

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:05.0] 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]

[0:00:32.8] DC: Hey everybody, welcome to Podcasts from the Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your intergalactic ambassador. More specifically, we are here with the Out and Proud in Print series and I am so honored and thrilled to welcome April Lytle from Scodix, to the podcast. Hello, April.

[0:00:54.1] AL: Hello, I'm always happy to be a guest with the honorable Deborah Corn.

[0:01:00.0] DC: Thank you so much. Yes, I am the honorable Deborah Corn with my ambassador title. Okay, I said the magic word, Scodix. Why don't you let everybody know what Scodix is and what you do there and also, how you got there? You got a very interesting background.

[0:01:16.2] AL: Yes, yes. So, Scodix is digital embellishment. We make digital embellishment presses, this could be the clear UV, this could be cash secure, this could be foil or glitter, it could be flat or it could be raised tactile, even up to like a braille standard.

Lots of fun things that you can do with it with print and being a designer. You know, that's kind of how I came here was being a fangirl with the technology. So we're going to dive into how I came here because I'm excited to fill that part.

So I worked with KURZ for about six and a half years. So always on the embellishment side of things but more on the traditional hot stamping cold foil parts. I got super into designing for embellishment and eating, breathing, and sleeping embellishment.

I do marketing but I also do design, which is a great combination because then I can design all my own pieces but I noticed that using all of the different technologies out there that Scodix results were always my favorite, like, they always do the best job.

And I was at Luxe Pack one year and we were in a mutual customer's booth, there was a salesman for Scodix there and a customer of KURZ who uses hot sampling foil and I was just gushing about how much I loved it and I was kind of on the outs with KURZ anyway. I didn't have a clear path forward for my career and had just got an offer from American Airlines actually but I was kind of devastated about it because I loved this industry and all my connections so much.

That exact same day, the president of Scodix called me and said, "Hey, would you be interested in this job?" And it was the role that I wanted. It was still doing exactly what I loved doing and you know, a fully remote job, and all this creativity now, having access to the technology, so it was just a perfect fit for me.

[0:03:18.1] DC: I mean, anybody who listens to this podcast knows that I am a fan of Scodix and I had been a fan of Scodix for many years and one of the things that was really missing in the team was someone just like you to create amazing print samples, which you just won an award for one of your samples at the FSEA Conference, which I want to talk to you about.

But I want to go even further back because, as you mentioned, you actually studied graphic design and marketing and you just said that it's really helpful because you can design your own pieces. Designing with specialty effects though is not often understood by everybody out there. So, how are you contributing to that mission to really create embellishment customers?

[0:04:07.4] AL: Oh man, I mean, that is my mission. That was my mission at KURZ, it's my mission in Scodix, it's this education process because coming up in design, I actually got my associates in design in like 2003 or something, it was a long time ago and have been doing kind of print design as a history since then and then it kind of evolved into marketing.

I was sort of doing both. In all of that time, you're not really taught anything about printing, no less, embellishment. Even working with printing companies, I think you know, they would often send the embellishment out. Like you just kind of setup the file for it and then they would do it.

So, your access to that education about how it worked and what you should be doing is limited because they didn't know either. Really, like, getting into this world and knowing the gap of education out there, I've come up with educational presentations. There's one that I keep on a Google Drive that I've been giving everybody for free about how to set up your files.

I've been meeting with brands about how to design for digital embellishment, how to think about it, and taken on as part of my marketing duties awareness with brands and designers, not just having tunnel vision of, you know, "How can I use marketing to make money?"

Because that's not necessarily – you know, working with education is not necessarily making us money but it's still an important mission and the burden of educating people should be on you know, people like us, like the Scodix and the MGI and the, you know, all these people with these technologies should be the ones leading the charge in this and helping the print community grow.

[0:05:52.6] DC: Yeah. I mean, I'm so glad that you brought that up. I like to say, companies need to make an investment in education. And investment doesn't mean you make money off an investment, it means you're making an investment in the future. Maybe it will work, maybe your investment will pay off, maybe it won't but you're making an investment.

You're not educating somebody to immediately have them sign a dotted line on a contract or immediately send you a file to print. You educate them so that when the moment meets the need, they can work with you in some manner.

[0:06:31.3] AL: I love that when the moment meets the need and it's exactly what it's like working with designers and brands. I mean, like going to Luxe Pack for us, it serves no other purpose really than that and, you know, it will be like a year later, all of a sudden, I would hear from someone that I don't even remember meeting from that show.

“You know, we met and we talked about this and I suddenly have this project” and I mean, it just – it trickles in like that over time and you know, you start having customers, getting more specified jobs coming to them, you know, featuring this kind of technology or effects. It’s all because of your personal investment and education.

We have to grow as a print community, especially with design about always taking advantage of what’s the newest and best. You know, just because a lot of it is an art form, we have to keep art alive.

[0:07:22.8] DC: Yeah, I agree. I couldn’t agree with you more which is why I love speaking with you and to your point, first of all, if it comes to packaging, which I assume the people from Luxe Pack were working on that, that could be like an eight-month discussion before something even comes to fruition but the point is that you can’t even be considered if you haven’t made that investment in reach and awareness, and education.

So good on you and you know I’m very jealous, you went to Luxe Pack without me. That’s one show I have to get to at some point. I want to turn to this newfound love that the industry has towards all things of finishing and embellishment. There is a new digital embellishment association, you just went to an FSEA conference, yes? And there was an industry survey put out there. So a lot of focus on that and I know that Scodix is involved.

Please say whatever you want about all of that and how, you know, if people want to join in or take your survey or whatever that they can?

[0:08:31.5] AL: Oh yeah, thank you for that opportunity. So I’ve always been a fan of Jeff Peterson because he really is so passionate about the embellishment industry. Him and his family and Gala and Blake, they’re such considerate, nice people.

So you couldn’t have a better group of people really having an organization focused on embellishment and he has been very open in helping, along with Kevin from Taktiful, to really create an environment for digital embellishment within the association as well. So there’s the Digital Embellishment Alliance.

[0:09:13.1] DC: I'm sorry, Alliance, I said.

[0:09:16.3] AL: Which has been formed you know, kind of this, within the FSEA membership organization, and it focuses on just digital embellishment because there's so many vendors and customers that have evolved into that direction as well and even when they do the awards, there's a digital and a traditional analog award and they created new categories just to honor digital embellishment because the techniques are kind of completely different.

So it's really great in coming up with education items, there's a new website now that's being used as a tool for people to talk to each other and answer each other's questions, specifically to digital embellishment. So if there ever were a group of people that were really helping each other, I mean, because you know I'm brushing shoulders with MGI and that group as well and we're all just using our passion for advancement to work together and ignore this competition thing that's going on and come up with terminology for the industry so that we're all using the same terms so that we can help educate better.

So lots of big ideas and things like going on in that group, especially where education's concerned.

[0:10:30.8] DC: And it's not just the equipment makers of finishing equipment. It's also the press manufacturers who have specialty inks and finishing built into their equipment, correct?

[0:10:39.9] AL: Right and that's something that we talked about at the conference too is, what exactly defines digital embellishment and it's not necessarily like foil or the varnish. It's you know, metallic inks, it's the metallic substrates, it's everything that involves being able to digitally, you know, enhance a sheet, a print, a package. So that that can be all kinds of different things. It could be the toner-based, the sleeking stuff. You know, it's actually pretty broad category.

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:11:57.7] DC: Last question about this. I saw some content out there about a survey that they were asking people to take, is that still open? We are recording this in June, just for reference out there, whenever you're listening to it. Is that still open, is that an ongoing thing?

[0:12:15.0] AL: It's an ongoing thing. I mean, the more data that we get from people, the better that we can address the industry and we're definitely trying to get people that are either customers that use digital embellishment or manufacturers that have solutions to join the Alliance so that we can have a better comprehensive group to make some changes.

[0:12:39.6] DC: Excellent. Okay, well, I will put links to all of that in the show notes so everyone who is listening to the podcast can just scroll down and click it. I want to talk about sustainability and the only reason I do is because, you know, we have a sort of push me, pull me situation going I think, with messaging. In one sense, I understand why there's a focus on a value add to the already value add of using print in your marketing.

How can you strengthen that print through the use of visual and tactile effects? Totally understand that. On the other side, we have the brands, we have a lot of members of society saying not just about, I mean, paper in general, printing in general, as well as other plastic in general. Embellishments get caught up in this conversation because it is something that is misunderstood by some people.

It is also something that is being miscommunicated by others and therefore, there is a disconnect on what is allowed to be said about it, what are the steps moving towards uniting a

message, a mission, and enabling everybody to stand behind the fact that they are creating materials based upon the culture and the mission of their organization. So, I'm just going to drop that in your lap and let you say whatever you want to say about all of that.

[0:14:22.9] AL: So I mean, that's one of the things that I respect most about working for Scodix is that it's something that they take very seriously as well. We just had an LCA done on our company, a lifecycle assessment for people not familiar with that. It's where we have a third party, in this case, it was a company that is actually contracted that works with the UN as well.

They come in, they analyze everything about you, how you make your machines, all the shipping. I mean, really everything that goes into it. So not only do we have that assessment done on us but we had it done as compared to the traditional hot stamping method because we wanted to really know how much more sustainable, how much greener it was to use digital versus traditional hot stamping and –

[0:15:08.6] DC: But you're talking about the process, not the –

[0:15:10.8] AL: Right, everything. Yeah.

[0:15:11.5] DC: Okay, okay, go ahead.

[0:15:13.9] AL: Yup. In conclusion, I mean, it's a huge long report but to summarize it, in just like a sentence, digital embellishment is about 80% more efficient in terms of energy used, in terms of saving water, in terms of saving environmental impact. So I mean, that was awesome.

I wasn't sure what to expect from these results but you know, naturally, it made me personally happy not just as the marketing person but just as an employee of the company that you know, is that much more efficient and the second step of that, and this is the part that people really misunderstand the most is about the recyclability of materials that have been decorated and this is where all the confusion comes from.

So working for KURZ, it's the same, it's things that I already knew is that adding embellishment does not inhibit the recyclability or de-inkability of a sheet and that's because the foil is so thin

that it just comes off in the wash process. That was proven by Michigan State and Clemson and the NG in Europe. I mean, that's been tested everywhere but at Scodix, we weren't really sure what that meant because of polymer.

We're working with Michigan State right now, we had sheets decorated with up to 15% coverage and that's a lot. Usually, jobs are about 5%. Every phase of this testing we passed and that's the recyclability, de-inking means that the polymer comes off in the recycled process. We should have our final certification by the end of the month and that will probably establish that conversation for, you know, the method in general and not just Scodix but just digital embellishment in general.

So once we have that certification, we'll be able to speak with both hands like you know, that LTA and global impact and then the recyclability part so.

[0:17:24.7] DC: That's amazing and I commend you for sticking with it and you know, giving people the proof points that they need. It is not a talking point, it's a proof point. There's two different things about that, yeah?

[0:17:39.8] AL: Yes and it's important for everyone in the printing industry and I mean, everyone from paper to inks to machine manufacturing to printers. It is up to all of us to do our due diligence in our investments to make our processes more environmentally friendly and our products more environmentally friendly and I've seen some great advancements in this. One of my favorites is a plastic-free coded paper and some of the things that Mohawk is doing, what Nina is doing, and things that have been driven from the paper world have just been amazing.

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INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:19:16.1] DC: Excellent. So you mentioned fluff before and I'm bringing it back into the conversation because last year, you and I kind of went on a gay pride month logo hunt, to see how many logos out in the world had changed to rainbow colors for the 30 days of September, April, and June. Yes, 30 days of June to show their pride. I've actually not seen that this year, which is concerning me.

I don't know whether to be happy about it or to be concerned about it. Happy because people have realized if they're not going to walk, you know, talk the talk, they shouldn't just do that but also concerned because are people more afraid that there's going to be some horrific backlash because they're supporting the gay community? I would like to preface that, who I am as a person, I refer to the community as gay. That is my nomenclature. If that's not yours, use whatever you want but I keep saying all these podcasts, that's the term I use. Go ahead.

[0:20:23.0] AL: Yeah. A little bit about me is I'm like a non-binary queer person that has evolved as I've gotten more comfortable with myself over time. As a marketing person, it's not something that I would ever take advantage of. I mean, seeing some of these places harvest advantage of the queer communities is kind of repulsive, especially if their internal structures are not supportive with queer people in management or equal opportunity and it would just quite often the case that their internal culture doesn't match their support.

I have mixed emotions about what I've seen this year as well. A lot of places that have shown support, like I just saw Cracker Barrel the other day come out with their little rainbow rocking chair, which is like an unexpected "ally" but the thing about them, especially, is that I've heard

that internally, their culture is very nurturing of the queer community, which I didn't expect and all of that came out after their support.

I just encourage more authenticity and I don't want to see a logo, I want to see what their nations have you made, what is your internal support for queer people, do you have equal opportunity actions, do you, you know, are there any charitable contributions or charities that you work with? That's what I want to see. I don't want to see a logo.

[0:22:07.7] DC: Yeah, I agree with you and I had this conversation with Kim Wunner as well and we were talking about one of the best ways to understand the actual cultures of the companies, not just for certain months of the year, you know? February that everyone's supporting Black people, and in June, everyone is supporting gay people but to look and see what are their pro bono accounts.

What are the types of clients that they have that they support, what are the types of charities that they donate? So you know, websites are great ways to learn these things without screaming it from the rooftops, so to speak.

[0:22:44.7] AL: Right.

[0:22:45.7] DC: You know in a way, gay people come out all the time in some manner, you know? Now, I don't like to be stereotypical but in this stereotypical manner, I think if you put you and I together in a room and say, "Who's the gay person?" most people would point to me by virtue of let's say, my short hair or whatever else, my clothes, whatever it might be. You're in a little bit of a different situation.

You are certainly not walking into a room and someone is like, "Ah, I think that is a non-binary queer person, you know? I can tell." So for people out there who are maybe trying to navigate this in some way, what is your process for, I guess being your authentic self, I assume once you feel safe that you can be.

[0:23:40.7] AL: I think that you saying feeling safe has been a big part of my journey, and I mean, me outside of professional settings and business attire is leather jackets and much

different than you'd see me in a business setting. I mean, I've got half my head shaved and I'm covered in tattoos and so it's been, you know living in the south has not been a safe place for me to be myself.

A lot of that stemmed even from high school, I was severely bullied for just being the weird person. Every day I would go to school, this was this group of very southern kids with their big belt buckles and their big hats waiting for me and they would call me names on the way to class because I had rainbow hair and you know? Working in environments in the South with a bunch of very conservative men has never led me to feel safe in business environments.

You know, I'm 40 now, so I finally work for a company where I feel safe being a little more authentic to myself. Maybe I shouldn't have cared as much as some of the places that I've worked, you know? But I've felt like I'm never going to advance in my career if I, you know, show them a little bit more of who I am. I have to conform enough just so I can keep moving forward and I hate that I had to feel that way.

That I had to feel like I had to be normal to succeed, visually, and in the print industry specifically if you take away like the designer brand part because that is completely different, you know, they're gay as hell on that part but if you just look at the printing part, it didn't feel safe for me to be so visually weird. I hate that because I am such like unapologetically myself person otherwise.

But I finally work for a company, I finally feel like I'm in a place where they would not care at all. I mean, my boss is just like cantankerous old like British punk dude and they're so, I don't know, nurturing of just being authentic and they are so authentic on the inside about supporting the LGBTQIA+++ community. So I'm having to like – I'm slowly getting into myself. You know at dinners, I can feel like I can dress more of myself and wear my weird jewelry and not wear makeup and be more non-gender conforming.

Like I went on a food tour with one of our big brands and I just was able to shoot the shit with this guy as myself. I feel like career-wise, I'm finally in a place where I can be less afraid and I guess my piece of advice for queer people, gay people in printing is: find your career where you

find that safety, where you find your tribe, where you find your community. Don't feel like you have to sacrifice yourself at a place where you don't feel safe.

There is actually a reason why you're uncomfortable there and the burden of that is not on you. I don't want to encourage people to think that the burden of not fitting in is on them and feel a guilt about that because it is something I had to struggle with myself forever too.

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:28:13.9] DC: When you first went to work for Scodix, did you know that this was going to be your experience? Had you pre-vetted them as far as being able to be your authentic self or were you just so used to not being able to that you were going to continue it, just at another place?

[0:28:33.2] AL: I didn't have any expectations. My bar was set so low that I just didn't even think about it but I knew – my first real encounter with understanding Scodix culture was my hour-long interview with Mark, who is the punk British guy.

[0:28:54.1] DC: Mark Nixon, shout out.

[0:28:56.9] AL: In the interview setting, I knew immediately that this was different because of the non-political way that we were able to speak to each other. It was just very raw and honest and it left – when I walk away from there, I felt good. It was one of the better interviews I've ever

had and that sort of raw honesty, like being able to shoot the shit with each other, is sort of the culture.

I've never had that before, I've never had anything like this before and I know that it exists in other places because I've met some really awesome people in this industry. Cog, for example, the prototyping place in Ohio, I'll give a special shout-out to Lindsey Frimming, an amazing human being. There's Tactive in Indianapolis and their community, their internal culture is so cool.

[0:29:54.1] DC: I love those ladies.

[0:29:55.4] AL: Yes and the women there, the people there are doing such cool things and so I know that it exists and I just encourage everyone to fight for what they deserve as a human being in their career. You should not have to sacrifice your authenticity for your career.

[0:30:14.2] DC: It's one thing to be able to go to dinner and show off your tattoos. It's another thing to go to dinner and talk about your partner or your wife and your kid and you know, essentially, laying it all on the table that way, you know? Because I'm assuming you don't walk into a room and say, "Hi, I'm April. I'm a non-binary queer" you know?

[0:30:42.9] AL: Yeah.

[0:30:44.3] DC: It has to be announced and if that's something you want to share about yourself with whomever you're speaking with but it is, you know, sometimes people who haven't had the experience don't understand that gay people don't come out just once. You come out 20 times a day.

[0:31:02.6] AL: Yes. I agree with that.

[0:31:04.1] DC: Can you address that in a professional setting and did it come up in this interview?

[0:31:08.9] AL: Yes, it did come up in this interview and I'm sure there's people that are going to hear this and not even know these things about me. So, I just want to preface this that this took – I had a lot of anxiety even building up to this because I've been nurtured in such this kind of toxic environment for so long that even casually talking about my orientation and my preferences and my history is still very uncomfortable for me.

But I think that it is important to show bravery, especially this month, especially when there's a spotlight and it's something that's supposed to be celebrated but yes, in a professional setting there's still some editing. Some people I just kind of got – I had to get the feel for them about where they are, where their headspace is. I am fortunate that I work with people that I know have different religious beliefs that are very against what I believe in.

However, I'm going to call out one of our sales persons in particular. His name is Mark Obleman and usually when I hear someone's like devout Christian, white, conservative man, I instantly just pull my shell up because I've had so many bad experiences but he will sit at the table and he – we can talk about these things like over team dinners and just be perfectly kind and accepting and you know, non-judgmental and it's so refreshing to see people that are so different in a workplace, in a print environment that you can feel – that you know they feel differently but you are comfortable around them because they have given you such respect and courtesy for being different.

I have to give a special shout-out to a lot of our team. I know that they're like that but they still have given me such grace and respect as a human, which is all anyone deserves.

[0:33:13.2] DC: That is a perfect place to end it, April. I just want to thank you so much for being brave and authentic and joining me on this podcast. It means a lot to me, you mean a lot to me. What you do to educate the industry means a lot to me. I'm a fan, I'm a supporter, and I will always be there for you.

Until next time everybody, print long, have pride long, and prosper.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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[END]

Mentioned in This Episode:

April Lytle on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/aprilxlytle/>

Scodix North America: <https://scodix.com/>

Foil & Specialty Effects Association (FSEA): <https://fsea.com/>

Digital Embellishment Alliance: <https://fsea.com/digital/>

Digital Assets: <https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1GQM3TJ0zL4bYVmFaB3poL-x6yxjo5ViJ>

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