

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:05] 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.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:32] DC: Hey, everybody. Welcome to Podcast from the Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your intergalactic ambassador. Even though it is not Christmas, we are getting a visit from Santa today. That's Santa Buka, from SDD Group. SDD designs, manufactures, and markets inline, offline, and nearline document finishing solutions for the graphic and digital printing markets. In her role as the International Sales and Marketing Manager, Santa is involved with product development, product launches, market research, creating innovative marketing concepts, and managing communications with international partners. You can learn all about SDD Group at sddbv.com. Don't worry about it. The link is in the show note. Santa, welcome to the program.

[0:01:23] SB: Hello. Good day, Deborah. Thank you for this very nice introduction, and greetings from The Netherlands.

[0:01:32] DC: Yes. Okay. Ready? *Goedemorgen*. Oh, no, I wasn't speaking Dutch there? Okay, I thought I was speaking – I thought I was saying good morning in Dutch. *Goedemorgen*. No?

[0:01:43] SB: *Goedemorgen*. Almost.

[0:01:47] DC: Almost. Listen, I try to learn something in every language, but I have to tell you that when I'm fortunate enough to be in Europe, I always realize who's speaking Dutch because I understand nothing, not a word that they say. Apparently, it's because I can't even pronounce

it when I do it phonetically. Thank you for the correction on that. Now, you are in The Netherlands right now, but you are from Latvia, correct?

[0:02:15] SB: Correct. That's completely correct.

[0:02:17] DC: Excellent. Tell everybody about your journey into print and how you ended up as the International Sales and Marketing Manager at SDD Group.

[0:02:27] SB: Okay, yes. Thank you, Deborah. Actually, as you mentioned, I'm from Latvia. I was living there for 20 years. I did a totally different work there. So I was busy with restaurant business, with account management. Later on, when I turned 20, about, my family moved to The Netherlands. There, actually my journey gone from zero. Let's put it like that. Actually, yes, I came into the SDD as young somebody, totally from different business. But I was curious about company who is working internationally. This was also my passion, because I always liked to talk and meet different people from different countries. So yes, because I just came into The Netherlands, I didn't knew the Dutch language. So actually, I said, almost, *Goedemorgen* like you did. But yes, it took me a while that I've learned language. When I was at, let's say, okay level on my Dutch, I came into SDD. I started at the production engineering.

This was a good combination, because I could write manuals, documentation for the machines, for the equipment with which they were developing for the printer fenders. So at the beginning, I thought, okay, I know English, so now I'm learning Dutch, and now I can combine things. But okay, it's technical work, so I actually need to dig into the details, into the machines. I walk through the old portfolio. I work together with my colleagues from the research and development group, because there, also, I started my journey at SDD. I learned a lot about techniques, about the background, how the machines are working, what is the working principle, how you do things, and actually, what are you doing with those machines. Because we have so many modules, so that means that you have to do a lot of different things, and finish the whole processes.

This was my beginning. So I have learned all the machines, I wrote a documentation, so like installation manuals, operator manuals, service books, part books. I did also machine trainings, but also testing phase, because I was of course at the R&D. So I was kind of, yes, let's say a

piece of chain between the R&D and the production because we were developing equipment. So actually, yes, I was writing the documentation, but I also have to – I had my own project. So I have to make sure that everything has been done at R&D side also goes on a good way into the production so that we can industrialize the whole process. I did it for about four – I guess, maybe five years, almost five years. And then my colleague, Arnoud Kerkhof, you met him last time as well. He said, "Oh, Santa, I know that you like to work internationally, I need some help. Because we have now new products on the market, and yes, I need some help. You know already a lot of basic things, and I know that your passion is doing marketing and sales. Would you like to join me?"

Actually, this was my beginning into the sales and marketing. But of course, I did totally different things in the past, which means I had also different education. Then, besides my work, I also did marketing and communication studies. That's why, yes, I could combine, let's say, work together with my studies. I must say, SDD was also very flexible in this way that they give me also a bit of spare time to make the studies. Otherwise, it will get crazy when you have an understudy, and the whole bunch of work, and everything.

So yes, I manage it. And then step by step, actually, I learned a lot also from Arnoud. We went together to the customers, also, we did together meetings with our print fenders. Actually, yes, now, I'm doing this 14 years with SDD. So five years almost at research and development, and now in sales and marketing for another nine years down.

[0:07:02] DC: I mean, it's just incredible. Now, I met you at innovation days, where SDD was collocated with a manufacturer in a booth. You were the only woman there, Oh, no, there was one of the women with you, if I remember correctly. And everybody was like sending everybody over to you to discuss how everything worked. And they wanted to champion you, and girls who print on this podcast. I think it's super important that we mentioned how supportive this company is. Also, it's such an interesting journey that you've had. I'm really interested in – a lot of times we say that diversity is not just about gender, or orientation, or race, or beliefs, but it is also about a perspective.

You definitely saw things differently, because you weren't an engineer, you weren't a product developer, you were somebody who needed to translate this in a way that your entire value

chain could understand the value that your products and services brought to the marketplace, and how to use them. How do you think that not being from the industry actually helps you get to where you are now?

[0:08:27] SB: Yes, thank you, Deborah. Yes, I think it's more something what comes from out of the heart. For me, it's always important, or at least I love to learn things. For me, it's interesting. Okay. Should I start it? Should I do things? Can I go farther? Can I do something with it? Just to maybe stupid example. I speak five languages, but then I started to learn French. Sorry, French people. But after one year, I thought, "Oh, no. This is not my thing." In techniques, it was like different way around. I thought, "Okay, I understand where we are going to, what we should do." Maybe not all the details, but the global timeline of project or things, and I understand what customer wants, and I can put those chain pieces together. Maybe that's the thing. When you are interested and passionate about things, then you can move forward. This is my feeling and my experience. Let's put it like that.

[SPONSOR MESSAGE]

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUES]

[0:10:26] DC: So I want to touch a little bit more on SDD Group, because in all honesty, I had not heard of SDD group until I met you at Hunkeler, of course. I wouldn't be buying finishing equipment, so that's probably why. Can you just give a broad overview about the products and service you develop for the market, and who's right for them?

[0:10:48] SB: Okay, yes. So actually, as I mentioned, SDD group has a research and development part. We have a production facility also, and we have our sales, marketing, and service division. Which means that all SDD products are developed, produced, and also sold, let's put it like that from The Netherlands. So we have really European product. Actually, next year, we will celebrate 25 years SDD is here. So actually, SDD was created by our CEO, Roland Oudsen in 1999. Two years later, Arnoud Kerkhof, our managing director also has joined the company.

Actually, the funny story is that they have worked before together, so they know each other already for almost 45 years. They are coming from the other business from the high speed and inserting company. Actually, Arnoud was Roland's boss before. Then, there also has been changed, Roland started his own company. The thing is, before at that time, all the printer fenders, they had printers and all the finishing equipment were more offline. They saw the needs and opportunities for the future to add finishing equipment online because they saw, okay, this is our future. We can do things automatically. At that moment, the company where they were working for, they don't want to do anything. Our business is going good now, and let's keep it like it is.

Roland made this decision to start on company and this was a good decision, because the first project started at Océ in Venlo. Now it's Canon, because Canon has bought Océ. Actually, what they did at that time from 1999, they developed the first interface connection. So the integration between the printer and the finishing equipment. So they have started this integration with digital printers. It went, okay, we had a Canon, then we start to work with Konica Minolta, then we started to work Riso, Kyocera, HP. So yeah, the old biggest printing companies actually are our partners and our customers. This is the thing what I have to say that yeah, we develop, we produce, we sell, and we also help our partners to do also after sales things on the machines.

Actually, if we come back here to the research and development. So SDD develops like booklet making, booklet makers, front trimmer, two side trimmer, square fold, and diverse booklet belt stickers. But if we come back to the two-side trimming, this is a very specific product of SDD. Because also, many years ago, there were a big companies who made, and also now, of course. Who made a guillotine, also called offline booklets or brochures. Then of course, we

had a bigger machine so could do that online. But then we talk about very thick glued booklets or books even.

SDD came to idea, yeah, should we make something also for the digital market? Actually, yes, this is our high-quality products, which we have brought on the market, and these still have, and now, even we have successor of it which we are using in different ways, in different configurations where we aim for the high-quality booklet finishing. Which means that, yeah, we try to always do different than the competition, adds additional things. We are listening to the market. We are listening to the needs of our partners, but also their customers. This is also where we talk about research and development. We try, at least, Arnoud, myself, also Roland. We have these sparring sessions also with the customers. We are working on different levels. We are working directly with the countries, we are working directly with the regions, but also with the headquarters.

We try to manage and work with all kinds of levels. But when we have possibility, for example, to talk to the end customers, or it's amazing, because the only information you get from them, actually, what are their needs, what they are searching for, where they can make their processes faster, where they can save money, how they can reach more automation. But you know, yes, for us, as you mentioned, we are a small company, but we try to do specialties, try to put all the things in a niche market. Yeah, when we have opportunity to talk to the customers, to the end customers, then, of course, it's diamond time for us, let's put it like that.

[0:16:14] DC: I think that's such a great point. Because obviously, it's gold to get bypass, distributors, and everybody else, and get to the people actually using your equipment, the printers. Because in their using of it, they understand, maybe some features that are amazing for them that you're not highlighting in your marketing materials. Or maybe if we could just put this button here, or this tray would open this way. I mean, I've heard the craziest things from printers that manufacturers are like, "Ah, he never even thought of it because we don't work in a print shop all day long."

Along with that, though, you do need your channel partners, because your equipment doesn't – I mean, I guess it could operate independently, but it still has to receive materials that are the correct sizes, and everything else, so we could do what it's supposed to do. How do you work

with your channel partners, to understand the current needs of their customers, and also create a roadmap for the future, so you know what they're developing, so you can develop equipment that makes it to your point, one ecosystem for a printer.

[0:17:32] SB: Yes, a lot of details, of course are involved in the whole processes. But again, what I try to mention, we try to be like a spin in a web. We talk daily to our partners. We hear their needs, we hear the needs from their customers. And of course, when we hear, "Oh, this country needs this, and other country also need something similar. "Oh." And then we hear, "Oh, US also is willing to have something like that." So we collect all those needs.

Then sometimes, it could be that also partners coming to us and say, "Oh, you know, we need to have something like that." Then we try to collaborate together. So we start the whole processes, of course, all the contracts, and NDAs are involved, that we are working together on a project. And then we are making together the roadmap. Okay. When we should be ready. Maybe there is a goal for Drupa, maybe there is a goal for another show, or maybe there are too many customer cases. That's yes, we need to fulfill their needs as soon as possible. This is how we start a project.

Again, it could be on region level, but it could be also on a headquarter level. Depends on the on the project, and depends on the needs. Of course, then when we have outlined the timeline of the project, then we start build the first prototypes, do the first testing. Then we have the complete testing metrics is, what the thing should do, and how we should proceed. Then when we are through the whole validation processes with all levels, because yes, it's a big work to do. Not only for R&D teams, but also for the production. Because then, you have to make your production ready for it. But then also, your service teams have to be trained, but also service teams from the partner. It's the complete thing that should be arranged. But I must say, yeah, we are lucky that we have done it already few times with our partners, and we know how it works.

Of course, there are some changes by the new project, but actually, yeah, we need to have customers, we need to have needs out of the market. Then we try ways how we can collaborate, and how we can make processes faster, and create the right product to our common customers.

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[0:20:06] DC: Calling all fierce fabulous females, Girls Who Print, is waiting for you. Our global mission to help empower and connect the women of print is stronger than ever. Join our 8,500 members and growing, women-only LinkedIn group. Connect with us on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, celebrate Girls Who Print Day, and find out who wins our Annual Girly Award. Learn about our ongoing initiatives, events, conferences, and our free mentoring program.

Visit girlswhoprint.net for information on how to get involved and connect with the women of print. Empower long, and prosper.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:20:47] DC: One of the unfortunate outcomes of the pandemic, there were many, of course, was the almost depletion of the service level of jobs. People just decided, "Nope, I don't want to fix things anymore. I don't want to learn how to fix things." You mentioned service, so I think this is a good point to bring this up. How do you sell? Do you sell through distributors or direct? What is your service process for any printers that need your help?

[0:21:21] SB: Yes. Actually, we have several service possibilities and opportunities. We try to be very flexible, and actually, we always say, "Okay. Let's do the train the trainer sessions." We always try to give all needed materials, all operator books, installation books, service books, but also create additional videos, how you can install things, how you can manage things, how you can also exchange things in a field. We tried to be really, really flexible. Also, if we mentioned the pandemic time, we did even the online service, not only the trainings, but also exchange of the parts. We have showed to the customers at the country themselves. Okay. Now, you should do this, this, this, this. We cannot come because of all the restrictions, but we can do it on distance, we can show you, and you can repeat it.

This is the thing that's on one hand, pandemic time was not so great for all of us. But on the other hand, we have learned how to do things different, how to help each other, how to support each other, to make things more simpler, and easier. This is also something what we try to do in terms of service. We are flexible. For example, if we look to different offenders, most of them,

they are doing themselves service. But sometimes we have for example here in The Netherlands, or in The Belgium because it's nearby or even Germany, very nearby. They say, "Oh SDD, could you please come and help us, or support us with installation or whatever?"

Again, we are flexible, we are always doing things, we try to support our customer. So that's why I'm saying, and we are daily contacting our partners. So on all different levels, but also for different questions, could be service question, could be marketing, or sales, or even sometimes, it's like, "Oh, I have a customer. We have this printer engine. At the end, he wants to have this application finished. How can we do that? How we will manage that? And then we are sitting here and puzzling, "Oh, if we do this, or if we use this equipment, okay. What is the best need?" We try also to be open if we know that competition for that application can do things better as we can do that. We will never say, "Oh, no, you need to buy SDD." Now, we want to have customers who say. "Oh, SDD is the right partner because they are saying, okay, if we need to do this thing, then we need to go for this product. Or if we need to do another thing, then we have to choose another product. This is the thing what we try to – yes, we think with our customer, we try to support them and always what we can.

To answer your question regarding the sales. Actually, we don't sell anything directly. We are working to the partners. Again, what I mentioned, we have products which we're selling directly to the countries for example, to the printer fenders, or we are selling and having contracts with the regions. So yes, actually we don't sell anything. So we let our partners to offer the right things. But what we do, we support them on the right offerings, decisions, obligations, and that kind of things.

[0:25:04] DC: How can people learn who your distribution partners are, and which countries that you currently service?

[0:25:11] SB: Yes. Actually, if you go to our website, www.ssdbv.com, you can see actually all the information. Who we are, what we are doing, what are our partners. Actually, yes, you can see that we are working online with our printer fenders, which means that, again, we have close collaboration. We like to have things more automatic way. So we are working on different levels with them. Actually, SDD is international company. We are operating worldwide from The Netherlands, so from the middle of the Europe. But we try to work together with our partners on

different levels, and all the information or products, videos, and all our things you can find on our website.

[0:26:07] DC: "The will to win, the desire to succeed, the urge to reach your full potential. These are the keys that will unlock the door to personal excellence." That is a quote from Confucius that you have prominently on your LinkedIn profile. Can you apply that philosophy to your experience as a girl who prints in the printing industry?

[0:26:37] SB: Yes, good question, Deborah. Again, this is my feeling from the inside. As I mentioned before, I understood, it doesn't matter. Are you girl or a man? Are you young or old? There is always place for improvement, there is always place to learn things. The question is, what do you like? What would you like to do? What is your passion? For me, it was always learn new things, what I also mentioned before, and why also I put this quote, because I understand, if you have passion, if you have interest, it doesn't matter what. You can learn things, you can do things. Yes, maybe you are not good in everything, in all small details, or in different topics. But if you have this passion, and if you have this will to discover things, this is also my journey from the beginning, and where I am now at the moment within SDD.

I have learned things from zero, from scratch. I have learned a new language. I was in a new country, so everything was new, and I got a new job in technics. I never did anything. And then I was a production engineer. So yes, I took my notebook, I took my pen, and I walked through the machines, and I written down every module. Oh, this module is doing this and this. Then I go to the next one. The next step was, okay, let's build out the knives, the machine, let's put them back. Oh, how the machine works. Oh, how I need to adjust it. Because I thought, okay, if I need to work in this direction, I need to know the details.

I am really blessed and proud that SDD gave me this chance. But also, people who have learned to me those things. So they make space for me free or to use all people, employees to understand how the things are working. So actually, I did some things for the production, I did some things of course with R&D, but I did also the testing, I did also the packaging. So actually, I went through the whole processes to understand how the things are working and it helps me now a lot. Because I understand what customers are asking me, what are the needs, and if they

say, "Oh, I have problem here or there." Then I can also give some analysis, "Okay. This can happen or that can happen."

Again, maybe not in all details, but at least in global overview, and then I have the sparring conversation with my team. "Okay. What do you think? I am right, or maybe we should look into the other things." I hope this answers your question, but I think it's more passion, and learning to do things. Of course, SDD give me this, let's say, start in the bottom. Let's have like that, like when you're on marathon from beginning until the finish. They support me a lot. They give me a space, and also time to learn. They told me from the beginning. Sometimes you need really to have two years to understand how every department is working. What are the processes inside the departments to get a picture. It really took a two-year time to understand, and to make and bit by pieces to – okay, because I know only my work, but I don't know what influence the other departments work.

Then when you understand that, you can make a global picture, and that means you can also better help your partner and your customer. Because then, you know, okay, "Oh, they have problem with this or that, so I have to go back to that department or this department. Again, this is a complete new journey, complete new journey, new business, new opportunities. And of course, I'm glad that I can do those things, and I can talk to the partners, I can visit partners, and also be a part of the strategy for the future.

[BREAK]

[0:31:17] 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 CONTINUES]

[0:31:51] DC: Totally, I mean, I mentioned how much your company supports you. I mean, at Hunkeler, they were running me down telling me that I had to meet Santa. When I got to the booth, they made sure that I had met you. Even contacted me to sponsor Girls Who Print. Thank you so much for that. I want to focus on that for a moment. Because yes, of course, it was an ability to reach your full potential, your intelligence, your curiosity about how things work, and then being able to translate that, that other people could absorb that information and manifest it to the way that the machine should be cared for, operated, and to do the work that they need to produce.

That would not have happened if your company did not support you, really in a role that is not that traditional for women. I do want to preface that; Europe is a very traditional place. I'm not putting any judgment on that. I'm just saying that, in some ways, it's more difficult for women to overcome some of these gender roles. Certainly, being an engineer teaching people who need to fix equipment coming from a woman is not a traditional role. But your company was like, "This is who our expert was and sort of put their foot down about it and said, this is who we go to." So I want you to share how that support from your management team in your company was so important. Let's help others understand how it really changed your job, and your life.

[0:33:42] SB: Yeah. Actually, yes. I think, it's again, because I was curious, I have showed that I understand things. I know what's going on.

[0:33:54] DC: Did you have to you have to say, "Hey, I want to be an engineer. Hey, I want to learn this." Or were they like, "Oh, that's not. No. Santa, we want you to stay in marketing, because that's more of a traditional role for a woman versus getting a screwdriver, and going to machine, and fixing things"?

[0:34:13] SB: Actually, no. It was different way around. They knew that I would like to do marketing, and do communication, and do sales afterwards. But they say, "Uh-oh. No, no, no, no Santa. You need to know basics." Because without the basics, you cannot support our customers, our partners." So please start at the production engineering, because then, you know the basics, you understand how our machines are working, what they are doing. And then you understand also the whole processes of the company. It will help you in the future, so it was different way around.

Actually, that's why I'm saying, they were giving me a chance to start from the beginning, and go farther, farther, farther. Actually, this was a good step in the right direction. Let's put it like that. Actually, I must say also, our CEO, Roland Oudsen. He is pretty convinced that women can do better and more precise production work, like be more specific, and look better into the details. I'm going to say, we have even a now woman in our production facility. Now, we're getting even more. Yes, also our companies supporting the new generation. We have also the open doors for girls. We have a girl's day, where we showed them techniques, and we show also – because yes, girls also, from one side, they say, "Oh, techniques is dirty, and I don't want to make my dirty hands."

But we try to show the other thing and other opportunities, so that techniques, it's also interesting. You can do things, or you can do – for example, also production engineering. You can be involved in different processes, you can describe things, you can think more, you can make things more smarter, or support in different ways. So, yes, this is the thing what we try to do with the young generation. But also, now, we hire much more woman at our production facility here in The Netherlands.

[0:36:30] DC: Well, thank you so much for being a trailblazer in so many ways. I have to give another shout out to SDD Group for really just being a champion of women in the industry, for reaching out to support girls who print and for introducing me to you, which is the best thing that happened. You can learn more about SDD Group at sddbv.com. But as I mentioned, the link will be in the show notes as well as how you could connect with Santa on LinkedIn. Santa, thank you so much for your time. I didn't look up how to say, print long and prosper in Dutch. Does it translate?

[0:37:13] SB: Yes, I think it will be not so easy to do that. But Deborah, you are very welcome. It was a pleasure to talk to you. Of course, to explain more about SDD. If anyone has any questions, you know how to reach us. Thank you.

[0:37:32] DC: Thank you so much again. All right, I'll say it in English. Until next time, everybody, print long and prosper.

[END OF EPISODE]

[0:37:42] DC: Thanks for listening to Podcasts From the Printerverse. Please subscribe, click some stars, and leave us a review. Connect with us through printmediacentr.com. We'd love to hear your feedback on our shows and topics that are of interest for future broadcasts. Until next time, thanks for joining us. Print long and prosper.

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Mentioned in This Episode:

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

Santa Buka: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/santa-buka-5266a953>

SDD Group: <https://sddbv.com>

Hunkeler Innovation Days: <https://www.innovationdays.com/en/>

drupa: <https://www.drupa.com/>

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