

MICHAEL JOHNSON'S APPG SPEECH – 6 JULY 2010

Last month the BPIF published *Priorities for Print*, a call to action by Government in support of our industry. We sent it to all MPs and all BPIF member companies. Hopefully most of the printers and parliamentarians here today will have read it. If not, more copies are available today.

One of the reasons that we published this document was to introduce our elected representatives to one of the UK's most technologically advanced and economically important manufacturing sectors with an ever evolving footprint in the creative industries. And as you heard from Martin earlier, it is the cornerstone of the UK's fourth largest industry.

We are also keen to attract new members to the Group, particularly those with substantial numbers of printing companies in their constituencies. Hopefully today will serve to demonstrate that we have a Parliamentary Group – and an Industry – that is more than worthy of your involvement. We greatly value the effort that Martin O'Neill, Chair of the Group, and Tony Lloyd, our sponsor today, both put into supporting our industry, and we hope that more MPs from both sides of the House will be minded to lend their support to you by joining the Group.

We also needed to brief MPs on our industry's concerns, particularly the 232 new ones who joined the House in this intake. In setting these out, *Priorities for Print* calls for specific actions that we believe Government should be taking to address each of them. It calls for action a number of important areas and I want to focus today on the one that is our theme today: "The Power of Print".

It's almost impossible to imagine a world without print. It is largely produced using sustainable materials. It is highly effective: print provides the means to communicate 'messages' easily, quickly and cheaply. Print has impact, it is creative, it engages, it is versatile and it is persuasive. It has longevity and authority. It is tactile and offers a 'real world' experience. It has a unique ability

to grab and hold people's attention. In fact no other media channel can offer this combination of qualities. If you don't believe me, just take a few minutes to look at some of the eye-catching value-added print that's on display today.

Now there are a number of things that Government could do to help promote our industry, and these are set out succinctly in *Priorities for Print*. In particular:

- They could reform the law on pre-pack administrations to make it more difficult for failed businesses to dump their debts and gain competitive advantage over well-managed companies.
- They could improve the quality, efficiency, reliability and pricing of postal services
- They could drive improvements in public sector efficiency and cut waste in public services, adopting standard tender criteria and pre-qualification requirements so that SME printers could understand, process and apply for these with as little bureaucracy as possible
- They could provide increased funding support to help companies address the skills issues arising from adaptation to structural change and to increase intake of apprentices
- They could provide support for sectoral initiatives to support innovation and business improvement through local agencies working in partnership with trade associations.
- They could maintain pressure on the banking sector to improve lending to SMEs, and ensure greater competition in the lending sector, in order to increase the supply of funding for investment in new and replacement technology

- They could legislate to ensure that companies and public bodies cannot enhance their own cash flow by imposing unreasonably drawn out payment terms on suppliers
- And they could recognise that removing VAT zero-rating from newspapers and magazines would constitute a tax on reading, with damaging consequences for literacy and educational attainment in our society.

But perhaps most importantly of all, we need Government and its agencies to recognise the power of print as a sustainable and effective and communications medium when making media procurement decisions. Print's sustainability cannot be called into question. It is predominantly a paper-based medium and paper is made from a crop, with three to four trees replanted for every tree logged. Printing companies are at the forefront of improvements in environmental performance in manufacturing, with high levels of take-up for both the ISO 14001 environmental management standard and for FSC and PEFC chain of custody accreditations. And using electronic alternatives does not come with a zero carbon footprint either. Half of the UK's domestic household energy requirement is predicted to be needed to drive laptops and PCs in the next 10 years.

Did you know emission per tonne of paper produced in Europe was reduced by 42% compared to 1990 and our sector reduced its absolute emissions by 8% compared to 1990. Our promise is to reduce that by similar levels in the next decade. Did you also know that more than half our energy from biomass and of the remaining part almost 40% was from natural gas. So we are a most credible partner in the evolution of low carbon scenarios. In world greenhouse gas league table we rate only 1.1% impact the lowest of any industry or sector. Print is almost negligible. Tell that to the INTERNET BOYS.

Even Google is going to produce internet guide...in a leaflet to get UK online by 2012.

When Government is under pressure to cut cost, there is a real temptation to cut print spend and 'go paperless'. I consider this to be false economy. The problem with relying on the internet to do things like book a driving test, apply for a passport, pay for a TV licence or fill in a tax return, is that many of these transactions are complex. Unless the technology is well thought through people will be disinclined to use it and will resent Government efforts to force them to.

There are many issues that need to be resolved before every citizen can be expected to embrace this brave new world enthusiastically. It's all very well to set out to save money and improve performance, but if it leads to a more distant relationship with Government then it could turn out to be self-defeating.

And a paperless society could easily turn out to be a faceless one. New internet users may find it difficult to use online services if they can't readily access help or advice from a human being, or because the services themselves assume you're computer-savvy. And other citizens may be worried about how efficient, secure and reliable they can be, or concerned about whether it's safe to notify address details online. With the new government looking to build a 'big society' and engage its citizens more actively, it would do well to harness the power of print to ensure it communicates effectively with them.