

INDIA TAKES BOURBON STREET BY STORM !

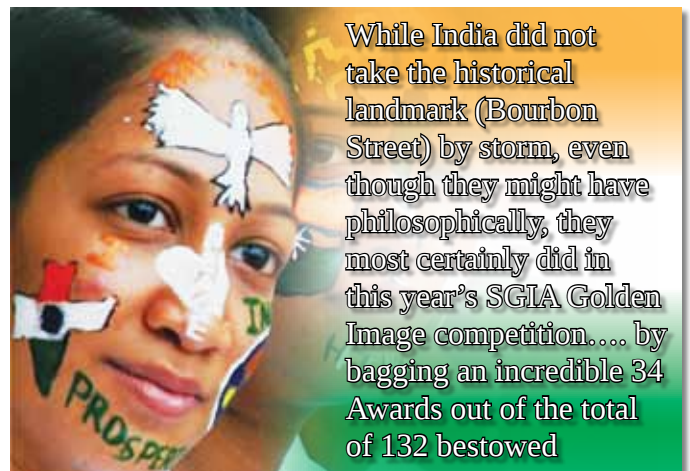


Why or how did India bag so many prizes at the New Orleans SGIA Expo 2009 Golden Image Awards? Mike Young, Imagetek Consulting International, one of the judges at SGIA '09 and a frequent visitor to India who has firsthand seen the progress of its screen printers, presents an in-depth analysis of this new trend and offers advice for further improvement. He points out that India only had to submit 1.59 entries per 'win' against 3.26 entries for the rest of the world. This accomplishment is quite incredible news for the Indian continent and the printing community at large.

To the best of my knowledge and to put concerned Americans at rest-I do not recall seeing Indian nationals taking the proverbial walk down this celebrated street in great numbers, one of the most famous and nostalgic thoroughfares visited in the United States. While India did not take the historical landmark by storm, even though they might have philosophically, they most certainly did in this year's SGIA Golden Image competition, held in New Orleans, October 7-9, by bagging an incredible 34 Awards out of the total of 132 bestowed. This is wonderful noteworthy event as it represents an increase of 65% over last year's competition !

To check out SGIA's web site for a full list of Golden Image Award winners go to http://www.sgia.org/events/current_expo/sgia09/competitions/gi_winners.cfm.

After seemingly a long absence, SGIA Expo finally returned to the very popular venue of the Big Easy, as one of the largest exhibitions held since hurricane Katrina devastated



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the area. While Katrina was responsible for over 1,800 lives lost and damages well in excess of \$100 billion (Rs.4,800 arawb), four years hence, downtown and the French Quarter appears to be business as usual. Hotels, restaurants, jazz bars, shops and taxicabs were busting at the seams to cater for the nearly 14,200 attendees to the screen printing show and after-dark entertainment. Although die-hard locals were adamant that things were still not back to normal I, as a visitor to the city perhaps on seven occasions including a vacation, would never have known that the inner part of downtown / French Quarter was devastated just a short four years ago. In all sincerity, it is probably fair to say that Bourbon Street will always be Bourbon Street regardless !

Why India ?

Why or how did India bag so many Awards ? A good question and one that several inquisitors walking around the Golden Imaging area sensed there must have been some kind of an explosion within the Indian printing community of recent. Before then, no one had 'India' on the tips of their tongue as it related to high-quality / high-definition printed products. They knew the country was becoming a major player in print quality, a realisation they would never have accepted until they observed with their very own eyes and watching other visitors being just as impressed in what they saw at the Awards. That is a powerful statement from neutral observers, being unbiased since it came from respectable printers who just simply never imagined such quality could come from the Indian continent.

Combined, there were a total of 52 screen printing categories and sub-groups being judged. Only six Indian companies submitted the total of 54 entries, although almost half (25) were from one company. In my tally, there were a total of 132 awards bestowed including two 'Best in Show' recipients; one apiece for graphics and textiles. Winning 34 Awards meant India bagged a staggering 25% of the total awards; equalling to 5.67 awards per company participating or 0.63 of an award for each printed sample entered into the competition. Conversely, the remaining 98 awards were split among 31 other participating companies who had submitted 319 entries. How does that stack up against India's net results? It equals to only 3.16 awards per company participating or a low 0.31% of an award for each entry.

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As statistical figures can sometimes be hard to evaluate their true meanings, especially against a gross participation of only 16.2% from Indian printers, perhaps the best barometer of their collective achievement is based on the number of entries submitted compared against the amount of awards collected, as it assumes a direct reflection of typical 'quality' submitted in the first place. It turns out India only had to submit 1.59 entries per 'win' against 3.26 entries for the rest of the world. This accomplishment is quite incredible news for the continent and the printing community at large. The reason for making this particular comparison is to remove the potential prejudicial unfair shotgun-effect, where companies might blast their way in by entering a mountain of everything printed over the year in hopes that some of them will eventually catch the eye of the judges. As such, I believe this statistical criteria represents the most accurate outcome for India's total contribution as it directly compares number of 'wins' against actual candid entries (see accompanying chart).

ROUND-UP OF SGIA 2009 GOLDEN IMAGE AWARD

GROUPS EVALUATED & CATEGORIES	TOTAL	REST OF THE WORLD (% of total)	INDIA (% of total)
Participating Companies	37	31 (83.8%)	6 (16.2%)
Number of Printed Entries	373	319 (85.5%)	54 (14.5%)
Screening Categories & Sub-Groups	52	52 (100%)	21 (40.4%)
Total Awards Given	132	98 (74.2%)	34 (25.8%)
Best In Show Awards Given	2	1 (50%)	1 (50%)
Gold Awards Given	48	37 (77%)	11 (23%)
Silver Awards Given	34	27 (79.4%)	7 (20.6%)
Bronze Awards Given	32	23 (71.9%)	9 (28.1%)
Honorary Mentions Given	17	11 (64.7%)	6 (35.3%)
Avg. Awards Per Participating Company	3.57	3.16	5.67
Avg. Awards Based on Total Entries	0.35	0.31	0.63
Entries Required to Win Award	2.83	3.26	1.59



Although the amount of Indian printer's participation was unexpectedly low when considering previous involvement with international competitions, it nevertheless spectacularly amassed over 25% of the awards-an astronomical feat and one that should be congratulated by all. Removing statistical figures from the equation, India's bottom-line outcome takes on something like this:

- They collectively captured almost twice as many Awards per participating company
- It took less than half of the entries required to 'win' an Award
- On average, each entry submitted had an award 'face-value' twice that of all the other entries from around the world

It matters little how the results are mathematically broken down and evaluated, all measurable facts superlatively points to India being clearly a runaway winner - and deservingly so.

Victorious in print

While it has never been my intention in the past to single out winning companies or awarded samplings, out of the respect

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for others who participated, I will make some exceptions to this rule in order to stress some accomplishments that was widely achieved by just a few.

Thane-Mumbai-based Classic Stripes bagged an impressive four awards (GOLD, 2 x SILVER and a BRONZE) out of their six entries. However, I think the most remarkable aspect of this accomplishment is not so much the gold and silver awarded for two different prints of Walt Disney characters, under the true process colour decal category, but they unbelievably beat out the formidable bronze-placed Atelier für Siebdruck (Studio for Screenprinting). If this Zürich-based company is not known to readers, the man behind it is no less than the highly acclaimed artist Lorenz Bögli-who is nothing less than a genuine master craftsman of the screening process and a protégé of the legendary Michel Caza.

Under the circumstances, I would respectfully rate both Classic Stripes' awards as being worth somewhat higher since their entries were unknowingly competing against one of the most distinguished European 4-colour process gurus in the industry. In careful appraisal of the printed samples, it was not hard to see why Classic Stripes' winning entries struck the eye of the judges. Irrespective of how real-life both printed images jumped out from the decal by its sheer impact of colour and dynamic vibrancy, the tonal blend (graduating dots) in several areas were absolutely perfect; whole and blemish-free dots to provide an extremely smooth graduating effect-a rarity seen in many high-end printed products. As a print judge myself, I know only too well it is this that often causes the downfall of otherwise worthy high quality entries.

Spectrum Scan of Mumbai deservingly added three more Awards to their healthy collection while Pune-based Unique Labels, acting entirely on their own, blew the instrumentation / panel category away by sweeping up all three awards; GOLD,

Mumbai-based DMI received an Award of Excellence (equal to GOLD) for a textile transfer. The total of two Award of Merits (equal to SILVER) were awarded for a multicolour Saree Box printed by its students.



SILVER and BRONZE ! As a demonstration of how well the judges thought of Unique Label's three winning offerings, no other entry in the group was worthy of an Honorary Mention. Mumbai's Matoshri Graphics should feel very proud too as they bagged a GOLD for their extremely beautifully produced three-dimensional process print of Disney Princess, the only award given in its category.

Students not forgotten

Students were not forgotten at the Expo. Under the auspice of the Academy of Screen Printing Technology (ASPT), they too had their own separate category at the Golden Image competition-as an encouragement to promote excellence during their training. If comparing last years participation is taken as proof of the programme's success then there were 40 plus entries against this year's 106, an astonishing increase of over 250% !

Due to the subtle nature of this category, it should be understood that judging students' print samplings take on a slightly different degree of tolerance in scoring from the 'adult' group. Print judges realise students have not yet gained the same skills or abilities as professionals and certainly not make use of the same level of equipment, materials or processing systems as professional printers do at their disposal. To this extent, one is a little more forgiving with registration, a touch more lenient with dot gain or if some were missing entirely, a bit more understanding when observing dirt being transferred from the screen, a shade more merciful with edge definition or somewhat more considerate with moiré. But in the final analysis when judging took place-there were almost no need to take such a relaxed view

in this year's competition. The top entries were so good-some perhaps better than a number of professional entries in my opinion, that it took Michael Robertson (SGIA's President/CEO) by complete surprise when I shared this observations with him.

As it happens, only one entity from India entered the student side of the competition, who were students from the Mumbai-based DMI (Dhirubhai Mistry Institute for Print Education, Research & Training). The Institute received an Award of Excellence (equal to GOLD) for a textile transfer printed by Shailesh Yeole. The total of two Award of Merits (equal to SILVER) were awarded for a multicolour Saree Box, printed by Firoz Chippa and a Carry Box printed by Shailesh Yeole-yet again ! As overall proof of the standard of quality in this group, which took over four hours-by far the longest to judge, the winning entries where separated only by one or two points from the majority of the others-all for making judging just that little tougher to execute.

As a side note from the golden Image awards, but nonetheless, an important announcement was made during the SGIA Expo. The esteem Director of the DMI printing school and Managing Director of Thane-based Grafica Flextronica, Mr. Bhargav Mistry, was elected as a member to the prestigious ASPT-the Academy of Screen Printing Technology. This was in recognition of his constant unrelenting devotion and forward thinking in overseeing the DMI immense benevolent principles, as well as all-out efforts in training award-winning students and developing their processing skills to a much higher level of proficiency.

The Academy recognises individuals who have contributed to the technical growth and advancement of the screen printing industry. The ASPT is an international body of experts which honours qualified individuals for their distinguished long-term contributions, application who actively provides technical education, consultation and promotion of the technical and commercial development of the screen printing industry. Congratulations to Bhargav on his worthy induction to the Academy and taking his seat alongside his fellow country Academy member, Devang N. Sheth, the publisher of this magazine.

In the eye of the beholder

In my customary way, I have reserved the best pitch to last, not because of its commendable significance but due to the continuous creativeness this company seeks in providing something unique and beyond the normal realm of print

Analysis

excellence. As a consultant, frequent readers know I do not deal with the T-shirt side of the screening industry despite a number of years experience with textile printing. That said, I reported late 2004 in these pages, under a two-part article headlined 'Destination India', about a company I was very fortunate enough to visit - Tarun Print Tech in Mumbai. I stated then that I could feel the sense of print 'quality' simply by observation as I walked into their facility. I later found the owner-brothers, Tarun and Bharat Shethia, both work untiringly in their constant pursuit of developing and creativity, by persistently pushing the processing limits to a higher level in order to produce something uniquely different to the market.

This creativeness and unsurpassed quality was very much in evidence at this year's SGIA Expo in New Orleans. The brothers bagged an astronomical 22 awards out of 25 entries, equalling an 88% return on their print samplings! Without researching the archives, I believe this is a world's record, 8 x GOLD, 4 x SILVER, 6 x BRONZE and 4 x HONORARY MENTION. Should this not be a record then I am happy just to leave it so the rightful holder can identify them selves and take the title.

But that is not the end of their venture in New Orleans. To top it off-they bagged India's first ever BEST IN SHOW, for a breath-taking single / multicolour piece goods print simply known as 'Guitar'. I have never knowingly used this word before in my articles but I have to say, the print was absolutely awe-inspiring at the very least. I believe Best In Show in the past was bestowed only to extremely complex multicolour prints or true process colours that created unusual stunning visual effects. This fittingly reveals any type of print offering can become the leader of the pack-irrespective of all the

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superlative appraisals that might be thrown at more intricate finishes concerning print quality-simply by catching the eye of the beholder.

Coming back to the time Tarun Print Tech spends on development, two GOLD entries were absolutely exceptional-a demonstration that their efforts obviously pays off. One was known as Ear Ring and the other AK-47. If additional Best In Show Awards or anything higher than GOLD were awarded, I am fully convinced these two entries would easily take them ! Photographs of the prized entries will not do justice because one needs to see and feel the three dimensional aspect of them and view the reflective lustre from the 400 micron thick film used in the latter shirt to complete its creative striking appearance. As I said in 2004 and reiterate again, I am staggered by how much quality is produced from so little-meaning just a few participants and especially from a community that had missed a complete generation in high-level printing skills.

Falling off the map !

Before we go any further, it would be prudent to reflect on some comments I made previously in these pages about India's ability to bag so many awards on the international front and consideration for its future. A few months ago in August, to celebrate this magazine's 16th Birthday-edition, I penned an article under the headline "Sweet 16", taking a snapshot of its short but illustrious existence and its influence in shaping the screening community in India. I reiterated about an unnamed textile printing operation in Mumbai that I visited, who took the best of international honours for print entries that were nothing less than overwhelmingly breathtaking. In case no one is aware I was referring of course to Tarun Print Tech.

I opined then that I was not surprised this company took top honours because they obviously had read, listened, learnt, invested and took the business at their own calculated pace. To me, this is the epitome of striving for perfection-so anyone can create their own 'diamond in the rough' if they are prepared to plan it that way. Classic Stripe achieved this feat with automotive decals as too Unique Labels with their instrumentation products. My fellow print judges and I, as well as the Indian screen printing community, know such quality exists and is performed on a daily bases routinely everywhere in most segments of the marketplace. The problem, however, is no body seems to be interested in exhibiting their prints-despite being judged to be among the best. If this indifference, if that is what it is, is allowed to

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continue, India will fall off the map for sure as a formidable player in the screen printing world. In my humble estimation, it is the number of companies that are low in participating and not exactly the amount of entries they submit.

On that point, many of the usual players that compete successfully nationwide as well as FESPA and previously at SGIA Expo's were sadly missing. Why was the participation so small when the community were doing so well over the past few years? While there is understandably a small charge for entering the competition-such payment does not even show up on the radar screen due to the insurmountable cost involved to handle the programme, by several full-time staff members to document fully each entry, crate, ship, display, rent a large room to display them and then hire several security guards! In fact, I was once informed a long time ago that the real reason for making a charge was to prevent companies from bombarding the competition with too many entries. It was a way to make sure participants would select their entries from the best of what they produced and nothing more.

The rewards of acquiring international acclaim for print greatness are very diverse and far exceed the cost to compete. Customers, especially new ones, will always acknowledge 'winners' because of their internationally noted ability to perform not only well but likely to exceed beyond expectations. This is a critical way where one can judge the worth of an untried supplier rather than what they self-promote from within. International recognition of the best in print superiority is an unbiased independent accolade that sends a powerful message to others without having to say or print a word! It makes one stand out from the crowd as being nothing less than special. Cataloguing awards acknowledges accomplishments like no other entity can confer and it lasts

a lifetime. As they say in Bollywood; if you have it flaunt it- because no one else will !

Wake-up India !

This time last year when writing about the 2008 Golden Image Award competition, I headlined the article by saying; "India throws down the gauntlet and challenges the world". Despite the unprecedented bagging of so many honours, philosophically the gloves have still not been removed from the hands because so few entered the competition this year. India, this is your early wake-up call requesting you get those best production printed samplings over to SGIA's HQ in a timely fashion for next year. As a matter of fact, I challenge India to step up to the plate and show the world that it has arrived and can hold their own when it comes to international excellence as a formidable printing community. Between you and me, I have already drafted my 2010 headline for next year's Golden Image Awards; "India takes 'The Strip' by storm" when it will be held in Las Vegas-so please do not let me eat my own words !



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