

Q&A WITH INDUSTRY ADVISER JOHN SANDS

John has been with ICN since 2016 and has had an extensive career within the fashion and textiles industry.



Q. Prior to working for ICN what was your professional background?

I started my career in the fashion and textiles industry. I worked for a traditional knitwear company, who manufactured “Fully Fashioned Knitwear” under license for various labels such as Christian Dior. I initially started in a sales role and as I gained experience I moved into management. I then moved into the CMT (cut make & trim) apparel industry where I started my own business which I ran for several years. We produced locally in Victoria and manufactured around 30,000 garments a week. However, once import tariffs which were protecting locally manufactured Australian garments were removed, this allowed imports to enter and dominate the Australian market.

I then moved into the sporting sector where I worked for Tennis Australia in their commercial department. I then had the opportunity to work on the 2006 Melbourne Commonwealth Games where I was Program Manager of Uniforms and lead on all dimensions of the Uniform program.

I then took a short-term contract in WA working as the General Manager for a Pacific Brands business, YAKKA, where I ended up staying for four years. I have always had a passion for Australian made products, which is an interest that translated very well to ICN.

Q. What does an Industry Adviser do on a day to day basis?

I view my role as an Industry Adviser as a kind of gatekeeper between industry and Government agencies. I help the industry to navigate the requirements for Government tenders. Another part of the role is to help and assist industry find local manufacturers to ensure local content targets are met and to develop local supply chains. As an Industry Adviser I see myself as a bit of a matchmaker by utilising my contacts to the benefit of local industry and local projects. Another part of the role is to undertake supply chain mapping, which helps to identify the capabilities that are on offer throughout the state of Victoria.

Q. What is the most enjoyable part of being an Industry Adviser?

I really love to engage with businesses, and I get great satisfaction out of seeing smaller companies succeed, especially when they have had struggles through the tender process in the past. As an Industry Adviser even though we play a very small part in the process, I do get a great sense of pride when I see small businesses, which we have helped, winning tenders and growing as a result.

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John (pictured far right) is a very passionate squash player. In the last year John has competed at the Hong Kong Masters Squash Open Championships and at the World Masters in the US.



Q. What is your proudest achievement while working at ICN?

During the two and a half years I have spent at ICN I have had some good wins. However, I don't measure myself on wins as my ultimate success. What I am proud of seeing is the overall picture for local organisations and helping them become more competitive and ultimately successful through the rigorous tendering process. I am proud when I have been part of a job well done.

Q. Why is ICN a great place to work?

ICN is a great place to work because of the flexibility and autonomy I have as an Industry Adviser. I feel very comfortable in my role and I think the organisation has a great culture, which I enjoy being a part of. I have really enjoyed developing relationships within the workforce. We have a real diverse mix of personalities and skills at ICN, it is a bit of a melting pot, but it all works well and as a team we get on fantastically. Everyone within the organisation is very happy to help, which makes everyone's life much easier, you can always ask for a helping hand or a bit of support if you need it, which I think goes back to ICN having a great culture.

Q. Outside of work what are your main interests?

Outside of work my main interests are my family. I have two children who live in Victoria and NSW, I am about to become a Grandfather for the second time. I love being able to spend quality time with my family. I have always been a sports person and I still play squash and golf. I normally play squash 3 or 4 times a week and I recently competed in the World Masters in the US and the Hong Kong Masters Squash Open Championships. Having grown up in New Zealand I am a big Crusaders and All Blacks fan.

Q. What is the best thing about living and working in Victoria?

The culture, the food, the education system, the sport. I think we are lucky to have the best sporting precinct in the world in Melbourne. There is always something on whether it's a sporting competition, a jazz festival, a comedy festival or a food festival. You'll always find something new to do in Melbourne. More regionally there are some fantastic places to explore in Victoria from ski hills to great surf. The diversity of the state makes it a fantastic place to live.

Q. And finally, what one thing could you not live without and why?

I don't think I can narrow it down to just one. I couldn't live without family, friends, my dog and a good glass of red. All of those things play a big part in making my life what it is.