

Jessica McAuley

Printer - Digital Print Machinist

State Lithographic Institute of Australia Apprentice Award

Institute of Australia Graduate of the Year Award

Visual Connections - Lithographic Institute of Australia Graduate Scholarship Prize

What made you consider becoming a printer and how did you go about it?

At school I really enjoyed science and have always been quite artistic. I thought I wanted to be a biologist. By the time I reached year 12 I was questioning what the future would hold and whether I wanted to go to university. I felt overwhelmed. There is so much pressure that it's hard to see clearly so I switched from ATAR to general and did a work experience placement with a small local printer. I didn't know much about print then but thought it might be interesting. They were a really good bunch of people eager to show me how to do everything. Their enthusiasm got me excited. I got to be part of the entire printing process and it made me see the creativity of it all. At the end of my placement the owner offered me employment under an apprenticeship contract once I completed my schooling.

What are the benefits of doing an apprenticeship?

Although I was based in Perth, the apprenticeship was done through an interstate TAFE, combining on-line study, assessments, practical on-the-job-training, occasional visits from the TAFE trainer and plenty of communication in between. These worked well together: the study was relevant to the practical work I was doing in my job and that made it easy to understand the theory; it also gave me a good understanding of the machinery I was using and a better ability to apply my knowledge and troubleshoot problems. The learning is very hands-on: you're involved in the process, able to apply the theory on a regular basis which helps remember what you've learned.

I also liked the flexibility of completion. As long as I was able to show that I was competent in each area of learning, the self-paced process enabled me to complete my apprenticeship sooner than if I was attending face to face classes. Getting

on the job training and completing a nationally accredited qualification while getting paid worked well for me. By the end of my apprenticeship I felt very job ready having learned all aspects of the job. Plus I didn't have a study debt.

What personal attributes and general skills are ideally suited for the job?

This is a creative industry. It is dynamic and vibrant, dependent on cutting-edge technology, software applications, contemporary materials and techniques. Employers often require their staff to multitask and be competent across a number of machines or design and production phases. Smaller companies, particularly, rely on their staff to have cross-capabilities across different parts of the job. For these reasons, being flexible, willing to learn new things and interested in what you're doing is very important. You also need to be detail-focused and be good at managing your time to meet deadlines.

If you're coming in as a print machinist, having a technical mind or at least an interest in technology and how machines work is an advantage. Similarly, although not critical to the job, being creative allows you to appreciate the process a lot more, enjoy the changes you can make to a job (the way something looks and feels) and be excited and proud of what you and the team are accomplishing.

What do you enjoy most about your job?

Whether you're a designer, the printer, someone cutting or bolting the product it goes from an idea to a finished piece and you were part of that process creating something beautiful for a client. Being able to see that is exciting and rewarding and you get that sense of achievement every day. Breathing life into a concept and seeing the end product integrated into daily life at supermarkets, building sites or cafes is personally rewarding. I now have a different level

of appreciation and connection with places. It's like leaving behind a footprint. That's really cool. Not many people can say that.

What are some challenges you face working in the industry?

It is a busy environment so you need to be able to manage your time well and work to deadlines. You learn to strategise to make sure the fast turn-around timeframes for product delivery meet client expectations. You get better at this over time but it helps if you like keeping busy.

What are some exciting technologies and how are they shaping industry?

This is a rapidly evolving, exciting, fast paced industry and technology and automation play a big part in that. It is all about improving efficiency, productivity, speed, quality and reducing cost. Technology is increasing small business capability and capacity. Machinery upgrades are also providing businesses with the versatility to broaden the products and services they offer. Understanding what the machines are capable of and maximising those print technologies can help adapt your business and diversify your client base. Software upgrades are refining systems: making them more intuitive and business friendly, reducing the need for complex training such as coding. On-line ordering systems are boosting efficiencies for both businesses and clients. They de-clog your day, allowing faster delivery processes.

What opportunities have resulted from winning your awards?

Winning the awards gave me a lot of opportunity to network, travel and be involved at a broader industry level. I got to meet people from different corners of the industry, have been able to gain a broad knowledge and hear different perspectives on things. Being up on stage, telling my story and advocating for industry was great and winning the money meant I was able to travel to Germany and see the latest technologies. It has given me an understanding of the criticality of networking and it is this connection to people which I find has been most valuable providing further opportunities to broaden my understanding, involvement and travel.

Do you see yourself as a role model?

Recently, the printing industry has drawn a lot of negative attention in its transition towards a blend of printed and digital media but every industry has its challenges. The impact of technology also creates opportunities and I see the benefits of this in the type of work being produced and the breadth of materials used in our craft. We all have a role to play to ensure

public perception reflects a balanced portrayal of this industry. It is important industry lobbies to schools and career advisors to raise awareness of what we do and the impact our work has across all industry sectors. There are viable career options in what is a highly creative and technologically advanced industry.

I am passionate in making sure this industry attracts new talent into the workplaces to harness imagination and fresh ideas which in turn will drive innovation. My story can advocate for what is possible. There is a lot of stigma associated with choosing a trade and a great divide in the way we think about vocational education and training compared with university degrees. In reality, there are many pathways and options to a rewarding and successful career. Going to university is just one of those and does not suit every job role or person. There needs to be a cultural shift in the way we think about those who choose to go to university and those who choose not to. Neither path is a reflection of intelligence and doing a trade should not be seen as a lesser option. Understanding this distinction is important when deciding what career you might like to pursue. Being comfortable with that understanding can open up choices not yet considered. And here I am.

What does the future hold for you?

I only left school three years ago. I find myself adjusting to a new work-life balance and am slowing my pace after a very busy few years. Working for a large company, I have recently changed my roster so work three long days and then get a four day weekend. There is a transition period at the end of every month where my hours change for a week and I get to enjoy a week off every second month. It's fantastic as it gives plenty of time to take up hobbies, travel or do some study. Not too many industries allow people the flexibility of having a long weekend every week and six extra weeks of leave a year and still get paid a constant 38 hour pay.

There are opportunities to progress my career and I may want to move into sales or marketing within the industry but that will take time. I can see myself working more closely with clients to meet their needs. For now I am passionate about what I do and am keeping busy learning everything I can to continue getting better at what I do. I may do a Diploma of Business in the future but am working through my options and interests at the moment. To be honest I don't know what the future will hold but whatever it is it will be good and I will be right in the middle of where technology takes us.