

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:05] DC: It takes the right skills and the right innovation to design and manage meaningful print marketing solutions. Welcome to Podcast 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]

[00:00:32] DC: Hey everybody, it is Deborah Corn, your Intergalactic Ambassador. Welcome to Podcasts From the Printerverse. We have a guest today who I've known for quite some time. Paul Nicholson is a video digital print and global advertising production executive with a track record of leveraging emerging technology for strategic cost reduction and process implementation. He's also a DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) advocate, former chairman of the Advertising Production Club of New York, and currently serves as an advisory member for the club along with me. Paul, welcome to the program.

[00:01:12] PN: Yeah, thank you so much, Deborah. This is great. What a thrill. This is up on my podcast list. Joe Rogan and then Deborah Corn, right there, man. I'm here. I've arrived.

[00:01:24] DC: Excellent. Well, we could debate that order of importance at another time. But look, I just scratched the surface of all that you are, which to me is Mr. Fantastic. Can you tell everybody how you got to where you are? And it has been a storied career.

[00:01:45] PN: Thank you so much. Yes, it's been quite the journey. It's really fun to look back now at this point, having been in this business for so long, and just kind of look back at like, how did this happen? How did they get here? How did this, all the people, all the companies, all the conversations, and whatnot to get to where I am? Not that it's any great height, per se. I just mean, like a life's journey, right? We all have a story and it's really interesting to think about.

[00:02:11] DC: We do, but don't be so humbled, because you didn't mention the last position that you had. We're going to get there. But it is pretty high up there.

[00:02:17] PN: Thanks. Yes, for the past 25 years, we'll start at the end. Over the past 25 years, I've been the Senior Vice President of Production and Technology for Showtime Networks, part of the Paramount Global set of brands. That was just an unbelievable 25 years of producing incredible advertising, marketing, direct mail, video, print and digital campaigns across the globe for iconic shows like *Dexter*, *Homeland*, *Weeds*, and *Yellow Jackets* most recently. Just like an incredibly fun environment, an amazing group of people to work with, and that team that I had the opportunity to build there and collaborate with for all these years.

So, I owe a great debt of gratitude to them, of course, for a lot of my own success. But it's really been just an awesome place to be for the last number of years. But going back, which it's kind of interesting and unique about my story is that I actually didn't go to college, or anything related to what I do. That's an interesting story for young people today, right? You don't have to have it all figured out the moment you sign up for college. I started out as a musician. I was a saxophone player, believe it or not. In high school, I was an all-state, number one saxophone player of New York State.

[00:03:38] DC: Trombone here.

[00:03:40] PN: Trombone. All right, we got to start a band. I didn't really know what I wanted to do with my life. But music was a big thing and a big part of it, and my family was all in music. So, I decided to go to college to learn how to play the saxophone better. Ultimately, as a fallback, maybe education. Maybe my high school music teacher or something to that effect. But really, you want to "make it" in the business and be really a successful musician. And I was going to school and I got a bit burned out on it. I was playing for 12, 14 hours a day, literally practicing my whole life, and realized, at some point, when I got to a certain age, that you were either going to connect with the next Taylor Swift and make it as a huge music star, or you were going to be a starving musician. I didn't have the passion to live in my car, for the love of music. I wanted to have success with music and be "famous". I was kind of a little bit misguided in that way.

I decided to bail on music school, and then I went to audio engineering and recording school because it was related to music. But in the digitization of the music business at the time, I decided to get into running recording studios and editing audio, and doing some mixing and

producing. I had some success there. I had a lot of really cool bands. I started my own recording studio for a while up in my attic where I had musicians coming and going and doing some fun stuff. I was also DJing at the time, believe it or not. I was in the nightclubs during the week, and I was doing corporate events in a local bar –

[00:05:17] DC: Wait, what was your DJ name? I need to know.

[00:05:19] PN: Oh, that'll never be revealed.

[00:05:20] DC: Oh, come on.

[00:05:21] PN: Top secret. That goes to my coffin. No, it really wasn't that much fun. So, DJing and making some money, doing my audio, mixing, and recording with them. But kind of realized it's sort of the same thing at a certain point. You either connect with somebody who makes it and breaks it, like a Justin Bieber or Van Halen, or whatever, Pink Floyd, or whatever your music interests lend themselves to. Again, wasn't willing to live in my car for the love of the music.

What was really cool is that while I was recording these bands, I started getting into also designing their CD covers, and doing the graphic design around that format. So, I found myself staying up to four in the morning, two in the morning, whatever it might be every day, after sessions, spending all this time learning how to use QuarkXPress, and Photoshop and Illustrator, and all these tools that were just kind of coming out at the time. We're going back now a number of years. I've really felt like I found this passion for graphic design and graphics in general, and just figuring it out on the computer, if you will.

I saw a little ad one day in a local PennySaver. It said, "Mac artists wanted." It was a job at a local sort of newspaper house, a very small newspaper house on Long Island that was advertising for a job. It was a \$ 7-an-hour job, but it was to operate and do editorial design for the newspaper family. I went in and I had an interview with this woman, and the first question she asked me after introductions was, "Let me see your portfolio." I said, "What's a portfolio?" I had no idea what she was talking about. I didn't know that was even a thing. I said, "I don't have a portfolio. I don't even know what that is." She said, "Okay, well, thanks, but no thanks. I really

need somebody with some experience and blah, blah, blah.” So, sent me on my way. I went home and I was kind of like, intrigued by this. I started doing some research around what portfolios were and what they needed to have in them and stuff like that. Then, I bought – went out to the store and bought a *Rolling Stone* magazine, and I literally measured ads in that magazine with a ruler, and then I started to try to recreate them in QuarkXPress. They didn't really have total chops back then. I was still learning so I didn't do a great job with it. But I nonetheless, put together some things, printed them out on my little laser printer at home, went back to the interviewee, and said, “Here's my portfolio.” She said, “Not so much. This is not very good. This is amateur hour and ultimately, not what we're really looking for.” Rejection number two.

I said, “Listen, I'd love to just come in and hang around, and watch what you guys do, so I could learn. You don't have to pay me. Just let me like come in.” She said, “No.” I tried again, she said no again. We're up to like the fourth rejection. Finally said, “Well, I'm going to call you anyway. Every once in a while, I'm going to give you a call and I'm going to see if you could let me come in and hang out, or if you need some help or whatever, I'm just going to try to stay in touch with you.” She was just kind of like basically pushing me out the door to get away from me.

But nonetheless, I proceeded to call her every day, every single morning at 10 AM, I called her and I said, “Good morning, I'm having my coffee”, and she would have our coffee. “Do you need any help today?” And she'd be like, “No, I don't need any help.” I just went on and on and on through for weeks really, and it became kind of a funny thing. It's kind of like networking 101, back before we had any of these things like LinkedIn. This was like –

[00:09:00] DC: Seriously, you're a pioneer with this procedure you developed.

[00:09:05] PN: The actual telephone, right? Anyway, one day as luck would have it, a bunch of people had called in sick. She said I really could use some help today believe it or not. I was like, “I am there.” I literally jumped right in my car, drove immediately there, and wound up working with her. It was kind of just the two of us for about 14 hours straight. It was issue day. It was printing day for the newspaper. These were weekly newspapers, and she needed me to sit there with an Exacto knife. I did nothing on the computer, but I just basically sat there doing

some arts and crafts, really running things through a wax machine and pasting them up on flats like our old school days.

But we hit it off. We listened to some music. We talked. At the end of the night, I said, “Sure, can I please just kind of come in and hang around?” I said, “Listen, let me work for like two weeks just come in. You don't have to pay me. But if after those two weeks, you liked me, then pay me and hire me. Basically, if you don't, I will wash my hands, I'll never bother you again, I'll go away.” So, after two weeks, she ultimately liked me. I proved myself and she gave me the job, paid me for the \$7 an hour that she owed me. Then four months later, I got promoted to be her boss.

[00:10:16] DC: Wow.

[00:10:17] PN: Yes.

[MESSAGE]

[00:10:21] 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.

[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[00:11:08] PN: Yes, so she didn't really love that and made her way out of the company at some point, when that was convenient for her, on a personal level, I guess. We worked together for a little while. But ultimately, it wasn't really that – she was a wonderful person, by the way, and very talented. But I think I was kind of coming in at that right time when technology was coming into the printing business, and I rode that wave as one of the early adopters. Not the earliest,

but one of the early ones, and just took advantage of that. But more importantly, the passion that I had for it really was the reason for the success, right? I would go home and I would read book after book after book that I could get my hands on. Again, not a lot of Internet out there at this moment, back in the nineties. So, I was like just trying to learn everything I could possibly learn about these applications and the graphic design and all of that. Just really took to it.

One of the people that I worked with there at the newspaper, another editorial designer had then left and got a job at an ad agency in Manhattan called Franklin Spear, which was a very prominent book publishing advertising company at the time. He had called me up a couple of months after he left and said, "They're looking for more people." I made my way there. I wound up getting that job and doing some really cool, mostly black and white actually, at the time, but very high volume. He and I really built that place from a technology standpoint, from the ground up. We literally learned everything. We were crawling around on the floor trying to connect wires for networking and trying to figure it out. We put in the company's first email system, which was really cool. Remember, CC Mail and Lotus Notes and all those really early applications. That was so awful, really.

We had a lot of fun building that place. Then eventually, a gentleman by the name of Len Fogge came. He was a great –

[00:13:04] DC: I know that name.

[00:13:06] PN: Yes, you probably know – Len has been around for a long time. He's kind of a real mentor of mine, but really an industry titan, if you will, in the advertising space. He was president of Grey – I think was Grey Entertainment at the time. And then he eventually came to Spear to run Franklin Spear as the president. He and I hit it off. He eventually got wooed to Showtime.

[00:13:29] DC: That's how I know him. When I worked at Showtime. He worked at Showtime too.

[00:13:31] PN: Okay. Yes. Eventually came to Showtime. He essentially brought me over there because he was really interested in building an in-house creative department and production

department. He wanted me to do that for him. So, it was a great opportunity. I couldn't pass that up and that's how I wound up at Showtime. It's been quite the interesting ride.

[00:13:53] DC: That is such an amazing story. I didn't know half of what you just shared about yourself. But I do want to say this, as a band geek myself, you can tell so much about somebody by the instrument they play. So, you were saxophone. Tenor sax, alto sax, which one?

[00:14:10] PN: I played all of them. Most recently in my – I had an original rock band that we played with. I was an alto because that's the screaming high notes, right?

[00:14:19] DC: Of course. So, this is my assessment of your saxophone playing which makes total sense. Saxophone, sometimes you got to step up there and take the solo. You got to do it. But a saxophone unlike a trumpet player, plays within people, plays within the music. It's not leading the melody, it's playing within, so it is highly about listening and responding and knowing where your moment is to shine. I think that that completely describes you. Where I was a trombone player, which means that I held it down. I held it down so everybody else could do what they needed to do. I remained steady, and just the boom, boom, boom. Just that driving force, right? It makes total sense. We all know drummers how they are. But very interesting.

[00:15:20] PN: What was also really interesting, actually, as part of this is, just like both of us were musicians. Many people in this business are musicians, right? In my mind, more than any other, you obviously are responding to the creative outlet that this business gives you as music does, right? So, there's that relationship. But I also think that there's a logic to the way music works itself to production and printing.

[00:15:43] DC: I agree. There's a framework that you need to stay within, but within that framework, you still have the ability to improvise, as long as you don't mess everybody up in the process. As long as you stay within that timeframe, or the time signature, or the key, the established rules, you can play the saxophone, you could do solos all day long, just don't mess up the bass player in coming in the wrong place, or anything like that.

The other thing I wanted to echo is that I also early on worked at an agency called Stein Rogan and Partners and it was one of the first “interactive” agencies out there. All the print people, they were like, they put us in the conference room, they’re like, “This is a website.” We were like, “What? What is that?” “This is a banner ad. Your life is going to become this right now. You need to learn all about it.” But being at that moment in time, and enabling myself to be able to call it an integrated producer, print producer, a production person. Honestly, it propelled me the next five years, as certainly, I freelanced more of my career than I did, just because it was – I didn't want to get involved. I just kind of wanted the money to get out of there. Because it's crazy. But I would get jobs before the people because I had that dual knowledge. So, it's super important.

Okay. I want to move toward really focusing on this technology because you do have a very unique set of skills that you can talk IT and understand what you're talking about. Not just, “Is your computer on Sir?” You're way beyond that. Where did you start on your emerging technology journey? I mean, obviously, you said you implemented email. That was way along. But closer to now, what were the types of things you were looking at? How did you assess them, and how did you implement them? Especially with creatives.

[00:17:49] PN: Yes, it's always a challenge, right? Getting creative, people use a lot of technologies is always a challenge. I think early on, again, I was so intrigued by this digitization of this business in graphic design and using those early tools, and the early computers, right? The Macintosh SEs with two megs of – two megabytes of RAM, and those tiny little screens and all of those early days applications. I just, always, just like eternally curious about technology in general. Also, just, I am not one to sit still. My clock is going all the time, and anybody that's ever worked for me will tell you that I am constantly pushing them to innovate. What are you doing now? What are you doing next? Let's not just do the work and go home for the day. I'm always like, how can we do the work better? How can we do it faster? How can we do more of it, right? Just naturally my clock dictates that.

I've always looked for any ways that we can improve things, sometimes that's just a straight-up business process, right? That's just figuring out the structure of your team, and how to streamline things from that standpoint. But so often, obviously, these days, it's technology, and it's automation, and things like that. So, very early when I was at Showtime, I was really only running the – or building first, but then running the print studio of what we think of as the

traditional print studio like retouchers, mechanical artists, that sort of thing, print buyers. All of the files were stored on zip disks, and they were all in different drawers around the place, and like nobody knew where they were except like one person. If she ever got hit by a bus, oh, my God, what are we going to do?

The first thing was, let's put all this stuff on a server, by a server, and then how can we then share that server? Then how can we work off of that server? As opposed to having to copy files in a local machine and spend that time, right? There were all kinds of things around the company like drawers full of CD ROMs with photos on them. So, you'd have to literally get up, walk down the hall, go through the – find the disc that you need and have hundreds of them from every show, and every day of shooting photography and whatnot. Lift that CD out, walk back to your desk, put it in, and then find the photos you want.

Now, if somebody else needs that disc, they go over to the drawer, that disc isn't there because it's on your desk. You would imagine people are lazy, they don't put things back. Next thing you know, it's weeks and weeks, where the heck is that disc for *Weeds* or *Queered as Folk* or *Nurse Jackie*, one of those earlier shows.

Again, server. We put in a big sand system, it was a very first of its kind. There were articles written about it, that's how kind of innovative it was at the time because no one was really doing this so that we could work off of one server. Then, I put in the company's first digital asset management system to house all of those CD ROMs with images. Now, you can just sit at your desk, and everybody had access to stuff 24 hours a day, even from home, and you can download stuff and upload stuff and keep track of version.

Those were what we talk about then as emerging technologies, right? Today, it's more things like video MAM systems or media asset management systems where you're editing video proxies in the cloud. You're not having to move these gigantic video files or full episodes or movies too and from your house or your office or edit room, wherever you might be working. You now have access via the cloud. Again, innovative technology. They're in the cloud, and you're editing off of these low-res proxy files, and then essentially hitting a couple of buttons. And then the computer makes the high res version, not – the cloud makes the high res version depending on how you've configured it.

So, those were some of the later emerging technologies. Then, of course, we have AI, which is the big buzzword. We have to — no podcast is as relevant anymore unless we say AI. We've checked that box. But AI is a part of all of these tools that are implemented at Showtime now. So, you can auto-create versions of things, because that's a lot of what we all do for a living is actually make one thing and then make thousands of versions of that one thing that we made. Certainly, a lot in the media streaming business that happens.

How can we automate that? Or we can use things like AI to make those versions rather than pay some very high-priced editor an hourly rate to make each one by hand, or burden the creative department with this kind of more administrative like tasks, to create the vertical video, and the square video, and the horizontal video for the different social media platforms and whatnot. No need for them to be involved in that. So, you find different ways of leveraging these emerging technologies to just kind of keep up. I just always prided myself and my team on the fact that we were always looking for what's next. Never settling into anything we were using. We were always trying to innovate.

[00:22:46] DC: When I was at Showtime, Sandy Torres implemented FileMaker Pro. It was the first time there was a production management system there. You probably inherited that since you were right after — you came in right after that started. So yes, I remember, I was like, “What? You can see where everything is in one place, and there's a status report? You enter and you just put dates in it, and it makes a schedule?” I mean, it was like, “What?” Of course, we couldn't get the creatives to use it, which was a whole other thing. But it made it very simple for the production department.

When we met, it was actually because you were the Chairman of the Advertising Production Club of New York, and you were putting together an innovation, print innovations event. I always know you as someone who has been looking forward as far as printing goes as well. Showtime does a lot of printing. I mean, when I was there, it was all printing. There was really no digital asset. Well, there were, but it was like the broadcast team did that. It was not any little videos online or anything like that. It was, no we were doing ads and a lot of promotional materials, we did a ton of those. A lot of outdoor. I don't know if you know this, but at one time, Showtime made the world's largest billboard. We rocked the port authority. So, I was part of that, which was really cool. But we did a ton of printing.

I want to just focus on that for a little bit. How were you learning about new technology out in the marketplace? And how were you assessing it, as to whether or not it was relevant at this moment in time to the projects that you were working on?

[00:24:30] PN: Yes. Specifically related to printing, and print in general. Yes, Showtime, as you said, the days that you were there, obviously, we crossed paths very briefly at Showtime. Those were all the same time that I was kind of coming into it. My first order of business, as I said earlier, was just kind of like getting the digital studio up and running and figuring that all out. The next order of business was to take over all of the print production, and the main focus of that department, in general, was direct mail because we did so much direct mail. There was so much printing happening, and shipping of those pallets of mail pieces, just hundreds of millions of pieces a year really, we would print these, essentially shells. We would come up with the creative, create these mail pieces, and then offer them to the affiliates, and cable companies, if you will, and have them put their own customized black plate on it. We would do that for them. But they would give us that information. We would typeset it, and then we would actually print out the number of pieces and deliver them to them. They would handle the mailing.

[00:25:36] DC: I just want to interject for one second and say that I totally forgot about that. But you're right. We used to make the schedule of all the new programming that was on Showtime that month, and it used to go in everyone's cable bill. Everyone who subscribed got to, and you're right. I'm having a little PTSD now about all that direct mail. I did a lot of stuff on the boxing too.

[00:25:58] PN: Yes. So, we would create these shells, these creative pieces that left room for their black plate, and we would create dozens of variations for them, because everybody wanted something a little different, or wanted to sell one type of show versus another. But these were primarily and really exclusively at first, Showtime promotions. Later that changed because the cable companies started selling internet and phone service, and then they wanted to have those things incorporated. Then the whole table shifted, where that was their primary message, and the Showtime thing became a little box on the piece. Then, all of that direct mail had gone away.

But we had some really incredible partnerships with our vendors back then, big direct mail printers that we use, that really came up with some very innovative ways of creating those shells, printing on demand, variable data. We started to really implement some of those at the time emerging technologies in print.

[00:26:53] DC: You mean digital printing, pretty much. What about wide-format technology? Were you still doing the – I mean, still doing the outdoor billboards, or did they all go elec – I mean, Time Square used to be filled with them, or would you go electronic on those?

[00:27:10] PN: Yes. We really pushed and pushed the outdoor companies. At the time, one of which was obviously owned by CBS, a sister company. We were a critical part, my team really, and my Grey print production people, Linda Monteleone and others, Peter Oppenheim, et cetera. And they really helped to push the industry forward, because we were doing so much outdoors and we wanted to create more digital opportunities. That was very – obviously, the printing companies were resistant to that, obviously. But the outdoor companies were not because they can then just change out creative or sell a rotational board and these types of things.

So, we really wanted some key areas to have those digital boards, and so we were successful in getting them to do that. We continue to print tons of outdoor. In fact, now, Showtime is really primarily outdoor printing, as compared to any other type of printing. They've really gone ultimately to a very robust digital promotional platform, as opposed to physically printing much at all, in terms of like offset. It's mostly outdoor and large format.

[00:28:19] DC: How much of a conversation has sustainability been in your world for the last, let's say, three to five years? What do you think of the conversation moving forward? What is the impact?

[00:28:33] PN: Yes, I mean, personally, sustainability means a great deal. It's very important to me, and there's a lot of things we need to do to improve in this industry, especially in the outdoor space, and vinyl, and whatnot, and the impact that that has on the environment. The problem for companies, though, is that it's so expensive, right? It really ramps up the cost. We just have not done enough to make it palatable for budgets in today's marketplace. Okay. Budgets are getting

tighter, content velocity is going up, we need to create more of this stuff for less money, and the price to do something more sustainable is just counter to that. So, it's the first thing that you just say, "Forget it", and you take it off the list.

Again, from a personal standpoint, super important. From a company standpoint, really, everybody's interested in sustainability until they see that price tag and that invoice, and then they're like, "Maybe we can wait a little while."

[MESSAGE]

[00:29:28] 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.

[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[00:30:18] DC: When it comes to marketing budgets, sometimes this is a point of contention with some people in the printing industry, and at least my personal experience of how life in the agency works. So, there are people in the printing industry that believe if they could just get to the chief marketing officer and tell them, "People like to touch paper. People retain more information when they touch paper. Look, we can print shiny stuff on paper. People like shiny stuff" that that will make a chief marketing officer go, "Wow. Let me take all that money that I have allocated for digital marketing, and reassess that, and put it back into print marketing, because you just gave me a stat about how people love to touch paper." What is your experience with how all of that works? And how someone like you, with all due respect, gets your marching orders on what you're supposed to produce? And do you ever, and even in the

role that you had, which was a major role get to say, “You know what, we actually should put some money in the print budget.” Have you ever been able to do any of that?

[00:31:34] PN: I think the first problem is that they come – the salesmen come and they say, “Yes, people like to touch paper.” They use examples like that, instead of real data that shows any kind of relevant impact that it has on the market, right? Or any type of success that their customers have had by doing more printing, in any kind of real tangible way. With real KPIs, with real data points, and things of that sort. So many of the salesmen that call, right? And we all, in these positions, get calls. I mean, I would get dozens a day, even earlier days, when printing was – when there were a lot more printing companies. Now, there's less printing companies, so you get less phone calls, thankfully. But you get a lot of phone calls still, and people are just basically saying like, “This is the equipment I have. This is where I'm located. People like to touch paper.” These very general things that don't matter to me. My immediate answer is, “I have somebody that does that” right? It's a commodity.

I mean, at this point, equipment is the least important thing in that conversation. For me, I mean, if you're, I don't know, if there are even any more annual report printers, or more than that health care sector, or something where these government required printing thing. Then maybe it matters more for those hardcore people that need to fit certain things up on a press and whatnot, right? But for the most part, everybody has the same capabilities now, and there are a lot less printers, so they've merged, and the equipment has merged over time.

What they really need to be doing is bringing data with them, and they need to talk about how they can leverage your data in the printing, and they need to understand what your business needs are, and what you're trying to do with your marketing. They don't spend any time in my experience, coming with real solutions for my business, and how I'm going to move the needle, and get more subscribers, or get more customers, or increased sales, or whatever it is that I'm trying to do in my business.

Again, it goes back to emerging technologies, right? These printers have the ability to hire people in their company that really can leverage emerging technologies, along with the printing component. You've got some printers that are doing interesting things, but man, it feels so slow to progress. Where there are some that are using data points, and some of the data points are

old data points like zip codes, and some of the data points are new data points like geotagging on your phone and using the notification system of an iPhone to alert you that you're about to get a direct mail piece in your mailbox today with a deal from Verizon, or a deal from Coca Cola, or whatever it is.

So that, you get this ping on your phone, you look at it, like, "Oh, now I'm expecting a mail." Because I am now looking for the mail piece, as opposed to just grabbing all the direct mail and throwing it in the trash, and not even looking at it, right?

There's creative ways, I think, for them to use technology, but also creative ways for them to use their business know how to tell me why I need to use them, right? Some of that needs to be direct. Some of that needs to be them calling me to tell me that, that they did the research on my company and they saw X in the market, and they want to know why we did that. Some of that has direct relationship stuff where they call you, and some of it is just them having a presence out there on things like LinkedIn and other social media platforms, showcasing some of these successes. Talking about their customers, the impact that their technology had on their customer, how their customer increased sales by X by running this program of print combined with video, right?

They need to make content. They need to be their own kind of influencers, if you will, and say, "Create videos showing how this project made its way through their plant, interview the customer to talk about the success." There's all this extra stuff that takes work. It doesn't take a lot of money, though, to show that you're an expert, and that you can offer me real added value by me doing business with you, right?

[00:35:40] DC: Yes, I mean, that's such a great point. Are you getting packages from printers with samples anymore? Letters? Introduction? Hey, to your point, we've analyzed what Hulu, HBO, and Netflix is doing. Here's some ways that you can stand out in the mailbox.

[00:36:01] PN: No, I don't get – nothing comes to me with that strategy behind it or real strategic thinking behind it. I might get just a kit of stuff. "Hey, here's our kit." I immediately throw those in the garbage. So, don't waste your money printers if you're listening, because no one is

looking at that unless it's like a real wow piece, and more than likely they're not sending those because those are more expensive typically, and so they're not just blankly sending those out.

But what I used to say when a printer would come in and sit in front of me or on the phone, I would say, "Send me interesting things. I have nothing for you right now today. This phone call is not going to get you a job or a bid, even, a bid opportunity." I would say send me interesting things though. Keep in touch with me, by every once in a while, sending me a sample that isn't just like a well-printed sample. I know you can print good. Everybody can print good. But show me something that is highly creative, even in just like, it's a simple print job. But the agency that did it came up with this wild creative idea that might inspire me. I know now that I got that from you. So, I'm thinking about you related to their good work. Show me something that is a wow piece, with incredibly innovative technology used to do it. Show me something that has real data around the success of the campaign. Don't just send me a kit of samples that you can print letterhead, and you can print mail, and look at the four colors.

It's got to be a real wow piece because it initiates conversation, and that initiates relationship, and helps you build a relationship with somebody. Because now I like the way you think you've sent me two or three of these things, now, I know your eye is good, and that you can add value to my department, and you can be a resource for us. Not just somebody who just wants a bid, just wants a bid. I know your bid is going to be the lowest, right? That's the other joke. They always want an opportunity to bid. Then, of course, the bid comes in like 30% less than anybody because they're –

[00:38:06] DC: The first time. Right, exactly. You're so correct. I remember the first time I received a sample of just a printer sent it and said, "Hey, I thought this was cool. I want to send it to you." Now, it seems like a very simple thing. But at the time, it was a round piece that opened up so that it almost looked like a flower when it was a square piece, but the four flaps were round. And when you close it, they interlocked with each other. If I can tell you, we all looked at it like it was a miracle. And we worked with that printer because they had the template. We didn't have to reinvent the wheel. I started to get my three bids, but there was no comparison because somebody already went through the months of creating the dye and making sure they knew which flat had to be like a 16th of an inch shorter on one side.

I mean, people don't realize that everything – well, or you learn the hard way like I do, designing something for a five by seven envelope. Five by seven instead of leaving it a little room. The first time you do that, the printer is like, “No, it's got to fit inside the envelope.”

Yes, it's such a great point just to – I call it printspiration. Just keep sending printspiration to people, and printers, listen, listen to Paul, listen to me. We keep drawers full of this stuff, and we wait to whip it out for the right time. Or we remember that one time that we saw something really cool. We know what's in that drawer, and now this is the perfect moment in time to whip it out and show everybody and say, “We can do this or we can modify it in some way.” But either way, we've got an idea that we haven't done before, that we can retool for another purpose. I think it's super important. Any final words on that?

[00:40:02] PN: It is incredible. We had drawers full and I had an amazing print production person that worked for me at Showtime named Judy Salmon. I know you know Judy.

[00:40:11] DC: Judy, rest in peace, my friend.

[00:40:12] PN: Rest in peace, Judy. She took over half the floor of file cabinets, because if you sent her something that was really beautiful or interesting, man, she kept that for life. She brought with her boxes of this stuff from previous jobs when she came to me. I don't know, I think she started about 12 years ago working at Showtime, and then built an entire library of like printspiration, as you say, and that's an incredibly valuable tool for the creative department to look at. We would showcase that stuff. We bring out like six or seven pieces this week for no apparent reason, but just put stuff out. So that while people walk down the hall, they might get inspired to do something or look at something, and it might influence another project, in some way.

[00:40:58] DC: That's amazing. Speaking of influence, you specifically point out that you are a DEI advocate in your profile, which I respect and thank you for. You developed something called the Content for Change Academy. Can you tell everybody what that is?

[00:41:15] PN: Yes, sure. That's something I developed exclusively at Paramount. Paramount Global has a project essentially called The Content for Change Academy, and it's really part of a

much larger DEI initiative. But this one was very specifically near and dear to my heart. I pitched for the original concept.

So, there's a real lack of young people coming into this business, whether it be print or video production, coming from diverse communities, and I would put out job applications for production assistant level types of jobs, and I really would get a lot of resumes. I mean, I can post a job description, and in a week, I'd have 2,000 resumes. There would be less than 5% coming from underserved communities. That really mattered to me. I really wanted to create at Showtime, and always, it's always been a mission of mine to have a very diverse department in general. I mean, diversity for me isn't about skin color, it's about a whole range of things. It's even just diversity of thought and ideas.

But it's very important to me, nonetheless, for all those reasons, and I wanted to create something where we could have an almost an internship level type of program, where we could get kids from underserved communities, and get them ready so that they could apply for those entry-level jobs. Because there was this gap of kids that were actually ready and had the very, very basic, even, knowledge or skills to work in a corporation, to work in a department, to work for anybody but themselves or for anything but being a student. So, we created this Content for Change Academy program, so that we would have a dozen or so kids come in, and there would be an actual curriculum, where they would learn how to behave in an office, how to be in an office, how corporate structure works. We would teach them about the business of television streaming so that they can understand how the company function, and what was important to the company. Then, we would take them through kind of like through a mentorship with a creative director or production line producer or something like that, depending on what their interests were, so that they can shadow a little bit and just get comfortable so that they can be a good performer in an interview for these entry-level jobs.

We started doing that and it's just reaped incredible benefits. We partnered with a company called Reel Works, R-E-E-L like video reel works, and they're an amazing organization. I encourage anybody to check them out. I believe it's reelworks.org. This is their whole mission, serving underserved communities, and helping them to get these talented filmmakers, and editors, and producers, into companies, into jobs, and ultimately, into their dream careers. We

had great success with that. I have an amazing PA program led by a woman named Kim Gallagher at Showtime who's there and still operates this team.

We have an 18-month program, so it's almost a little bit like the NBC Page program where it's a defined period of time, that these kids come in, and now these Content for Change Academy kids are applying for those and getting those jobs. And we have an incredibly diverse team now. They come in and they work for 18 months, so the clock is ticking on them, so that keeps a little bit of fire under their belly or in their belly, so that they keep active and do great work and really try to continue to figure out what they want to do next, because this is a stepping stone level job, and it keeps us fresh with talent coming in constantly around Showtime.

So, so many of our PAs over the years got restarted the PA program 20 years ago. The Content for Change Academy is only a couple of years old. But so many of our PAs have turned into some of my absolute best editors in my career at Showtime. Some of our highest-level creative directors at Showtime came out of that PA program. And so many very senior level people in the production department that made to director level, or even vice president of Showtime started in that PA program. It's such a great place to start, because it's really from the ground up, and you really get to be a resource for a lot of very senior-level people right in the beginning, and you get exposure to that.

The Content for Change Academy, just a huge success, and I'm really excited that Paramount is continuing it, and they have a lot of great people working on there, and it's really across all the brands now. It's been nicely a part of that.

[MESSAGE]

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[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[00:46:35] DC: Anyone who's ever worked in advertising or an in-house advertising department at a corporation which functions as itself, with itself, your own company as your client, which is a weird situation. It took me a little while to understand that the person down the hall was actually my client. But mergers and acquisitions happen and corporations make changes and recently, Showtime merged into Paramount, not the other way around. Obviously, there were some changes made there and you are no longer at Showtime. What are you looking for in the next chapter of Paul Nicholson?

[00:47:15] PN: Good question. I still want to try to figure out what I want to do with my life, actually. I'm just kidding. At Showtime, I was managing a huge team. We had a really large team that had built from the ground up, the in-house team, as I mentioned earlier. It included things like campaign management, marketing operations, post-production, print production, all of our key art finishing, physical production shoots, photoshoots, and whatnot, plus all the technology that we use to do all this work. The marketing tech stack, so to speak, including the, as you said, the company's MAN systems and DAM systems, project management systems. We did a whole bunch of custom software development, and I managed the facilities, kind of acting as a COO for the in-house agency. All of the physical office space was under my watch as well, and all the technology in people's hands.

While all of that certainly kept me and my team really busy, and I couldn't be more proud of it, it was also so rewarding and exciting at the same time, and I'm not willing to sit still. There's still so much more that I want to do, and I'm kind of trying to figure out in which direction I want to focus. I think I could make my way to a technology-driven company, in a way that would be really effective. Because, again, because of my history and my desire there. Also, straight-up production role, if it's at a senior level. My passions are managing – I love managing and mentoring, and as I say, DEI. So that, I would love for that to be a part of it. I also think that I would like to kind of take other companies through the success that we had at Showtime with all of the process implementation and structure and tool set, and help them figure out how to make their lives more efficient and really drive financial efficiency and process efficiency, and I think I have a lot to offer.

[00:49:19] DC: I think you have a lot to offer in any of those roles. But if I was going to choose your job for you, that's what would be the last thing you said. You are a transformational person. You are a disrupter. You are in a position to be able to take an agency to the next level, which is where we're at right now, especially with the emerging technology in artificial intelligence is very much going to affect the marketing world in ways that we're only tapping into right now. I don't know if you've seen these new QR codes that the AI is spitting out. My god, can you not imagine billboards on sides of buildings with these things? I mean, it's just incredible.

But living in all of those worlds and understanding how to assess the technology and how to look for the next thing before it's a thing yet, is something that I've always attributed to you, and I look forward to seeing what your next iteration is. Everything you need to connect with Paul is in the show notes. I just want to thank you so much for your time, for your service to the industry, to the Advertising Production Club of New York, for pulling me in there, and for just being an all-around awesome guy who happens to play the saxophone too. Thank you so much, Paul.

[00:50:42] PN: Thank you so much. This was a really fun conversation and let's keep it going.

[00:50:46] DC: Excellent. Until next time everybody, print long and prosper.

[OUTRO]

[00:50:53] 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:

Paul Nicholson: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/paulnicholsonsho/>

Advertising Production Club of New York: <https://apc-nyc.org/>

Showtime Networks: <https://www.sho.com>

Content for Change Academy: <https://contentforchange.paramount.com/>

Reel Works: <https://www.reelworks.org/>

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/>