



Chris Jones (sixth right) is a leading light in Finat's YMC organization, as is Xeikon's Filip Weymans (second left)

Young Managers

Chris Jones, marketing manager and UK and Ireland sales manager at Alphasonics, writes candidly about the industry's challenge of attracting a new generation into printing

A number of years ago, I produced an article which was published in the Finat Yearbook entitled 'Let's push things forward'. The crux of the piece was intended as a stark warning: if we don't encourage the best young talent to flourish in our industry, the future may not be rosy as many would like to hope.

Since then, I've joined the board of Finat's Young Manager's Club after attending a number of events and becoming unashamedly enthused with what I saw. I saw a dynamic group of people, passionate not only about progressing themselves and the businesses which employed them, but our industry as a whole. Finally, people who felt similar to me, and instantly I saw the benefit of what they were doing.

While our board has become smaller, our attendees and our network has only grown. In Europe, we're undoubtedly gaining a reputation as a progressive and effective platform. The key to this is the fact that we not only openly discuss ways to improve ourselves professionally and what we can take back to our company through our seminars and workshops, but also, what the issues are for us in the label and packaging industries as young people. We all know that the average age of those in our industry is increasing and we know there are a group of well-known faces that are dominant.

However, there is still a concern for me. It's clear that the majority of our members are from family businesses, myself included. What this suggests in part, is that young talent is primarily coming from these companies and not the industry at large. Our group is growing, but the same problem exists. So what gives?

Why aren't the best attracted to the industry? Is it not sexy enough? Are we reaching out to them well enough? I know for certain that I've never met one person in these spheres of print that aren't fully engaged by it or don't find it interesting. So are we as an industry showing this to graduates and young professionals? Clearly not.

New ideas

We as a collective need to look hard for the brightest new minds entering the world of work and make our industry attractive to them. More to the point, offering a pathway to management, responsibility and a place of meaning within one of the spheres of print which is growing technologically by the day. We need to look at those who have specialized in what we need. There is a new raft of engineers, accountants, business management and marketing experts primed with new ideas and a means of providing competitive thinking. A rich resource that is currently under-used. Why not try to tap it at source,

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such as by attending graduate fairs, and offering undergraduates and masters students alike a taste of our expanding and innovative industry, and with the prospect of a chance for real career progression. Our industry is exciting, it's fast-paced, and it's getting more and more interesting by the day. Why not sing that from the rooftops and drive us forward with the next generation of leaders at the helm?

One day, as our industry's well-known faces retire, there will be limited number of people to pick up the baton. We have to plan for this talent vacuum and start early to ensure the future is rosy and growth continues. At Labelexpo Americas in Chicago, I learned that TLMI's Young Leaders organization is undergoing a new lease of life. This provides a great opportunity for the industry in the US, especially, to focus on what can be done to drive their industry forward with youth and new talent in mind. Focus should not just be placed on networking, but like my own experiences with Finat, look closely at the issues effecting young people in our wonderful industry and how they can move forward with their own career progression. I openly invite them to engage with us and work together with Finat's YMC not only to gain insights, but also to harbor a meaningful and open exchange which will benefit everyone concerned.

Everyone at Finat's YMC is dedicated to our industry and also to creating a positive environment for young people in both our group and the industry at large. We're continuing the planning of innovative workshops, seminars and program primed to help our members and their companies' progress. If you're reading this and think it's for you, join us. If you're reading this and think our ideas can help you, we certainly can. Either way, one eye on the future is an eye on progression and the pathway to a brighter industry.



Chris Jones, born in 1986, is a graduate of Aberystwyth in Wales, and recently completed a Master of Business Administration degree at University of Liverpool. He is staunch supporter of Everton FC, attending matches home and away as his work allows