

PrintNZ media release (July 13, 2025)

Opal's Smith and Blue Star Wellington win PrintNZ Training Awards

Blue Star Wellington was named PrintNZ Training Company of the Year and Opal Kiwi Packaging afternoon shift manager Aaron Smith Trainer of the Year on stage at the 2025 Pride In Print Awards at the Cordis Auckland.

Mr Smith described being “truly honoured” by the recognition.

“It’s a real privilege to be able to support others as they grow in such a dynamic and ever-changing industry,” he said.

“This recognition motivates me to keep sharing what I’ve learned and keep investing in the future of print through the next generation of professionals.”

Mr Smith emphasised the value that his firm places on training and apprenticeships.

“For us, it’s not just about completing tasks – it’s about investing in people for the long term. Supporting someone through their learning journey helps them grow, builds a stronger team and helps future-proof our industry. It’s something we’re proud to champion.”

Having begun as a trainer in 2018, Mr Smith said training had since grown into a “real passion”.

“What drives me most is the opportunity to lead and support others in their growth. There’s something deeply rewarding about helping someone gain confidence, develop new skills and knowing you’ve played a part in their journey. Seeing people progress and reach their potential is what makes this work truly meaningful for me.”

In regard to what he personally brings to the role, Mr Smith said a focal point is to create a supportive, down-to-earth environment “where people feel comfortable asking questions and learning at their own pace”.

“I focus just as much on building confidence as I do on developing skills. I aim to lead by example – staying approachable, hands-on and always open to learning myself. My goal is to help people grow and feel genuinely proud of the work they do.”

Mr Smith additionally expressed appreciation to PrintNZ, Competenz and sponsors for “continuing to shine a spotlight on training and development in our industry”.

“Awards like this are a powerful reminder of how important it is to invest in people and their growth.”

Training Company of the Year – Blue Star Wellington

Blue Star Group chief executive Jill Cowling described being “thrilled” at the award recognition for Blue Star Wellington’s commitment “towards supporting the many aspirational people who want to complete an apprenticeship and continue their career development”.

“It’s a pleasure to see their success and for many of our apprentices to go on to become trainers themselves,” said Ms Cowling.

Blue Star Wellington operations general manager Dean Oliver said the award was welcomed as a “true testament to the hard work of our team, our trainers and of course, our apprentices and trainees”.

“We’ve been finalists before, but this is the second time we’ve taken out the award, which makes it all the more special,” he said.

“Training has been a core focus for us at Blue Star and we see it as a long-term investment in the future of the print industry.

“One initiative we’re particularly proud of is our experienced team leaders taking apprentices under their wing. We run internal workshops and cross-training opportunities to build capability and keep people engaged in their career development.

“Of course, financial incentives help – but it’s the sense of belonging that truly makes the difference.”

Mr Oliver emphasised that, while training undoubtedly requires a time and financial investment, “the return far outweighs the cost”.

“We see it in the skill level of our teams, their confidence on the floor and the loyalty they show to the business. Well-trained staff are more engaged and adaptable, and they bring fresh ideas into our operations. It also fosters a positive team culture – one that shows we’re truly invested in our people’s growth.”

He added that the business was currently developing a digital print skills module to support team members working with the firm’s latest digital technology.

“As the industry continues to evolve, we want to ensure our people are equipped with the right skills to keep pace. We offer leadership development programmes to help grow our future supervisors and managers from within.”

Mr Oliver also acknowledged PrintNZ and Competenz for their roles in continuing to prioritise industry training.

“Recognition like this keeps the spotlight on the importance of building skills from the floor up and we’re so proud to be part of the print industry. Winning Training Company of the Year has only fuelled our motivation to do even more in the training space.

“We love print and we love what we do at Blue Star – bring on another year!”

For further information please contact PrintNZ chief executive Ruth Cobb, ruth.cobb@printnz.co.nz, 027 248 9404.