the structured nature of the programme meant that the time was created.

1. Modern premises for a modern business

2. Sarah Leo, general manager for brand, strategy and people, with Michael Richards, chief operating officer

"We have been implementing the lessons under our change management policy. Our seven strong sales team all went through the programme, and all appreciated it." Education though is in the company's DNA, Leo went to the Dave Fellman print sales event in Sydney a couple of years ago, and say if he comes back the entire sales team will be going.

She says, "When things are changing so rapidly, everyone is consumed with what is happening at the coal face – whether that is bringing business

“**It is easy to put off change to another day, but in today's market that just does not cut it**

Sarah Leo, general manager brand strategy and people, Openbook Howden

through the door, keeping the figures straight or planning production schedules. It is easy to put off change until another day, but in today's market, that just does not cut it.

"You have to make the time to remain responsive and agile, because if you are not forging ahead, you are falling behind. Future Print is right on the

mark with its focus on helping businesses assess their performance, identify areas that need change and providing the training required."

Openbook Howden is already a long way from being solely an ink on paper merchant, for instance services include online inventory management for companies who require storage and distribution to multiple locations, creative design, and various electronic communication outputs.

Sarah Leo says they can add e-books, e-publications, e-diaries and apps for customers, as the focus of the company is helping to add services for the benefit of their clients.

It offers what would previously have been thought of as exotic solutions such as augmented reality, or interactive print as it is also known, and provides brilliant online youtube videos to explain to potential clients how they can use it in their campaigns.

In a print landscape littered with companies that have failed to move forward Openbook Howden stands out, for its commitment to progress and its belief that high quality external input can assist management in leading the evolving business into the 21st century.

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