

[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.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:32] DC: Hey, everybody. Welcome to Podcasts From the Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your Intergalactic Ambassador. Today, we have a special guest, Rick Fitzgerald, my main mellow man and the Co-Founder of Lazy Turtle Group, InnDica, and Merchant Boxes. Rick brings over 25 years of experience in brand identity, packaging, and digital design across multiple consumer market segments, including cannabis, hemp, music, liquor, cosmetics, HBA, and fashion. His focus on sustainability and innovation in packaging has resulted in producing several award-winning packaging designs.

Welcome, Rick.

[00:01:20] RF: Wow. I sound amazing.

[00:01:22] DC: You do. Very quickly, what is HBA?

[00:01:28] RF: Health and Beauty Aids.

[00:01:29] DC: Oh, thank you very much.

[00:01:31] RF: You're welcome.

[00:01:32] DC: Okay. Since our last podcast, and I will include a link to that in the show notes, you started a new business because, of course, why not? You have two. Make it three, right?

[00:01:41] RF: Why not.

[00:01:42] DC: So Merchant Boxes where you serve as the Chief Design Officer. So can you tell everybody about what you do at Merchant Boxes, how you help people, and the team that you've put together?

[00:01:55] RF: Totally. So thank you for having me, Deborah. I appreciate being back in this universe, in the Printerverse. So, yes, obviously, I've been in packaging for a long time. I love it. I dig it. It's my passion, and I had an opportunity last year to set up a new company to offer basically design services for packaging, which kind of moved into procurement as well. We realized that, obviously, we could do some fun design, work in the packaging realm, but there's the opportunity to produce this, the packaging as well.

So it started out with just two of us in the group, Doug Epperly, who's the president who started the business and brought me on pretty quickly to head up the creative side of things. Then very soon after that, we brought on Mickey Waite who was just a – he's an amazing person in the procurement and product development field. And set the company up to do some really cool design work for packaging.

We've been focusing on experiential packaging. So we want to bring in folks that want to essentially extend the life of their package. This incredible marketing tool that we have sitting on these shelves, staring at consumers all day, what more can we get out of that package? Can we get it back into the Earth easily without a lot of crazy extra yucky stuff added to it? Can we turn that package into something that is potentially upcycled? Could it be a container for something after the product is taken out? Hold your pens. I don't know. Whatever. Or can we bring people to an experience through the packaging?

That's a new – well, it's not new but it's an emerging trend called connected packaging, which you and I are going to talk about a little bit later I'm sure. That is essentially a digital link from the package to basically a virtual experience. It could be as simple as a splash page or a website that could give information about the product, deeper information about the product. It could tell about the product and packaging sustainability story. It could take people to a game. So there's a lot of ways to really extend the life of this package. We really wanted to build this company

around that. What's – the package is an amazing marketing tool, like I mentioned. How can we expand that? So, yes, we started with three last year. Now, we are up to nine people at Merchant Boxes.

[00:04:18] DC: Wow, excellent.

[00:04:19] RF: Yes, which is amazing. So, yes, it's happening, and we are super excited about it. I'm stoked about this opportunity.

[00:04:27] DC: Very cool. Sometimes, to try something new, you have to either assess where you currently are or create a baseline of where you're starting from. On your site, you have a downloadable audit brochure, which I did sign up for and downloaded. I thought it was really an incredible exercise to put a potential partner through in order for them to like ground themselves at least in understanding what they're trying to achieve through their packaging.

So can you share more about the audit process, why you decided to stick it up there, and some of the benefits that have manifested from it? Most importantly, has it been helpful in helping you secure new business?

[00:05:25] RF: Well, thanks for downloading the brochure, first of all. I'm super excited about this. This is an area that I've kind of been working in just in my regular daily operations forever. Whenever I have a new project, just from my standpoint, I want to understand what they're doing, how their packaging management system is working currently, if there is a packaging management system.

Let me give an example. A lot of new brands don't have a big budget. They have to figure out how they're going to package their products the most economic, efficient way possible. Sometimes, there's a lot of people out there that do packaging. So there's tons of choices. A brand stepping into this world probably has no idea really how to navigate that world. It's just such an insane process.

There are a lot of products that have been on the market for, it could be, a year, more than a couple years, and are still using that original packaging setup that they did in the very beginning.

So right off the bat, they're not using the most efficient and economical packaging process they can. Basically, I've always explored, and this is what we're doing with the audit. Really explore a brand's packaging management system like from beginning to end, who they're using, why they're using them. Logistically, is it someplace that's close to where their warehouse is? There's just so many elements to this packaging audit.

Like I mentioned, it's something that's kind of been ingrained in myself and Mickey Waite and a couple of the folks at Merchant Boxes. We're like, "You know what? We have saved companies." I mean, Mickey saved a large cannabis company. Like it was over a million dollars a year in their packaging.

[00:07:11] DC: Oh, hello.

[00:07:13] RF: Right. It's exactly from the jump.

[00:07:15] DC: Hello. Check please, right?

[00:07:16] RF: Hello. Just please, yes. Just you could send it to Rick Fitzgerald.

[00:07:20] DC: Yes, yes. I'll take 10% of that as my thank you, right?

[00:07:25] RF: We'll give it to you, totally. So you can imagine. I mean, with a million bucks, you could practically open a whole new department within a company with a million bucks. So a huge difference and that was really just basically examining. That was a pretty basic one right there. It was just looking at their press sheets, looking at their dielines, looking at their box structures to see how we can maintain that same look when it's finished but reduce the size of that template to get more pieces up on a press sheet.

You can get more positions on a press sheet. Obviously, you're printing more per sheet. So you're getting a savings in that sense. With a couple of ink changes, changing from like a stamping to a foil stock, a cold foil. There are a lot of different ways that Mickey worked with that company to get that savings. But you can only imagine. That's a huge, huge savings, and that is really just looking at the printing process.

If you look at the logistics of how to get that packaging from that manufacturer to the warehouse or the pack-out place, that's a whole another thing that you need to look at shipping costs and everything. So it's a really deep dive into the packaging management system of brands to see where they're leaving money on the table. I can practically guarantee there aren't many people that are doing this right 100%. There's always ways to save money and change. I mean, you just really have to look at your packaging every year or practically every month to make sure that you are getting the most bang for your buck because it's one of the most expensive parts of a brand is packaging, from the creation and development to the production, to getting it to the packers.

So, yes, this is a super cool process. I'm really excited about us basically building a system around it and being able to offer this to folks as a service to help them save money. It's incredible how much money folks are leaving on the table with packaging, and that applies to all kinds of things in business. But obviously, we're packaging folks, so that's where we concentrate. It's incredible the amount of savings you can find in that world if you really dive into it.

[00:09:32] DC: It really goes beyond savings too because we know that brands especially are you know really sustainability-focused. So, I mean, just changing the way something is shipped or where it shipped from or maybe printing in multiple locations. But this is what I would like to say, just to put my try-it advice out there for people.

I understand, as being a print customer for over 25 years, you have your trusted vendors, and you have your processes that you can count on in your system. You don't really want to break that up because it is in your comfort zone. It could almost be on autopilot at that point, and that's what you want. You're juggling a lot of things.

But this moment in time is almost like an event horizon because there are laws coming regarding sustainability with packaging, regarding ink usage, regarding specialty effects usage that are really going to, for lack of a better word, phrase, tone down packaging so that it's sustainability-focused first, I believe, is a fair assessment of it and design shelf shout blingy stuff. Second, if it can be addressed in the recycling, reclaiming, whatever the brand's mission is there.

So now is a great time to assess if anything that you are doing in an analog system or anything that you've been doing for 10 years or more cannot be updated in some manner. So I strongly suggest. It took me two seconds to put my name in my email address in a little form. I got the brochure. It's something you can look at with your team and then make an appointment to meet with Rick and his team and just discuss where improvements could be made. Those improvements touch a lot of – like I said, there's 10 areas there, so well done on that brochure.

[00:11:45] RF: Thank you.

[00:11:45] DC: Any final words on that before we move to a next topic?

[00:11:49] RF: Just I want to thank you for bringing up the sustainable aspect of that whole audit. I mean, there's so many ways to be even more sustainably-oriented. There's minor moves you can make. You can go to a veggie-based ink system. You can use aqueous water-based coatings. You can use post-consumer recycled materials. There are ways to get your packaging to be, at least if not fully sustainable, a little more sustainable.

To your point, that's what we're trying to get to. Ultimately, we're going to reduce the size of this package. We're going to reduce the amount of stuff that's on this package. It will give an experience potentially simply through a barcode. It might be a white package with a black barcode printed on it one day. Who knows?

But there are absolutely some amazing ways to become more sustainable and there's – a big part of this audit is to find – as long as the brand is into it and every brand should be. I mean, we really push this hard. So the sustainability initiatives that you can bring into your packaging don't have to be painful. Don't be afraid of them. It really is – I mean, we're in a place right now where so many folks are concentrating on sustainability. There are so many different materials coming out.

I just spoke to this amazing company in China that's creating this cornstarch-based single-use plastic flexible material, and they're actually talking to, I think, one of the big shipping companies like FedEx or UPS or something about changing out their mailers to this cornstarch-based compostable material. So, I mean, there are just so many ways to be more sustainable, and this

packaging audit really does address that as well as just trying to save some bucks. But also really just trying to help folks become a more well-rounded business all together with their packaging.

[BREAK]

[00:13:32] DC: Print Media Centr provides printspiration and resources to our vast network of print and marketing professionals. Whether you are an industry supplier, print service provider, print customer, or consultant, we have you covered with topical sales and marketing content, event support and coverage, these podcasts, and an array of community-lifting initiatives. We also work with printers, suppliers, and industry organizations, helping them to create meaningful relationships with customers and achieve success with their sales, social media, and content marketing endeavors. Visit printmediacentr.com and connect with the Printerverse. Print long and prosper.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[00:14:19] DC: I don't like to be Debbie Doom about this, but I'm going to reiterate this one more time. There are laws coming in the United States that will dictate this to you. Regardless of whether you want to do it or not, if you want your package on a shelf, it is going to have to adhere to regulations that will be dictated to the printing industry. So get ahead of it now. Get in and you become the customer of those providers for the long term. When everyone else is jumping on the ship, you're already there, you're already established, and you don't get cut out of the line. You don't get pushed to the bottom. Your stuff gets produced.

That would be – if you think about the pandemic, a lot of that happened during the pandemic when supplies were short. The long-term customers were first on the list, and that's how – by the way, that's how it should work in any business. Yes, I know you –

[00:15:15] RF: Early adopters.

[00:15:17] DC: Right? You be an early adopter on the future of packaging. Speaking of which, this is a perfect time to talk further about connected packaging. According to some materials

that you sent me, you define connected packaging as transforming a regular packaging into a digital experience by scanning, tapping, or pointing with devices to provide a whole new way for brands to connect with customers and to also collect invaluable customer data along the way.

Even though that definition is sort of self-explanatory, you move from the box to a digital experience. There's a whole lot more that is involved with that, to your point of the definition, especially being able to collect the consumer data. I know this is very important to you, so go ahead. Have at it, Rick.

[00:16:10] RF: Wow. All right, yes. So, yes, the connecting packaging world is super dope. I'm really enjoying it. I've been in it for a good while. We've been exploring connected packaging for over a decade. Now, I think it's really coming into its own with the ability to provide better digital experiences. Augmented reality is becoming a big part of connected packaging. Data collection is huge.

There are really just a couple ways to experiment with the collected packaging realm. There are a couple different areas of definition. There's active connected packaging which is it's an experience that the consumer has a physical interaction with the brand through this digital experience. It could be a game that they're playing that the brand has developed for that particular experience. It could be a treasure hunt like the Pokémon GO game that came out years ago. You could have a complete augmented reality treasure hunt set up through a QR code on your package. I mean, to me, that's amazing. I think that –

[00:17:13] DC: And just to interject for one second because, originally, when we were talking about this, I'm like, “No, that's a little much.” Then I started thinking about I used to literally beg my mother to buy certain cereal boxes because of the games on the back of them. So it is not as crazy as it sounds to now someone who's not in that cereal aisle as much anymore. But my God, if I could play a game like that from my cereal box, I would be a loyal customer.

[00:17:39] RF: I love that, and that is exactly what's driving me in this realm. I mean, the game's on – oh, my gosh. I just love the games on those cereal boxes and the little prizes you get inside that Taffy Time or a game.

[00:17:51] DC: Oh, my God. The prizes, yes.

[00:17:52] RF: Yes. But we used to have to fight for those.

[00:17:56] DC: My brother, sister, and I fought. Everyone had to take a turn because –

[00:17:59] RF: Yes.

[00:18:00] DC: Yes, because we weren't buying three boxes of the same cereal. So the next time, the next person got the prize.

[00:18:06] RF: We had a checklist on the wall. It's Ricky's turn.

[00:18:09] DC: Yes.

[00:18:11] RF: Yes, my turn. So, yes, you can imagine that excitement through a digital experience now. That can take you into a whole interactive game room where you are a person walking through the gig.

[00:18:22] DC: Yes. Create a Captain Crunch community. I'd be right in there.

[00:18:25] RF: Totally. I'd be all over it.

[00:18:27] DC: DC Crunchberry. That would be my name.

[00:18:31] RF: I love it. I want Crunchberry too, so yes. That's an active role that connected packaging can take, bringing people to an experience. There's also more of a – there's another connected aspect to this which is just educating people about your product or your service. That could really extend into that active portion as well. You can create experiences around that and really expand the experience. But you're still educating the consumer on your product or your brand or your brand's ethos.

A lot of people are using this to expand their sustainability messaging, explaining to the consumer how they are being more sustainable. The brand is being more sustainable and how that consumer can be more sustainable. A lot of products are recyclable, but we don't know how to recycle them. We don't know that you have to peel off the label or you have to pull that plastic tab off or rip this insert out.

I think education around sustainability in that sense for a package, especially if it's a unique package that has a lot of components, that could be an entire connected packaging message right there. Just here's how to recycle and make your packaging more sustainable.

[BREAK]

[00:19:46] DC: Printspiration is streaming across the Printerverse on the Project Peacock Network, and our mission to provide education and resources for print customers, students, and printers around the world has never been more accessible. Watch what you want, when you want, where you want. It's free. Visit projectpeacock.tv to access original programming and replays from our online events. Learn about the Peacock partners and companies featured in our shows. Join our mailing list to learn about new episode premieres and series launches, and create a free account to make watch lists. Ready for your close-up? Get your Peacock show on air by visiting projectpeacock.tv and request your partnership proposal today. Peacock long and prosper.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[00:20:38] DC: I just did a podcast with someone who is the production manager on a large beauty brand. To this exact point, it's hair coloring. In that hair coloring box is a plastic tube and a plastic glove and a bottle that had hair dye in it and of the paper instructions and the paper box. So they literally have to have like five or six different sets of recycling instructions included in this. So very excellent point.

[00:21:07] RF: Yes. That's spot on right there, especially if you have multiple components within a package. Not just a package itself breaking down but all the inners of that package. Most people don't know how to recycle that.

[00:21:18] DC: Yes. Even the packages that come with like the cardboard back and the whatever plastic that you need a screwdriver to get off. Or you have to put on fire gloves, so you don't cut your hands like trying to rip it open. It cannot be recycled technically as one unit. You're supposed to pull off the back. Who knows that? Nobody.

[00:21:38] RF: Who knows? No.

[00:21:39] DC: Nobody.

[00:21:40] RF: Nobody knows. I think one of the best things that some brands can do on the sustainability part is to educate folks on how to be more sustainable.

[00:21:49] DC: Or redesign their packaging.

[00:21:51] RF: Or redesign their packaging. I'm all down with that. Yes, completely. I mean, absolutely. Redesigning the packaging is the best way.

[00:21:59] DC: I mean, a lot of it is done to prevent theft in stores. But there's got to be a better way than, well, the only way to do it is to make something that people will like slit their wrists if they try to rip it open in a store. They need something to do it with because it's not easy to get those things open.

[00:22:17] RF: No, it's not. I think a little information on how to bust those apart would be amazing. I know there are a couple folks out there talking about how to basically disassemble packaging and make it more recyclable. But it's also dependent on your recycling area. What type of materials do they recycle?

[00:22:32] DC: A hundred percent, yes.

[00:22:34] RF: So if your area doesn't recycle them, is there a way to get those materials to a place that does recycle them? Can you do it sustainably? Are you going to have to ship this? You've got all kinds of stuff when you ship. So it's a tough realm, but I think there are so many

ways to really adjust that. I think the connected packaging aspect element of it is a great way to educate consumers on that. Yes.

[BREAK]

[00:23:00] DC: Like what you hear? Leave us a comment. Click a few stars, share this episode, and please subscribe to the show. Are you interested in being the guest and sharing your information with our active and growing global audience? Podcasts are trending as a potent direct marketing and educational channel for brands and businesses who want to provide portable content for customers and consumers. Visit printmediacentr.com, click on podcasts, and request a partner package today. Share long and prosper.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[00:23:34] DC: You just gave another fantastic reason to have an audit and figure out if there's not a better way of handling all of this.

[00:23:42] RF: Completely.

[00:23:43] DC: Speaking of education, you have a podcast now that you sponsor called Unboxed. It is a packaging design podcast. I was actually a guest a few weeks ago. Thank you so much for the invite. The podcast host's name is Sam Johnston. My God, does he not have the podcast voice of all podcast voices?

[00:24:06] RF: So good.

[00:24:07] DC: It's like I don't want to speak with this guy on the same podcast. I mean, he said – he just sounds amazing. So, Rick, there are a lot of podcasts out there. Why should people devote some time to yours after this one, of course?

[00:24:20] RF: Of course, yes. So after yours, people should come to our podcast. It's interesting. We're focusing on branding and packaging and all the things around that; sustainability, connected packaging, manufacturing, and design. There's really – it's a broad

spectrum approach. But our bottom line is to have our guests educate the public on what it takes to create a brand and to create packaging and how to do that efficiently, economically, sustainability-wise, and all that kind of stuff.

Sam is just fantastic at extracting some really good conversations with guests. I loved your episode big time, by the way. That's my favorite episode.

[00:25:05] DC: Thank you, oh.

[00:25:07] RF: Completely because I love you. You're awesome.

[00:25:10] DC: Oh, you're something.

[00:25:10] RF: You're the ambassador of the Printerverse.

[00:25:12] DC: I try.

[00:25:13] RF: We have to show our respects. No, I really dug that episode. So, yes, it's a really fun place to come on and have some founders, some brand founders come on that have really explained their process. From my perspective as a startup myself, it's amazing to hear other founders and creatives, and folks like me talk about their journeys because I realized that I'm not alone in my madness. That everyone is going through and has gone through such amazing sometimes turbulent times, sometimes great times. But we're all really on the same path.

So from my perspective, The Unboxed Podcast, I love it from that standpoint, is that I get to see these high-level folks that I really admire, listen to their stories, and tell us how they came to be in this whole branding and packaging world. So I love it. I really enjoy it. Like you said, Sam is fantastic. I could listen to him all day. He's just got a great voice, and he's got a great spirit. He is a super, super sweet individual, and I'm thrilled to death that he is hosting our podcast and our marketing guru. He's the Director of Marketing at Merchant Boxes. So he's running a lot of things, and he's doing it well.

[00:26:24] DC: Well, shout out to Sam and shout out to you, Rick Fitzgerald, my main mellow man. Everything you need to connect with Rick, Lazy Turtle Group, InnDica, and Merchant Boxes, and The Unboxed Podcast will be in the show notes. Leave us some stars. Leave us a review. It matters. It's how podcasts like the SEO of podcasts would be much appreciated. Until next time, everybody. Print long, package long, and prosper.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:26:54] 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.

[END]

Mentioned in This Episode:

Rick Fitzgerald: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/rickjamesfitzgerald/>

Merchant Boxes: <https://www.merchantboxes.com/>

Merchant Boxes Audit: <https://www.merchantboxes.com/audit-overview>

Lazy Turtle Group: <https://www.lazyturtlegroup.com/>

InnDica: <https://inndica.com/>

Cultivating a Cannabis Packaging Biz with Lazy Turtle Group: <https://podcasts.printmediacentr.com/cultivating-a-cannabis-packaging-biz-with-lazy-turtle-group/>

The Unboxed Show Podcast: <https://www.merchantboxes.com/the-unboxed-show-podcast>

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

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

Project Peacock: <https://ProjectPeacock.TV>

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

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