Since 2003, the Graphic Arts Merchant's Association of Australia (GAMAA) has soundly re-invested its profits from shows like PacPrint and Printex in education programmes. Scholarships and leadership workshops are open to all who work in the printing and allied industries. Samantha Crock and Anni Rowland-Campbell explain more about the programme, and note there is still much more to be done in re-positioning the industry as a whole.

Four years ago, GAMAA embarked on its leadership programme after much consultation with its membership and the industry at large. The focus of the GAMAA programme is to encourage companies to invest in developing the management potential of key individuals within their organisations. Developing strong leaders will in turn strengthen the position of the printing and graphics industries as they embrace change and expand markets.

The nucleus for the GAMAA leadership programme was born from the national discussions around the Print21 Action Agenda project in which GAMAA was intimately involved. The three key recommendations of this initiative were that profitable business development will depend on strategies that creatively integrate the following:

- Clever business strategy based on sound knowledge and in-depth understanding of existing and potential customer needs
- Appropriate use of print technology; and, most importantly,
- Patient investment by firms in the professional development of people

Through the GAMAA leadership programme the industry has started to address these challenges, but there is still a long way to go, particularly in terms of the development of business skills and the investment in people.

In 1998, it is estimated that there were some 6,000 companies in the industry—the current (July 2006) PIAA estimate is that this has now dropped about 17 percent to around 4,650-5,000. There are numerous reasons for this decline, but amongst them is still the fact that our industry is not seen for what it is.

"There is still a long way to go, particularly in terms of the development of business skills and the investment in people."

What constitutes the industry?
The latest ABS figures show where the growth is—in publishing and newspapers. Traditional print realises profits of some 3-5 per cent (at a time when money in the bank yields 6-7 percent). Many forms of communications are now rapidly going on-line. Even Australia Post is exploring the concept of the electronic letterbox.

There are a number of initiatives which began with the Print21 Action Agenda, which are now beginning to gain traction. Much of the thinking has already been done, many of the tools and resources to help companies are already available, (many of them free of charge and on-line). What is required is a commitment to supporting the good work which has been and continues to be done by a great many people and organisations.

The world is changing rapidly and the only constant thing is the change itself. Therefore the industry needs to develop skills in the more generic areas of business and people management, (two of the three planks of the Print21 Action Agenda), which will help our people to both cope with and also to recognise and exploit the opportunities of change.

One of the best models to explain this is McKinsey's 'Three Horizons.' Set within the book The Alchemy of Growth, this model explains some of the different mindsets required to adapt and survive within a changing market space.
NEW HORIZONS
Two of the most used words we now hear are 'commoditisation' and 'customisation'. Indeed it has been said that:

"Ever since Gutenberg made the first commodity—cheaply duplicated words—we have realised that intangible things can be copied. This lowers the value per copy. What becomes valuable is the relationships sparked by the copies—that tangle up in the network itself. The relationships rocket upward in value as the parts increase in number even slightly." (Kelly 2000)

McKinsey's Three Horizons model states that most organisations operate predominantly in horizon one which, after all, keeps the lights on and pays the bills. This is a most important horizon, but most of its activity relates to mature products that are of lower value to the customer.

If we move up towards higher value products we enter horizon two; emerging businesses which may be beginning to generate some revenue, but are still not mature. Product and sales cycles in this horizon are longer and the skill-sets are different, but activity here is no less important than that of horizon one.

As we move up further still we reach horizon three where some of the 'out there stuff' happens, the 'skunk works' and the crazy ideas. Bear in mind these crazy ideas once included the mobile phone and the Apple Mac computer, both of which are now commonplace.

One thing is certain—any successful products developed from an horizon three idea will eventually become horizons two and then one. That time scale once took ten years, but is now becoming shorter - take for example the iPod.

As an industry, we produce goods and services that compete with literally every other form of communications media. These competitors are not necessarily other graphic arts companies, but are more likely to be mobile phone companies and IT manufacturers. In order to successfully compete and survive, the graphic media industries need to develop skills that match those of all of their competitors, regardless of which industry we see them as being in now.

DELIVERING THE MBAS
Since the launch of the leadership programme in 2003, GAMAA has provided over twenty industry managers with the opportunity to undertake academic study. Many of our participants left school early, but have now finished MBAs and other leadership/management degrees. Over one hundred other managers have attended our industry leadership workshops.

GAMAA has now undertaken diagnostic assessments of some leading managers within the industry and is developing an outline of industry competencies for the 21st century. We seek to raise awareness within the industry, of the availability of both the GAMAA programme and other resources, such as the Print21 Action Agenda. The GAMAA programme is a tremendous resource for the industry providing a unique educational opportunity for those who seek to develop themselves and their management potentials.

The results of our assessments have been benchmarked across a variety of industries and reinforce the messages of the Print21 Action Agenda. These suggest that the industry still lacks formal structure around understanding our customer and market needs, together with understanding the concept of collaboration and team work. The challenges of the current business environment suggest that these skills are needed now more than ever.

When GAMAA initiated its programme it stated publicly that the objective was to develop people so they could work in any industry; thus equipping the printing and graphics industry with the intelligence and leadership skills demonstrated in other sectors—a fundamental to attracting and keeping good people to grow our industry.

This industry is not founded on printing presses and computers, it is founded on our people, and the relationships they have with each other and their customers. GAMAA can provide some of the required resources and opportunities, but ultimately it is up to each and every company in our industry to rise to the challenge and utilise these resources by themselves investing in the education and professional development of their people.

For more information on 2007 Scholarship applications and the 2007 Leadership Workshop Series, please contact GAMAA's education manager—Samantha Crock on <sam@gamaa.net.au>, or simply go to the website: <www.gamaa.net.au>.

This article was written by Samantha Crock, GAMAA education manager, with Anni Rowland-Campbell.