

## Women in Engineering

Dawn Bonfield 6 August 2013

This week we were asked to comment on a [story that is hitting the press](#) at the moment about an web-engineering company who used the somewhat seductive and provocative picture of one of their most attractive female employees to advertise jobs on a LinkedIn site. LinkedIn assumed that this was a model and not an actual employee, and took the advert down, to the fury of the CEO of the company who retaliated by saying that this definitely was one of his employees (and named the girl in question) and basically he wasn't doing anything wrong by using her image to advertise his jobs (and his company). The story was slightly confused as the same company had already used a model (as opposed to a real engineer) to advertise jobs previously - presumably before this new employee had been appointed and they didn't have anyone who looked good enough. Anyway, now they do so why shouldn't they use her to advertise jobs? Well, where to start? We all know that sex sells, and presumably this was the company's thought process in using such a sexy image of the employee, but is this an appropriate thing for an engineering company to do? I personally don't think it is. I think it reinforces the image that women are there to look good only, and don't have a professional and equal role to play in the business. I remember the days whilst working for an engineering company when calendars of topless women adorned the workshop walls, and when the clients sent them to me for Christmas (equal opportunities, after all) they had guillotined the calendar in half so that I only got the dates and the faces of the models, and not the semi-naked bodies. Whilst this seems funny now, the reality of walking through a workshop area as a young woman where the culture is such that men see women as sex objects and not equal colleagues is certainly not enticing for young girls, and something that should now be a thing of the past. I'm pretty sure also, that if there was more diversity in the management team of the engineering company in question then this sort of skewed view of what is appropriate would have been challenged before it got into the public domain. By all means, use women in your advertising, but make them real (i.e. not ones that could moonlight as a model), appropriately dressed, and looking as though they are in a professional environment. [See the comment piece here.](#)



Finally, as I wrote about last month, we have recently heard the news that Jane Austen will soon appear on one of our banknotes, which is a great win for all of us who campaigned for the retention of a woman on our currency, as we did at WES. We were asked to comment on our view of the choice of Jane Austen, and I had to think long and hard about this. Our own angle on the debate was that we should choose a pioneering engineer, such as Caroline Haslett, Amy Johnson or Ada Lovelace, the reason being that only by elevating these women to feature in our everyday consciousness will they start to become well known and make these non-traditional careers acceptable to the next generation. When asked about the use of Jane Austen, and whether she was a suitable role model for our young girls, it was a difficult question to answer. My own feeling is that she definitely *is* a good role model for our young girls, as she was a strong and determined woman who succeeded in her chosen career - against the odds at the time no doubt, and her work is still studied and enjoyed today. The heroines in her stories are equally strong and determined women, and these are entirely appropriate role models for today's young girls. The fact that the women she wrote about never became engineers is beside the point. :-)