

[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]

[00:00:34] DC: Hey everybody, welcome to Podcasts From The Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your Intergalactic Ambassador, and I am wandering the show floor at Sign Expo and I am in the Roland booth. It has been so busy in here all day. I'm here with Amado Lara. He is the new president of Roland DGA. Hello, sir, how are you?

[00:00:55] AL: Hello, Deborah. How you doing today?

[00:00:57] DC: Excellent.

[00:00:57] AL: Thank you for being here.

[00:01:00] DC: I'm so excited. We just met and we've already hit it off.

[00:01:02] AL: Oh, yes. I'm sure. We'll be taking vacations together anytime soon.

[00:01:06] DC: Very soon. Actually, I did a little stalking of your LinkedIn profile. And as I mentioned before, it is very sparse, sir.

[00:01:13] AL: I'm a bit of a dinosaur. My girls are trying to teach me how to join the 2000s, I guess, at this point.

[00:01:22] DC: Okay. Well, luckily, you have colleagues who like to spill the beans. So, I found out you have a farm with animals on it. Tell me about the farm.

[00:01:35] AL: I got lucky, and it's California, and I had an opportunity back way back to get a little property. My wife and I are animal people. So, we have chickens, pigs, dogs, cats, turtles, some birds, and probably a goat is in our future at some point.

[00:01:55] DC: Really? To mow the lawn?

[00:01:57] AL: Well, who knows? Just because they're cool, I guess. I don't know. We'll figure it out.

[00:02:01] DC: They are. I know people who use geese as like alarm systems. Apparently, they're very –

[00:02:06] AL: They're very loud though, and they're kind of aggressive. So, I kind of like – everybody, we've got kind of melds together. They all get along. But that's interesting that you know that. That's pretty cool.

[00:02:16] DC: I do. I told you. I'm a little stalky when I'm interested. So, you started off your journey at Roland, which has been extensive. You've been here for years and years and years, but you –

[00:02:25] AL: Thirty-two years, yes.

[00:02:28] DC: Wow. That is a commitment.

[00:02:30] AL: It is. It is.

[00:02:31] DC: Either you are the legal manifestation of insanity, let's keep doing the same thing and see something different happens. Or you are truly in it to win it. You started off in Latin America. Is that true?

[00:02:43] AL: Yes. So, my journey begins, I came back down from Northern California, I got an opportunity to join Roland in the technical side of things. I started running the technical support and service departments. From there, I migrated over to the product management side of things, because I was very curious. Apparently, that's good. And then shortly after that, I found out that I like talking to people. I like helping people, and that led me to sales. I've been in sales, probably, for 25 of those 32 years. So, that's kind of basically my story. I stay because the culture at Roland is awesome. I work with some tremendous people. They're really great. We care about the customer. We really are genuinely interested in helping people, and the products are just awesome. That's why I'm still here after 32 years.

[00:03:31] DC: You also have – I mean, we're in the booth, and you really have branched out here. I remember the last time I visited your booth, and I saw the little t-shirt station. I thought that was a little crazy. But yet this morning, when I came by here, that was the most crowded part of your booth. So, how are you choosing the things that work together with wide format to offer? And then we'll get into that.

[00:03:55] AL: So, we look at our technology and our expertise, and really, what we're driving at is how do we empower our customers? How do we help them either turn analog systems to digital, or maybe find additional opportunities in sales? So, for example, in the small t-shirt side, it's an area we call SOHO, we recognize that there are these entry level customers, in a lot of cases, they're not really professional sign makers, that are looking to do, maybe a side gig, or maybe start their own business. And the technology really facilitates them the power of creativity.

So, they're making stuff that they put on Etsy, they put on Facebook, they put on Instagram. It's awesome, because these people just are so creative, and we have so many stories of these people doing amazing things with this technology. That's one example of an area that we focus on.

[00:04:45] DC: Yes. You're right. There's no exhaust here. It kind of looks like a big giant George Foreman grill. And the printer part of it, it's not hooked up to exhaust. I mean, I could run in my – it looks like I could run it in my house in a garage or something like that. I like – I believe in the gateway drug to bigger business and I do believe wide format is a gateway drug.

[00:05:10] AL: It is. And to your point, we do have several instances of these customers who have become successful and have obviously, evolved into becoming more of a sign shop or sign business, buying into our truest family. So, that's not necessarily the point. We love that to happen. But more so, we want to just give those people opportunities, be creative outlet, right?

[00:05:33] DC: Yes. I saw, you had like a yeti cup device last time as well, I saw.

[00:05:37] AL: Right. That is part of what we call object decoration.

[00:05:41] DC: Okay. I like that one.

[00:05:42] AL: That's a great growing part of our business, because we recognize that in the world today, people like personalized and customized things, right? We all want our name or we want something special. So, there's a lot of opportunities for products like yeti tumblers and things like that. So, we're putting a lot of focus and time into providing some tools to let people decorate those objects. And that rotary rack that you're speaking of, is an example of something like that.

[00:06:08] DC: I loved it, because it had like two different sizes, so you could switch out what you were you're putting in there. I really loved it. The other thing I really love is that this is a case for making a business with wide format. If you're printing that welcome home banner, or the family reunion thing, then the next question, do you need t-shirt? But usually that's left up to 1-800 find me a tchotchke. So, that's how I see Roland.

[00:06:39] AL: I mean, you've kind of basically hit the nail on the head. What we want to see is customers evolve, right? So, sometimes we get locked into the applications that we know we feel comfortable doing.

[00:06:51] DC: We're a wide format manufacturer.

[00:06:52] AL: Yes. But just realize that there are opportunities to provide other services. Exactly what you just pointed out. Why are you let your customer go to somebody else to get

what they need, right? So, we're just providing you more tools and more options for you to provide those services, and that's what we hope. We hope that our customers expand their portfolio products and become more successful.

[BREAK]

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUES]

[00:08:00] DC: To quote Dan Johansen, who now actually works with you. “They might not be getting it from you, but they're getting it from somebody.”

[00:08:10] AL: Exactly, exactly.

[00:08:10] DC: I have taken that to heart every –I mean, for years, I've been quoting him on this, because it is everything we just talked about. It's all those ancillary things to become a one stop shop for something. I don't care if it's family reunions, or it's high school dances. I don't care what you're the one stop shop for. Just become a self-contained unit and help customers do as much as you possibly can. Now, along those lines, we are in your booth, and you had a launch at the show. You want to talk about that, please?

[00:08:41] AL: Yes, absolutely. So, for many years, we have enjoyed a leadership position in eco-solvent technology. We're kind of known for that, right? And print cut, eco-solvent technology has kind of been our thing. But as applications evolve, as those new creative applications start to show up and become reality, we realized that we needed to give more tools

to our customers. Empower them to do more. So, there are new technologies out there, some they've been out there. For example, UV has been a mainstay of wide format for many years. Resin, I think it's been about around 10 years that it's been out in the market. And there are some applications, for example, wall coverings that are ideal for some of those technologies.

So, all we wanted to do was provide the same type of quality that we have in eco-solvent technology and provide it and those other technologies. Now, we feel like we have a full family of products for anybody who's looking to get into wide format, and we fit kind of any need that you've got. So, that's really the genesis of that.

[00:09:39] DC: Excellent. I mean, there's a lot of debate over what ink you choose in wide format. Do you think it's dependent upon the full breadth of what a printer does? Or do you think now, if you're not making like let's say eco choices, you're probably going to end up changing at some point?

[00:09:59] AL: Well, that's a difficult kind of thing to nail down. I mean, as far as that writing technology, I think it boils down to what is the most versatile platform for your business, right? Obviously, I think what we'd like to see is that it's a combination of several of technologies to allow you to create those things. We are mindful that there are some requirements out there, depending on the business, where, for example, resin might do better, because of those type of requirements. We just want to make sure that we give you the opportunity and that technology that you need. So, we're going to help that customer down that road in choosing the right technology for them.

[00:10:36] DC: Okay, so let's play a game, and let's play, Hi, I'm Deborah. I've ever been in the wide format business. But I want to start.” And I want to understand the machine I should start with, and I want to understand in your portfolio where I moved to from there, to where we are. So, let's give everyone a roadmap if they're interested in this. And in this way, they can jump in, in any of those stages.

[00:11:02] AL: Right. So, this is an area where the first thing that, and the most important thing, is to ask questions and listen, right? So, as a customer, I would ask you, today, you're obviously doing something. You're in that business, or you're getting into the business, and you have

some intention. Maybe it's car wraps, maybe it's stickers, maybe it's t-shirt transfers. Really, let's find out what exactly it is that you're good at today. Then we want to find out is have you thought, and much like you do, empowering the customer with new ideas. Have you thought about some of these other applications? What do you think about this? Based on those responses, we can kind of sort of guide them in the right direction.

Now, all three technologies are strong. But we know for example, as a kind of a Swiss army knife or a very versatile platform, eco-solvent continues to be kind of like one of the strongest platforms, particularly because of the materials that are available, and the fact that we have print cut devices. UV is right there. But say, for example, I want to do car wraps. Well, we know that UV isn't maybe necessarily the ideal technology for that. Maybe we might guide you more into eco-solvent. But let's say for example, you have some considerations about ecological certifications, the green, you're in a situation where you can't have the printer in a sort of industrial environment. Maybe resin is a better option for you.

So generally, we're going to ask you, where you're at with your applications, what are you shooting for? What are your targets? And really kind of guide you down that path and get you the right technology? And that's really kind of the way we would help a customer.

[00:12:37] DC: That's really fair. I mean, I learned – I went to Hunkeler Innovationdays recently, and I really learned there that – I used to kind of think that that answer was like a way of not giving an answer, right? But until I realized somebody cut, every once in a while, someone is like, “Deb, Deb, come here. Sit down. Sit down. Let me explain this to you in a different way.” And they did. I just want to share it because in case anyone thought what I just thought.

It's not just that what I want to do with it. It's who are the people in my print shop working there? What are their skill level? What do those particular customers of that particular printer need? Which could literally be different in every single print shop, which is why there is no standard answer, no matter how much I try to get one.

[00:13:24] AL: Well, it's like everybody is unique. We could agree to that. So, it's really not about trying to fit the customer to the technology, but rather the other way around.

[00:13:31] DC: Which I honestly didn't believe it until two months ago. But now I'm on that page. Along those lines, we have – and you mentioned before about green. Okay, now, I mean, green is not necessarily the word I would use, but there is certainly a more of a focus, especially if any of your customers are working with, I'm going to say brands, but I mean, advertising agencies, and I also mean even stores that are saying that they are –

[00:14:05] AL: They have requirements.

[00:14:05] DC: Exactly. So, how are you helping educate your customers on how they should speak about this stuff when the brands are looking for an ecofriendly supply chain?

[00:14:20] AL: Right. So, we have a lot of content. We have video content, we have documents, case studies, where we really talk about all those aspects. And so, we also bring together that message about, being mindful of those requirements for your customers and making sure that you're providing that type of solution. So, we do focus on education. I would say it's a lot of video content, a lot of document content. Come to Roland and we we'll talk to you all day long about it, and help guide you on how to speak to that.

[00:14:51] DC: Okay, at least you're focusing on it. Are you focusing on it in the vision of the products that you will be producing in the near future?

[00:15:00] AL: Well, I mean, we've constantly trying to fit how we apply. Obviously, sustainable technology sustainable, sort of, not only in the manufacturing side, but even as something as simple as we're not making cartridges with plastic anymore. We're going to make them with cardboard, something that's a renewable resource. We have products that use far less energy, right? So, they're not consuming as much energy as maybe other products. In every aspect of the design, we're trying to incorporate sustainability in there.

[00:15:29] DC: Okay. Well, that would be enough for anybody to give an answer on why this fits that sustainable supply chain. Does Roland have the system will you sell directly? Or do you sell through dealers?

[00:15:41] AL: Well, we primarily sell through resellers. We have a few products that are really supporting supplies and accessories that we do have a store. But really, we rely on the strength of our channel, our reseller channel. Quite frankly, we have some of the best partners in the industry, and they have expertise ranging from anywhere from car wraps, to commercial printing, to textiles. Some go after enterprise accounts, where they're talking to big name companies. Everybody has their sort of forte, where they focus on. We educate them, and they go out and actually engage with those prospects.

[BREAK]

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUES]

[00:16:53] DC: One of the fallouts from the pandemic, and obviously, there were many. But one of the ones I think that's most irritating to printers, is that a service technician layer kind of went woof and went away. How are you addressing that?

[00:17:09] AL: Well, I can tell you, we engage a third-party service provider, as well as rely on our dealers who have strong service capabilities. So, between the two in this hybrid approach, we feel like we have really good coverage. What we bring to the table is constant training, constant support. We have internal service and support personnel. We have a lot of video content. We're constantly updating in our training for people. So, we rely heavily on this national third-party service provider, as well as the reseller to provide that support.

I think, through the pandemic, and especially through the pandemic, we had a lot of customers who had to put some downtime on their products. We helped them go through that transition of

how to basically turn off their units and stuff, and bring them back, and that kind of thing. And I think we've proven that we have some of the best support and service in the industry.

[00:18:00] DC: Another fallout was the media substrate shortage. How are you enabling your print service provider customers to switch out and use as many substrates and media as possible? And do you test?

[00:18:16] AL: Well, that's a tricky sort of question because obviously, as a hardware manufacturer, we don't really have a lot of control over substrates. But what we can do is we can provide support by profiling and testing, working with partners to bring new suppliers of media. In some cases, the same brand, but they're using a different manufacturer. And so that requires – you have to basically create a new profile for that media, do a lot of testing. So, we do a lot of support on that side.

[00:18:47] DC: Okay. So, I mean, flexibility. If you can't get A, you can use B, C, D, E, and there's a way for them to find out. Okay, in many ways in a very fragmented way, you've answered this question during the podcast. But I'd like you to answer it in one concise way, so people just have the soundbite of it, which is, whether they're making an investment in a very – which looks like a very affordable tabletop t-shirt maker, or a more elaborate press to print many things on many substrates. People are making an investment in your company, and therefore I feel like they have a right to know what the vision of the company is that they are investing in. So, what is the future of print according to Roland?

[00:19:36] AL: I think the future of print is the expansion and evolution of all of these awesome applications that are providing an outlet to creativity. At the end of the day, we're giving people that opportunity to outlet that creativity and offer a product or a service for their customers, right? So, I guess if you want to boil it down to one thing, we want to empower our customers to be creative and to be profitable. And we're going to support that through our service, through our education and through our great products.

[00:20:08] DC: It was absolutely fantastic meeting you. Thank you so much for taking the time to have the interview podcast number two, when you get the goat, and how was it? This was your first podcast. Was I gentle?

[00:20:22] **AL:** Very gentle, very easy to talk to you. Great time. I'm just looking forward to my next one.

[00:20:27] **DC:** Excellent. And you're all smiley. So, thank you so much. Gracias, senior.

[00:20:30] **AL:** Thank you. Muchas gracias.

[00:20:31] **DC:** Ciao.

[OUTRO]

[00:20:35] **DC:** Thanks for listening to Podcasts From The Printerverse. Please subscribe, click some stars and leave us a review. Connect with us through printmediacenter.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:

Amado Lara: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/amado-lara-a97203137/>

Roland DGA: <https://www.rolanddga.com/>

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

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

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