

IPI ROI is Triple A

June 5, 2014

Photo Counter chats with the IPI's (Independent Photo Imagers) Ron Mohney, executive director, and Brenda DiVincenzo, director, Operations & Membership...

What makes IPI different to PMA?

Ron Mohney: The way the membership works. Even though they are independent they work as a group that networks and truly does help each other. Our foundation pieces around IPI are education, networking, marketing, and our buying component.



But if you look at what really happens on a day-to-day basis all that is going on, but the networking is really where it comes in and you have members helping each other – sharing ideas and sharing successes and focusing on the details of how they achieved success to help other members.

So if you are looking on our online forum you would see over the course of a typical day there are probably 100, maybe 200 posts daily where members and our supply partners are collectively helping each other, chatting amongst themselves. So when we get together at an event like this the (the IPIC Conference in Las Vegas, June 23-26) that same type of model is expanded with 'one-on-one conferences' and people working and helping each other throughout the day.

Brenda DiVincenzo: When our members go to the larger shows they kind of get swallowed up. This is something that's very focused on them. They are sure to find something that applies to their business and maybe even a new business idea they haven't thought of yet. It's really kind of a family. There's definitely a social aspect – once a year we get together and have a great time working on our businesses. But at the same time the members love it when new people go because they want to make sure they are learning from everybody and the more new people the merrier...



What proportion of IPIC attendees are not from the US?

RM: Out of the close to 300 attendees probably about 70 to 80 are offshore. About 20 percent.

Why should Australian and NZ retailers join IPI and attend your conference – it's quite an expensive trip?

RM: All our international growth has been around our marketing program and our ability to have something that allows members across the world to market to their consumers, and within that marketing program we also develop new products on a regular basis, so being able to have those products at your fingertips is a very strong component of our international program.

BD: From an educational standpoint I notice the sessions are heavily filled with our Australian and even our Canadian members. I don't know what other kind of educational opportunities they are getting at conferences, but at our break-out sessions – being focussed on growing their email marketing list, or different smaller areas like that – I've seen them get very excited about that and come back year after year to further their education on those topics. I know we have some of the best education out there in our industry, and I don't know what's available to them at home, but it seems like when they come here they are just eating it up like crazy.

RM: I think our most valuable testimony is coming from other members and whether they are Australian or US there are very few that I've ever spoken to or heard from that have said that the investment in attending an event of ours, or being a member and paying the membership dues, is not many times over the value they have paid out. We know it gets quite expensive once you start having to cross the seas like you guys do in Australia but still folks are going to come out of this with the feedback that every bit of their investment is paid back many times in what they've learned and what they bring back and use in their business.

Is there a trade exhibition component to the conference?

RM: A full day, and a couple of hour trade show components. So Wednesday is focused on the



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trade show and there's also two hours on the Tuesday evening which is more of a social event on the trade show floor with the supplying partners. So we have quite a bit of activity and focus around that area.

What are your conference highlights?

BD: We are very excited to have Gabby Mullinax (*pictured right*) speak on Monday morning...Bill McCurry is going to do a Marketing Ideas Exchange lunch for us with the whole group...Erin Manning will come in and teach us about re-inventing our marketing through video...and there's Paul Thompson – a visual merchandising expert...

([Click here for Conference program.](#))

RM: There is another component that we are pretty excited about. If you think about all these different speakers as presenting a set of tools for your toolbox, then how do you now take all that information and all the different ideas that you have and put that into an executable program? We are calling this the '100 Day Challenge'. We realised that many people attend a conference and after they conclude that conference they have the best intentions, the best ideas all noted, and then they go back and they rarely get implemented. So what we've done is put together this 100-Day Challenge...

BD: So the members will start their challenge on the first day of IPIC. We will give them a workbook to use as a guide and walk them through it. It will help them with setting their goals and give them lots of tips on how to set goals and we'll do some education along with that and make it very interactive. By the last day of IPIC they are going to declare their challenge – whether it's out loud to the group, or they pin it on a wall, or mail it to themselves on a postcard. Just to remind themselves what goal they have chosen. And then we will put those people into groups based on their goal – for example if you have a dozen people who have decided they are going to remodel their store over summer we'll group those people together so they can work off of each other. So there will be accountability partners – peer pressure at its finest – and we'll have it set up on our website so they can share their successes, things they are struggling with, provide each other with solutions and support and between us on the staff and their group – it will act similar to how a physical trainer would for weight loss or some other kind of fitness challenge, and we'll just have them spend 20 minutes each day executing that goal, whether doing it themselves or allocating tasks to staff, so that at the end of the 100 days they will complete that goal...

There are over 100 A/NZ IPI members. Are you pleased with Australian & NZ support so far for IPI?

RM: We would definitely welcome more but we certainly are pleased with the entry into the market there. There's more room for us to learn and expand so we can serve the market better. We are continually working to add new things to all of our programs that will help all our Australian and New Zealand members.

BD: We are excited this year that both Phil Gresham (Fotofast) and Paul Maietta Fitzgerald Photo Imaging) from Australia are presenting sessions. Phil is a great speaker and has a lot to share. Paul has been over two or three times in a row but this is the first time presenting.

There's great loyalty among retailers to PMA in Australia and a perception that you are either PMA or IPI. Do you have to choose one or the other, or is there room for both?

RM: If you have an investment in your business on education and developing new products and getting into the new world I personally believe that independent retailers should spend it in one place and focus on IPI. But of course we are going to say that! The organisations can and do complement each other.

BD: I think there is still an overlap of our members. I think PMA does some things well that we don't as far as copyright and other issues, but I think if you are an independent, Ron is correct in that spending your money on this more focused group, with more educational components and marketing components and networking opportunities than a PMA show that's now partnered with CES that is so big. So I think it's definitely to their advantage.

But we still do see an overlap. A lot of our members are on the PMA board so I think there are ways they lock together. But if somebody had to make the choice, I would obviously point them towards IPI as an independent.

What percentage of your members use the Marketing Solutions Program – and do they get results from it? In Australia there is some criticism that it is more focused on US retailers...

RM: I believe we are in the 60 – 65 percent range across the board. What we are trying to do is work with any group we think needs more help, more focus, and if we do find areas where we think we can add things that help people attack their marketplace better we will assist with that. The people who are sceptical we want to hear from them, we want to talk with them to find out how we can reform this program to add new parts to help them in their specific marketplace.

We hear things like, 'my customers don't use email, so that part is not good for us', and you have wonder because email marketing is extremely strong almost anywhere. The same thing but to a lesser degree with Facebook, Twitter Instagram. We feel it's not that you are going to have a home run with every one of these items, but by doing all of these items and doing the marketing and doing the various parts and pieces there's no way that it cannot boost your business many, many times the investment for the program.



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Do you see the High Street/Main Street photo store disappearing as a category of retailing in the US?

RM: I don't think that's true. Everyone has had to re-work and reconfigure. There's no such thing as a true on-hour photo lab like in the 1980s, but the majority still identify and think of themselves in that vein.

1



ONE THOUGHT ON "IPI ROI IS TRIPLE A"

Stuart Holmes - Independent Photo (IPS) on June 6, 2014 at 2:11

pm said:

*I would like to echo the comments that there is room for both PMA & IPI Memberships, as both organisations have the welfare and success of the Retail Photo Specialty Industry at heart – At Independent Photo (IPS) we see IPI Group Membership as being yet another essential tool in your marketing kitbag to differentiate your businesses USP's against the Mass Merchant/ Supermarkets attempted commoditisation of the Photo Market. We highly recommend that Retailers 'take a chance' and attend the IPIC2014 Conference and judge the benefits for themselves.
Stuart Holmes – IPS*

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