

EPISODE 608

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:04] DC: It takes the right skills and the right innovation to design and manage meaningful print marketing solutions. Welcome to Podcasts From The Printerverse, where we explore all facets of print and marketing that creates stellar communications and sales opportunities for business success. I'm your host Deborah Corn, the Intergalactic Ambassador to the Printerverse. Thanks for tuning in. Listen long and prosper.

[EPISODE]

[00:00:33] DC: Hey everybody, Deborah Corn your Intergalactic Ambassador here at Sign Expo with first time exhibitor, Konica Minolta represented by Dino Pag – oh, God, you say it.

[00:00:46] DP: It's Dino Pagliarello.

[00:00:48] DC: Pagliarello. Bueno sera, senior.

[00:00:52] DP: Ciao.

[00:00:54] DC: Ciao. That was an amazing feat of Italian prowess there. Dino, first time attendee, exhibitor at – well, first time exhibitor. Have you been at the show ever?

[00:01:05] DP: I've been to the show before, yes.

[00:01:07] DC: Okay, I figured you spied it out at least once or twice. First time exhibitor at ISA Sign Expo. Why?

[00:01:15] DP: We are so excited to be here, first time ever, as you stated. The reason why, we have a new product. We have a brand-new product called the AccurioWide 250. First time show, not only in North America, but in the world.

[00:01:29] DC: Excellent.

[00:01:29] DP: Yes. And we wanted to have it here at ISA so everybody can see it. We're getting a lot of great interest. Some people don't know that Konica Minolta is the wide format business. So, one of the reasons we're here is to make sure that people are aware that our brand is part of the wide format industry.

[00:01:43] DC: Excellent. Well, it's definitely something I was not aware of as fully as I should have been, certainly having a podcast with you. But I figured you'd fill me here at the show. So, before we get into products and services, let's talk about you and your role at Konica Minolta. And really, what has been going on with you guys for the last couple of years? It's been a little radio silence, and with all due respect, I say that to you.

[00:02:05] DP: Of course. So, my official title is Senior Vice President of Product Management and Planning. Yes, we have been quiet on the wide format around for a little while. Due to the pandemic, we held off on new product introductions for about two years. And we just didn't feel like it was the right time to bring a new product to market. Over the past few months, we've been working really closely with our colleagues in Japan to get this new product out. This isn't the last of our new products. We're going to see some additional products that are coming later this year and into next year as well.

So, we're back on track. We started this journey with wide format in 2018, and we kind of took a little bit of a break. Now, we're continuing that journey and we're going to continue to add new products to the lineup so that we have a full portfolio of wide format products.

[00:02:52] DC: In your opinion, how does your wide format portfolio work with your press and MGI portfolio?

[00:02:59] DP: Yes. So, we are very simply investing in areas of growth when it comes to print. That means label printing, that means embellishment, that means wide format, high speeding, packaging, all the areas that we believe that are growth areas for print, where not only do we want to continue to invest, but we believe that would benefit our customers, our dealers, in areas that will allow them to expand into spaces where they may not have had access to in the

past. So, that's our main intention, is to help our customers be more successful with new technologies.

[00:03:40] DC: I mean, that makes total sense. You have access to those print service providers, because you're already having conversations with them about digital printing and digital finishing. Now, they probably, with all due respect, I've been getting their wide format equipment from somebody else. Now, you're saying, "Hey, keep it in the family." So, do you also are providing workflow, software, and everything that helps them make that all happen?

[00:04:08] DP: Yes, absolutely. So, we want to be that one stop shop. We want to be able to offer a customer, everything that they need in their commercial print environment, so that they have all the tools that they need in order to be able to support their customer base. That includes workflow software. We offer a product called the Isanti Workflow that goes along with our wide format products, and that allows the customer to do whatever they need to do from a wide format perspective.

It's amazing, as I've learned more and more about this business is that they're so versatile. There's so many things you can do with wide format other than signs, right? We learned that very much during the pandemic, with all the creativity that went on with wide format to get us through the situation that we all had to go through.

[00:04:53] DC: Yes. I mean, I remember the first time I heard that printers were making the acrylic shield for like supermarkets and stuff with the tables and the cutty things. I always forget what those things are called. But it was incredible how crafty they got with their equipment.

[00:05:09] DP: Yes, the limit is really your creativity of what you can do, right? And there's so many great things that we've seen. We are amazed by the types of samples our customers bring to us and say, "Hey, could you print this? We'd like to see how it comes out." As a sample print, before they decide to invest in a wide format device. And we've seen so many different applications that we've never even thought about, until someone brought it to us.

[00:05:33] DC: Right. It's really interesting, because in a way, you're taking the journey now into understanding what it means to develop a wide format business, because you're literally doing

it. What type of support are you providing to the customers of yours, investing in the technology? It's one thing to say, get a wide format press. It's another thing to be profitable with it.

[00:05:57] DP: Yes. So, we as a company, are investing in, not only sales support structure in the United States and Canada, but also service support. We are fully invested, ensuring that when a customer does invest in a product, such as the AccurioWide, that we're there to support them, help them understand the business, and help them grow the business so they can be profitable as well. If they're not profitable, we're not happy.

[00:06:23] DC: Yes, exactly. Everyone's got to keep moving. Speaking of moving, during the pandemic, or right before it, you redid and moved your experience center in Ramsey, New Jersey. Yes? Can you speak about that? What's in there? And who's allowed to come visit you?

[00:06:39] DP: Yes. So, this is something that's near and dear to me, because it's something that we've been wanting to build for a very long time. In March of 2020, we activated the showroom. We broke the champagne bottle and said, "Okay, everybody, the showroom is ready to go and 18,000 square feet of Konica Minolta technologies ready for your viewing pleasure." And then everyone knows what happened, the pandemic hit.

[BREAK]

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUES]

[00:07:03] DC: As soon as you said March 2020, my heart broke for you. But I did see your – come to your virtual launch.

[00:07:53] DP: Yes. So, we did – I shouldn't say we, the team did an incredible job pivoting to virtual demonstrations. I have to tell you, the team should deserve, everyone on the team should deserve an Oscar for being able to turn to acting when it comes to selling our products virtually. So, we pivoted. We were selling devices online with customers making purchase decisions, virtually, really the first time they ever saw the product is when it was actually delivered to their facility by our service team. We continue to do that. As a matter of fact, as of today, even today, 37% of all of our demonstrations are still virtual.

[00:08:32] DC: You see, people think that printers are off, like over virtual, but I do not believe that, because of workforce development issues. I think that in many ways that it becomes their only option. And if we don't keep providing that as an option in some way, I think that we're doing a disservice to the printers. So, thank you for that. I personally appreciate companies that invest in helping the printers. What else is in the – do you call it Experience Center, Innovation Center, what do you call it?

[00:09:05] DP: Client Engagement Center. In short, the CEC. We have three major centers worldwide. One in the United States and Ramsey, New Jersey, which is again, 18,000 square feet and opened in March of 2020. We also have a center in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia, which is another tremendous center that's been done with our European colleagues. So, if you're in that area, go take a visit. It's a tremendous space. And then of course in Tokyo, Japan, which is the original CEC, which we actually, took a lot of ideas when it comes to how it was organized, how it was set up.

One of the things that we do in our CEC and this is consistent through all of our CECs worldwide, is that we show the output first. We want the customer to see what can be done by the equipment. The equipment itself is a vehicle to how that output actually gets created. But to show them that gallery of output first, the packaging, the samples, the embellishment, the labels, the wide format creations that we have, says so much that the customer wants to know. “Okay, well, how do I get to that?” Not, “Hey, what is this piece of equipment do?” Right? So,

that's how we approach it. And it seems to work really well, because you get them excited about what they can do, then the vehicle of how to do it is the second question, versus the first.

[00:10:31] DC: I mean, that's probably why you've been project peacock partners, because that is our mission. To show people what's possible with print, and then if you want to get the technical aspects of it, go speak to the salespeople or the technicians. But it's a total show and tell. So, I'm fully behind that approach to the marketplace. Tell me about – you mentioned service, that is something that the printers also kind of felt like after the pandemic, that was a layer that was maybe moved around too much for their liking in some instances. Now, does your dealer channel handle your services? Does Konica do it themselves? How do you primarily sell it, through dealers or is it direct sales?

[00:11:17] DP: So, for the wide format business, we sell both through our dealer community, as well as our direct channel. We have technicians trained in the direct channel, service our product for direct, as well as we have some dealers that have been trained to provide service on our wide formats via the dealer channel. We have both, both the dealer and direct channels. We've sold the majority of our products through our direct channel, but we hope to grow the dealer business with this new refresh to the product line, and continued growth of the product line.

[00:11:46] DC: So Dino, one of the perspectives I like to bring to the table, or at least I want the printers to hear is the vision of the company that they're investing in. The wide format equipment is usually a lot more approachable than the digital presses, and the finishing in some ways, but it is still an investment. It's still money out of their pocket off their family's plates and into Konica Minolta's bank account. So, I think it's fair that they understand where you're looking to go. Is it expanding it so things are modular and they could just add? Is it like an Apple situation where every three years they have to throw out the present and get a new one? So, what is your vision of the future of print and how to all of your – you've been focused on wide format, and I appreciate that, because we are at the sign show. But in this instance, let's bring in your entire vision of the company.

[00:12:37] DP: Sure. Yes. So, I'm glad you asked because we have a significant investment in many areas of print that are in fact growth areas. So of course, our core business, our color

production and black and white devices, one of the areas of investment there is automation, right? How do we automate? And you asked, do I have to buy new press every three years? You can add capabilities to a press that you've purchased and add automation to it, whether it's color management, whether it's finishing, whether it's large banner paper that you'd like to print, all kinds of applications. So, the idea is continued investment, continued value add into the technology than we currently have.

In addition to the production print business, we've invested significantly, even over the past six months in the various areas of, let's call it, new areas of growth for print. We've just introduced a new label press called the AccurioLabel 400, which is a product that is twice the speed of our previous label press. As a matter of fact, Konica Minolta is number one in market share when it comes to toner label products in the industry.

[00:13:46] DC: I did not know this.

[00:13:46] DP: We only started in 2015, which is –

[00:13:50] DC: Congratulations.

[00:13:50] DP: Thank you. Thank you. So, we just introduced a new product that's twice as productive as the previous device for selling both AccurioLabel 230 as well as the 400. So, it just adds to our lineup of label presses and opportunities to get customers what they need. From an embellishment perspective, we just released two new MGI products back in October of last year. The MGI JET 3D 52L, and the AccurioShine 3600. What's unique about the AccurioShine is that it actually has the Konica Minolta logo on it.

So, made many enhancements from a service perspective in order to make those products as service friendly as possible, so that your uptime and productivity is even better than it's ever been. We're continuing to invest in the packaging space. We've got some products that we're looking at in that area. We continue to invest in the inkjet space and the high-speed inkjet space with our KM-1e. And, of course, the label business, right?

So, we're trying to help the commercial printer expand what they're doing today, to number one, help them grow, and number two to alleviate some of the potential downturn of the office business that they may be seeing with pages declining. So, that doesn't mean we stopped investing in our office business. We're continuing to invest there and we're going to continue to invest. As a matter of fact, we've got some new products that are coming out in the near future. But of course, we want to help them expand what they're doing and get into new areas of growth, where they can see a better ROI on certain things that they're investing in, and help their customers. At the end of the day, help support their customers in a better way.

[BREAK]

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUES]

[00:16:06] DC: One of the things you didn't mention is sustainability, and it's not that I'm the sustainability police, or anything, but it is very topical. When we look at brands and their supply chain needs and how they're going to be auditing them, everything is going to matter, including what do you do with the press after it's no longer in service. So, what are your thoughts and focus around that?

[00:16:33] DP: Okay, sustainability perspective, Konica Minolta is one of the most environmentally friendly and conscious companies in the world. So, we're taking that to the next level when it comes to end of life product. We are now considering or actually looking at a program to give those products kind of a second life where if a product is off lease, or now being either returned off lease or end of life, we are looking at ways of refurbishing those products and using them again. Still not quite finished as far as the overall planning.

But the reuse circular economy is where we want to go in that case. And the same goes for toner, toner bottles themselves. Why spend the energy of breaking up of cartridge into little pieces of plastic and then molding it again, when you can just use the piece of plastic the way it is, and refill it. So, those are some of the things that we're looking at. Because ultimately, there are going to be some states in the United States that are going to be asking for and making it mandatory. So, we want to be ahead of the curve, and do some of those things so that we can be ready when those types of things come down from a mandate perspective.

[00:17:44] DC: Actually, we were at the EPS Connect Conference, and we saw the presentation from Allison Keene that literally scared the crap out of me. It was possibly the scariest presentation I've ever seen, which is basically this is the end of the story. No more plastic. It's not going to happen tomorrow, although people want it to happen tomorrow. But if anybody thinks that there is going to be single use plastics, even multiple use plastics in the world, it is not a good bet.

So, that starts affecting things like the substrates we print on wide format. It affects pouches versus paper pouches versus plastic pouches. So, I'm glad you saw that presentation, because I have not been – I don't think I've been able to sufficiently scare people to what is coming. It has already started in California and Colorado. Knowing that now, what are you doing about that?

[00:18:39] DP: Obviously, we take all that very seriously. Like I said, about being ahead of the curve on the circular economy piece. We're looking at that very closely as well. Obviously, as you mentioned, it's not going to happen tomorrow, but it's going to happen. It's just a matter of where it starts to happen and when, so we need to be prepared. So, we are, of course looking into that. We've got our environmental folks, not only in the United States, but also in Japan, seriously looking at all of that.

[00:19:04] DC: And it was interesting, because she said it was going to extend even further into ink coverage, the type of ink and embellishments, which is clearly in your space, to the fact where they won't allow those products on shelves. The good news was that they weren't going to go after the printers, but they were going to go after the brands who were instructing the printers to print it that way.

[00:19:28] DP: Right. Yes, I know. At the end of the day, it's all about the brands and their social responsibility for the type of packaging that they're bringing to market. So, I think what's going to happen in the future is that the manufacturers, the printers, versus printers, whoever may have those particular products are going to have to follow what the brands are looking for. So that's how we're looking at it. We're looking at it from that perspective. It's going to be an interesting few years ahead of us to see how we have to adapt to those types of needs in environment.

[00:19:59] DC: So, you have a user group. Is that correct? Tell me about how that has been changing since the pandemic and how you've been serving the needs of your customers through education and whatever else you're helping them with there.

[00:20:14] DP: Yes, so the name of our user group is Prokom. And Prokom has evolved over the last few years. As matter of fact, the pandemic changed a lot, right? One of the things that we were doing from a user perspective was getting people together in person. We have our website, and it's a fantastic resource for our users to go to, to learn more about our technologies, and how to return on investment quickly, et cetera. Everything that you'd want to know about our products.

But because of pandemic, we made some adjustments to how the program exists and how we're going to move forward with the programs. See what we offer, register a user, if you have a piece of equipment, it's a great opportunity for you to learn more about all the great things that Konica Minolta has to offer, and stay tuned for the newest latest and greatest changes that are going to happen with Prokom, we're really excited about the future.

[00:21:04] DC: Okay, I think that's a perfect way to end this podcast, looking towards all the new exciting ways that Konica Minolta is going to be there for their customers and for the end users, which ultimately means the consumers and everybody benefits after that. Thank you so much, Dino. I really appreciate it. Grazie mille.

[00:21:25] DP: It's always a pleasure. Prego.

[00:21:29] DC: Until next time, everybody. Print long and prosper.

[OUTRO]

[00:21:36] DC: Thanks for listening to Podcasts From The Printerverse. Please subscribe, click some stars and leave us a review. Connect with us through printmediacentr.com. We'd love to hear your feedback on our shows and topics that are of interest for future broadcasts. Until next time, thanks for joining us. Print long and prosper.

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Mentioned in This Episode:

Dino Pagliarello: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/dinopagliarello/>

Konica Minolta: <https://kmbs.konicaminolta.us/>

Konica Minolta Client Engagement Center: <https://kmbs.konicaminolta.us/visit-our-konica-minolta-client-engagement-center/>

Prokom: <https://www.prokom.org/>

International ISA Sign Expo 2023: <https://www.signexpo.org/>

Deborah Corn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/deborahcorn/>

Print Media Centr: <https://printmediacentr.com>

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Girls Who Print: <https://girlswhoprint.net>

Print Across America: <https://printacrossamerica.com>