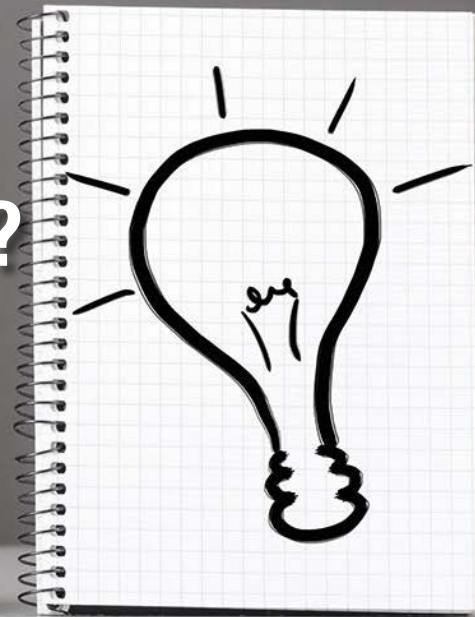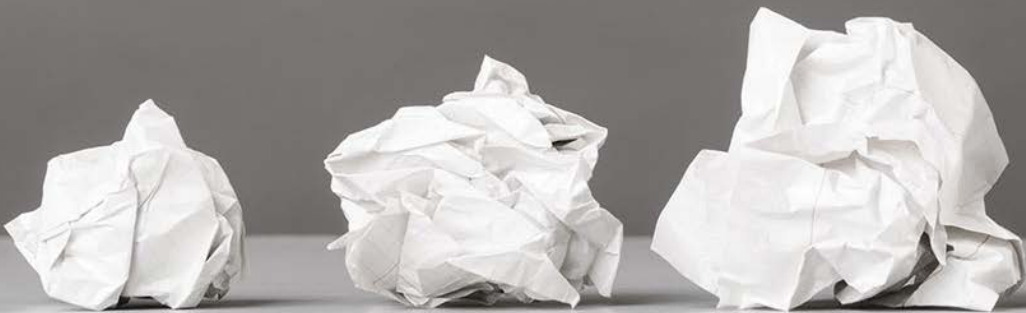# Are mistakes killing your SIGN AND PRINT BUSINESS?

So what's the big deal with making a mistake or two at work?

Let's look at the facts. Any mistake your company makes in production WILL cost a proven 3.5 times the cost of the job to rectify it. Plus, you could lose that client forever. Non-conformance reports, incident reports or learning opportunity incident reports, teach you the way to systemize the process of removing error out of your workflow, offers real cases studies and will give you the internationally recognised, tried and tested tools to learn why they occur so often in creative industries and how to fix them – forever!

Typically, what creates the problems.

There is not a singular defining silver bullet that with one shot will eradicate errors or mistakes in any creative business – it's that simple. Sign makers and print productions shops "employ many creative professionals who love to make stuff". As a rule, the people in this industry are great at that. However, "making stuff" also requires certain left-brain skills to manage the process. They unfortunately don't generally relish the paperwork side of the work. Many creatives will even resist, postpone and totally avoid management style tasks all together – reading plans, taking the time to correctly understand documentation from a job sheet, importantly check or pre-flight each stage of the project to a full review before scheduling of the project.

These steps will be a challenge for those not willing to be engaged. The eternal "I didn't read the job sheet reply" or "I didn't fill in my time card" continually mystifies many team leaders and employers.

How do you calculate the cost of mistakes?

Sharing facts and experiences over the last 25+ years undeniably validates a few shocking realities I have witnessed. Let me share a representative example:

Assume you make "Digital sign printed on 2400 x 1200mm aluminium composite sheet installed on site. Then, consider the total job say $2600. Or imagine any print or sign item that has a similar number of tasks, say "eight". A routine product for many digital print companies and sign companies. Agreed?

Let's call it sign "A" all complete done and dusted. Awesome. Until, that dreaded phone call – it's been discovered at the end of the process of installation that there's been a significant mistake, which requires total rework. The question is "how much to it cost to replace completely?"

May, I put this scenario forward for your review:

"A" Cost of Sign	"B" Cost of sign	"C" The missing product	"D" Intangibles
$2600	Plus $2600	Plus $2600	Pus l$1300
1x multiple	1x multiple	1x multiple	.5x multiple
"A" plus removal from site, disposal of waste, wasted time, smoothing the waters with the client & your team members	"B" may cost more as people may slow down to ensure accuracy & minimise errors in fear of reprimand	"C" while you were remaking "A" you should have been making a new sign for another customer. Wasted opportunity!	Potentially a lost customer, several disgruntled staff and lost or deflated morale.

By the way, back in the early 1990's our sign company was in a small group of 6 sign-makers and one supplier who became accredited to ISO 09002 – the international standard for quality assurance. After being certified for many years it became abundantly clear that the cost of a total rework for any given example is a multiple of 3.5 times – YES that's a proven 3.5 times the cost of the original! That fact was established across 5 sign makers ranging from 8 to 35 staff – it's the hidden cost of fix ups.

The tasks characteristically involved in the production of a digitally printed 2400 x 1200mm ACM sign are:
1. Site Survey
2. Artwork
3. Pre-Press
4. Print
5. Laminate
6. Assemble
7. Pack
8. Install

If you think this through and 'say' the average job is $2,600 and you spend just 5 minutes to check each of the 8 steps that is 5x8 = 40 minutes at $100 per hour – or only $66 to ensure an mistake free job – I put to you – that is a very cheap insurance policy!

The concept which suggests mistakes can be leveraged is enshrined in the International Standards for Quality or ISO 9001/2. Or commonly called QA. This documentation simply spells out the physical elements needed to build a business model that is robust and efficient. You don't have to be a full blown accredited ISO 9002 company to use the intelligent elements of the process. I recommend the non-conformance process is one of the very best elements in this standard to improve your business by eliminating mistakes.

Let's look at some case studies.
Case Study 1: A large format print company needed to supply a "control sample" print for a promotion of a specific colour imitation gold on a graphic print. The control sample was produced on 1300mm media on a well-known quality roll to roll machine. The order was approved. Two weeks later hundreds of square metres of the exterior media was rolled out onto retail windows across all capital cities and major centres in Australia – approx. cost $100,000. Then, the awful phone call – wrong colour! The issue was a simple mistake - the control sample was printed on a low volume machine while the approved sample was printed on a higher capacity machine and the approved colour control sample was not crossed checked against the eventual print run! Think of it this way – a one minute check could have stopped the error completely! Result – total reprint, shipping, removal and

new installation on every site. Estimated rework – $278,000 plus GST.

Therefore the question is "How can you effectively stop these silly and controllable mistakes from KILLING your business?"

Non-Conformance Reporting– what does it mean?
In all honesty, it matters little as to the name of the document, in the world of "Assured Quality" it is called a NCR or Non-Conformance Report. Many find that term somewhat confrontational and rename it to make the term more positive or friendlier like – "Incident reports" or "learning opportunity incidents reports". My view is call it whatever works for you as it's more about the real intent of the process that counts. Then of course using it!

The reality is what happens next is important.
A failure to conform to accepted standards, the non-fulfilment of specific requirements. In simple terms, the job sheet says one thing yet the product is different – that is a non-conformance.

NCR's can be raised against many things such as:- technically you could view errors in quoting, wrong information on work tickets or job sheets, the non-supply of a product as per customer's requirements, wrong manufacture of goods, wrong quantities, suppliers delivering wrong products, lack of information supplied, incorrect installation of goods. Think of it this way, if you have specifications that say the work is to be performed one way and it is not – that is a non-conformance.

Non-conformances reports or forms are raised to enable a company to improve their processes and procedures and identified by auditing, process review, jobs passing from department to department etc. They are not produced as a "blame and shame" operation but merely as the opportunity to raise unambiguous, defensible, clear and concise definitions of the problem/s, so that corrective action can be initiated by management. Giving the opportunity for employers, employees, contractors and even suppliers to work in a recognised method to stop mistakes.

When you start, the journey asking for information on the number of non-conformances that could be raised in any given day may seem daunting. As no strict measurements or guidelines were available at the time you started. So, pure guess work!

Most sign and print companies guess a percentage number between 5% and 25% of work performed may involve some sort of error or mistake. Many are shocked after the first few weeks as to the volume and size of the errors and mistakes – literally many times more than

bargained for!

After working in this area of business innovation for some years we have found up to 70% errors and mistakes are uncommon but evident – that is mind blowing! The question is "what is your percentage of errors?"

To alleviate this problem, we recommend training several your staff to understand the value to everyone and the company. Then start reporting errors and wrong jobs using our standard NCR forms. When these are raised, it will enable you to see which areas, project or processes needed better management and perhaps training.

Now what? – back to basics
The NCR report has 3 distinct sections –
Step 1 – establish what when wrong:
- What was it – Job Number, client, date, support material like a sample, which area or process – Artwork, prepress, print, laminate, profile cut, sssemble, install, deliver – etc
- Details of the error – Spelling, colour, design, media, written description of the error.
- Action to be taken – Redo, fix, discard, return to supplier, discard and other options.

Step 2 – how are you to correct it:
- Work out how to fix the problem – what is the proposed remedy?
- Talk to the team – there are sometimes many ways to approach the rectification
- Who is going to authorise – it's good to establish that people are ready to accept responsibility
- Review the outcome – take a few minutes to discuss
- Update our records – adjust job sheets, client records and your database
- Establish the cost – the old saying if you can't measure you can't manage – work out what it cost.

Step 3 – Preventative action
- How to stop next time – this is the very best part – it's a celebration of the business and employees' intelligence – working together to stop the problem happening again.

Is the question "are mistakes killing your business?" worth testing, you will be surprised! It could be as simple as supplying training, providing more clear and concise information, reading job sheets more thoroughly etc. It has been proved many times over in quality assurance that a second set of eyes will see what the first one doesn't. Perhaps the easy action is to bring quality checks within each department, check the job before going ahead, read and re-read – make your job easier and instil job satisfaction into your daily work environment.