



# THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN SIGNMAKERS SURVEY.

## WHY? Calling all Signmakers industry participants

We all know the sign and print industry is changing rapidly. Fact is, even the definition “sign” is rapidly switching to embody a wider definition, as is the designation of “sign maker”. That is nothing new for any reader, however may I suggest these deviations are not being tracked or leverage except perhaps by a small handful of commercial organisations. Of course, their collection of this important intellectual property and data is for their own use and good on them I say. However, my question is ... “how does that help the you in running your business, RTOs, suppliers or the government if we seek funding to grow or business?”

I propose a survey offering essential data available to all respondents. The collected data

can – and potentially will – greatly assist you to make business decisions within the industry more concise, better focused and based on knowledge rather than guesswork! This documented wisdom has not been available for decades. If it was available, it must be advantageous to the people employed in the industry, training institutions, suppliers and the government both state and federal.

The burning question is, “Will you invest just a few minutes to potentially create a change for your own benefit?”

The long-held belief is that – without any genuine evidence – there is something like 5000–6000 “sign and print” manufacturers involved in signmaking across Australia. This

figure has largely been unchanged for at least three decades!

### Who were the signmakers?

Considering the convergence of traditional signmakers and traditional small-format printers, that alone has significantly changed the statistics. Then add exhibition and events, sign franchisees, start-ups in digital print only and an endless range of newcomers who have embraced new technology and made signmaking their home.

Thus, in my personal viewpoint, “how could the old perceptions of the size and dynamics of the industry be even remotely accurate? The numbers just don’t add up. Let’s make a new one!

### Where are the old-school suppliers?

The sheer diversity and scope of those previously referred to as the ‘Sign Industry’ and its suppliers has significantly changed and evolved due to technology, materials, masses of new entrants and wider skillsets. The industry has welcomed new suppliers who are offering vast ranges of new and more versatile products. Previously, only a handful of suppliers were large international companies, yet in a couple of decades the old school local suppliers are being absorbed, merged, acquired or just disappeared!

I’m not making a social comment – I am just highlighting the massive changes in suppliers as well as signmakers. This had added to the pace of change in techniques and materials. Frankly, it is breath-taking.

These products, systems and methodologies have opened many doors and slammed shut others.

Rarely was the word marketing used in signmaking discussion and circles. Now, the high-end integrated systems not only offer output of finished goods, they will report how long they took to produce, cost and even offer an online shop module to help the signmaker market the products they make – when did that happen pre-digital – it didn’t.

Thus, the immediate importance of an all-encompassing Signmakers Survey!

### Will you spare 5 minutes? It’s your business – have your say.

Traditional skills in many areas have survived and flourished while entirely new practitioners have embraced old-school techniques. There has been an influx of entrepreneurs whose eyes opened wide at the first sight and smell of digital print.

It is estimated the industry produces hundreds of millions of dollars of sign and digital products. How about we test the simple sentence, “I make signs”?

We put it to you that, that statement no longer specifically describes your skill set or indeed the type of business you work in.

No one, not even the Australian Bureau of Statistics or indeed the various trade Associations has any meaningful information on the current size or make up of the sign and print industry. There are many suppliers who have compiled their own numbers of sign and print manufactures. Realistically, they may have invested many tens of thousands of

dollars building that information. It is very fair and reasonable they protect that data for their own commercial benefits of understanding the market size versus others who may not know.

### There is an old saying –

“there are three types of lies – lies, damn lies, and statistics.”

The need to drive any part of an industry with REAL statistics is not just important – it’s the very difference why some industry sectors are granted millions to build the employees, provide training, increase profitability and wellbeing, while others like the Sign and Print industry flounder at best.

Why is it so critical to have a concise and wider understanding of the Sign and Print industry? Not to be too mellow dramatic – OUR INDUSTRY NEEDS FACTS TO GROW. It is the only way markets grow and prosper!

Let’s, look at why...

- **Governments** will not fund “smoke and mirrors” we need to depict the REAL sign and print industry size if you want funding for TAFE colleges, Registered Training Organisation (RTOs) and grants.

- **Governments** in both State and Federal guise will always listen and assess appropriate grants, training and incentives. Without real numbers, it is improbable they will accept a proposal from any industry.

- **Lobbyists** professional and constituents alike are like an archer with a bow yet no arrows without accurate data. The desired target can be well described no doubt. Nevertheless, just talking words is like another famous quote that comes to mind – “Facts are stubborn things, but statistics are pliable.”

- **Training organisations** – its takes years of planning and organisation to develop a syllabus and training tools to offer training courses that meet the competencies required. The need to train people to meet the proficiency levels needed to be able to grant an apprentice or similar with a certificate of achievement for their course. Think about it – years of development and planning then maybe you can hope to achieve a return on your investment? Maybe, 20 years ago ... very old school, nowadays without serious backing and guaranteed returns it will never happen. Plus, think again, the market for training is becoming agile – online – think ZOOM® I think you get my point. – without the data – training as we know it will stand a huge battle to survive.

- **Suppliers** will not just gamble on stock you need for your production needs. Suppliers have the same responsibility as you to assess your needs and have a balanced stock pile of suitable goods.

May I offer you an example of how you will be affected? Assume they carry 50 rolls of a white media. As their own assessment of the market suggests, then perhaps the real stock should be 150 rolls if they knew trends and opportunities. What happens when you order matching stock for a regular project yet they made decisions unaware of trends? You may have to switch stock along with many others. Do you need that? Forecasting without quality information – its just guesswork.

- **YOU and your business** – yes, just imagine how much more difficult life can be after COVID19 without the ability to talk turkey to Governments, to have your people and children trained, run a business not knowing what stock or the equipment you have readily available. Whereas a survey will add to the baseline of current knowledge. All for just a few minutes of your time.

Our call, passionate plea or begging if you like is for you to invest the few minutes it will take to help change this reality and begin to put some basic statistics together regarding your sign and print industry. Then and only then can we as a collective, proactive industry have some bargaining power with the appropriate bodies to leverage the real facts about our sign and print industry.

The consequences are simple, your living is likely to decline, staff will be harder to find, materials you regularly purchase may not be in stock, your apprentices will dry up as TAFE will cull courses with low numbers of applications ... I could go on for ages.

Blind Freddie could see this coming and it is now or never. I’ll stick my neck out, I just need your help to build a valuable tool for all our futures.

The <http://www.visualimpact.org.au/sign-print-graphics-virtual-tradeshaw> has a linked trade stand for The Great Australian Signmaker Survey its right at the main entrance. By the time, you read this it will be in its final weeks – so act NOW!

There has also been various eNews links, email direct marketing mailers and links. If all else fails and you can’t find a link there is one on the [www.visualconnections.org.au](http://www.visualconnections.org.au) home page, my own web site [www.controlzone.com.au](http://www.controlzone.com.au) or email me on [john@controlzone.com.au](mailto:john@controlzone.com.au) and I will personally send you one!