

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:04] 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 create 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]

[00:00:33] DC: Hey everybody, welcome to Podcast From the Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your intergalactic ambassador. Today, we are beamy to beautiful Switzerland, and I am speaking to one of the most infamous and famous people out there, Francois Martin. Francois is an independent senior graphic industry consultant, and innovation and sustainability strategist, and digital print and packaging evangelist.

After 30 years working across selected industries, promoting new and transformational products and services, his current focus is on marketing and communication. Francois says many companies require clarity on their value proposition, related messages, and reasons to believe. Communicating and storytelling is essential and every company deserves it. Welcome to the program, Francois.

[00:01:31] FM: Thank you, Deborah. Good intro, beautiful introduction. That's what it is. That's what my belief is, at least.

[00:01:38] DC: Thank you so much for that compliment, Francois. But that introduction doesn't even touch all the amazing things you have done throughout your more than 30-year career. Can you fill in some of the blanks for everybody out there?

[00:01:52] FM: What did happen to me, I was lucky enough to start with the rays of digital for desktop printing. So, the first inkjet printers, the DeskJet, ThinkJet, the first laser printers, the LaserJet, and so on. And then all what came after, all-in-one products, large format design jet, and then Latex printers, and then the Indigo machines. And then the InkJet web-fed was

announced in 2008 at Drupa, and all these innovations that took digital at the core, and it has enabled new applications. It has transformed the way we communicate. Today, nobody is debating about photobooks. But back 30 years ago, it was mission impossible, and so on and so on.

Today you have web-to-print, and web-to-pack, you can be ordering almost all what you want online. And this is just the beginning. I believe that for the future, it will still continue. Of course, not all applications today can be done digitally, mainly for economical reasons. Technically speaking, it works. But if you need 10,000 of these or a million of that, digital can't cope with it financially. But over time, we will see more and more digital. Of course, conventional printing will continue for specific applications. It's fantastic. All the conventional manufacturers have done fantastic progress with more automation and the digitalization of the entire process. So, it means that print service providers or converters, now, they have a very wide range of solutions they can pick from.

This is what I have been going through my entire career and this is fantastic to always work with new things not possible before.

[00:03:45] DC: One of the focuses you have is innovation and sustainability strategy. I want to just focus on digital printing for a moment, because typically, the argument for sustainability regarding digital printing is well there's less waste, because it's faster to make ready a yes, and there's no plates, so therefore, it's more sustainable. I don't disagree with that. But I don't think that's enough of a compelling story. So, how does the industry actually speak authentically about a manufacturing process?

[00:04:25] FM: You're right. What'd you just say that back 15 years ago, that was the main argument. Digital does not require plates. Okay, so what? So, that's not enough. In fact, what we see, and I will take labels as the most visible element to illustrate my points. The role of the packaging and the role of labels have changed dramatically. So, labels now, they can become track and trace elements of a given product, and the duration of a specific label, because the regulations are changing all the time. You need to say that you don't have lactose, you don't have peanuts, and this and that. Too many things have to change on the way.

For brand owners small or big, it is better to not carry any inventory. The beauty of digital, you print on your reprint, you make a little change, and you reprint. Some of the changes are invisible, you just change something, and if you want, you can put security features that help you to track and trace the product. So, labels, if you look at the evolution of the last 20 years, and I have been following that industry very, very closely, they have changed so much that except for huge amounts of labels like on water, of course, it's going to be analog forever. But for a lot of other products, having them digital is reducing the sustainability impact, because you don't carry any inventory. So, your entire supply chain is very dynamic. If you have to make a change, you do the change. Then, there are many other things like, you can print using only three colors. You don't need to do CMYK. You can use CMY with the extended color gamut, and so on and so on.

Digital is a good way to reduce the environmental impact. However, you need to go through other things like quality control. This is something fantastic in digital, because you can have cameras checking everything all the time, and then you go to zero-fold packaging, zero-fold labels, you don't produce things with mistakes. Because after that, then you have to trash it and stop again. So, quality control cameras, and this is digital, checking what's going on. This is fantastic. Like [inaudible 00:07:05], or if you look at archives from recently announced by devs, and so on, and technologies from HP, and many, many others.

That's also something that I am recommending converters to look at. Quality control solutions, my friends. It is helping you to reduce waste. Then, extended good gamut. That one is my favorite. Everyone is talking about the environmental impact of trained blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. But don't go with ink mixing and ink kitchen and all these things. This is in my view, something of the past. You can use both in conventional oil and digital, obviously, everything is with a reduced amount of ink, and the less you put, the better it is for the environment. So, a lot can be done.

[00:07:56] DC: Okay. I mean, I think that that is a great perspective not to focus just on the press, but everything around what makes digital printing a more sustainable option than some other methods out there.

All right, so you've told the compelling story there, and that is also something that you're focusing on now, helping companies tell theirs. What are the ingredients of a compelling company story?

[00:08:23] FM: Everything starts with having clarity in mind, of what do you want to tell to your customers, and things that are not very clear in your mind, then they have difficulties to be articulated and communicated. So, I strongly believe in spending quality time in having a clear message to convey to your target audience. Of course, you need also to be clear on who is your target audience. So, that's what you need to spend time on.

What sounds easy, in reality, takes time, because the more simple you want to have it, the more time you need to spend in building it. However, every company can build a very good story. But then you need to take the time to be clear with yourself. Okay, what do I really promote? What is it? After asking yourself a few times the question from a different perspective, then you finally go, "Yes, this is indeed what I am offering to the customers." Then, you need to explain why you do it well, the so-called a reason to believe, and this is the so-called value proposition, in one sentence, couple of messages behind to three bullet points, and then the reason to believe where you articulate a specific product feature, or a specific benefit to the audience.

That's all. And on your website, in tradeshows, in social media, all of these has to be broadcasted very effectively, concisely, and all the time, the same. Not inventing new things that you change every three weeks, because it can be changed digitally. Of course, you can change everything all the time, but then the communication is worth zero.

[MESSAGE]

[00:10:36] 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

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[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[00:11:22] DC: That's great advice for printers, for sure. Focusing on the companies, the vendors and the manufacturers out there. There has been a rise in advertorials, have paid content, sponsored content all over the place. How is a story believable if it's an advertorial? Can it be seen as authentic and paid for sponsored content?

[00:11:48] FM: So, for me, once you have a story, it can take any shape. I'm talking about this is something I invented back in 2012. I'm talking about liquid content, like *Terminator* if you have seen the movie. Once you have your story and your value proposition, then it can be advertorial advertising, social media, or theater on a booth. It can be a brochure, it can be a movie, whatever you want, as long as you don't change it. Advertorial, why not? I don't believe in advertising as such, specifically in B2B type of business. But everything works. It all depends on the amount of money you have. But very important is make sure that your story is crystal clear, and then it can take any shape. It can be a very huge billboard, on a motorway, if you want. It can be an email, it can be a postcard, it can be whatever you want, as long as you repeat the same again and again and again. Then, you need to illustrate with real customers using your products.

Of course, some people will say, "Yes, but when you are talking about customers, of course, because they have your machines, they are very positive about it." Yes, but this is life. If you see suddenly that 20, 30, or 50 customers are using your solution, whatever it is, if 30 guys are doing it, they are not all idiots. There must be a good – there must be something good in the product you sell. And me, I don't have your solution, I see these 30 guys, one of them is eventually very similar to my company, then I have a good reason to believe that that solution could be a good one for me.

That's how to communicate your value proposition, your story, to tell your story, advertorial as you ask. Deborah, why not? There are many other ways, but all ways are good, as long as they reach your customers.

[00:14:09] DC: You and I have an origin story. I travel the world, occasionally with HP and you were working in HP, and I used to be terrified of you. I would be like, “Oh, God, there's Francois. He's looking at me. He's wondering what I'm tweeting. I'm nervous.” You made me very nervous. So, when we started, engaging with each other, I was really proud that you even knew my name. I'm smiling now because I can't believe that we interact like we do. You're one of those people that I was like, “Oh, my God. He's never – this guy doesn't know who I am.” We also, in being with each in other many places, we were in Drupa at the same time. We share a passion for Drupa. Next year, I will be co-hosting the Drupa DNA Forum with Frank Tueckmantel. Many people know him from 20-plus years working at EFI.

The Drupa DNA, which stands for Drupa Next Age, I describe as the Big Bang for new companies, new ideas, and fresh perspectives that will form and define the future of print. It's in Hall seven. There'll be speakers, startups, and established companies, sharing new technology, with the focus on the future of print and of course, sustainability.

In your opinion Francois, why is Drupa one of the most significant events in the printing industry?

[00:15:38] FM: To that specific question about Drupa, Deborah, it is a major event because it's only happening every four years. This is the Olympics of print, and packaging, commercial printing and labels and packaging. Because only four years, it's gathering an international audience, and it is more than a tradeshow. It is a place where you can really feel the pulse of the industry, and understand the trends. And even without talking, just by listening and seeing what's going on in the different halls, you understand if your specific industry, if you're a commercial printer or publisher, if you are in labels, for account or whatever, you want to stand where the industry is slowly shifting. It's becoming obvious. Then, you can deep dive. You can also – this is fantastic about Drupa, you can check 15 competitors in two days. If you want to do it without Drupa, it's going to be very complicated.

Then, last, and this is very recent. Once you go to websites, everything looks quite good, to be honest, and now with artificial intelligence, it's going to look even better. So, it means that you can't differentiate much between the solution A, B, C, D. However, when you are talking to

humans at Drupa, you look at them face to face in the eyes, and then you realize if they tell their story properly or not. Then, you get to a much better feeling if they could become potentially a supplier for you or not. So, that's why I really liked Drupa, and it's not that I like Drupa to like Drupa. I think that every industry as trade shows, and that seeds the middle age.

Today, if you look at consumer electronics, everybody's talking about the web and social media influencers blah, blah. But my friends, you have the Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas. If you look at the telecom industry, addressing a very narrow population, they are meeting in Barcelona. So, for the print and packaging industry, this is Dusseldorf. And the fact that it is every four years, it is really even making it in my view a must-attend event. Wherever you are, don't miss that one. Because after that, you have to wait another four years.

[MESSAGE]

[00:18:19] DC: Printsiration 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]

[00:19:10] DC: The pandemic obviously pushed Drupa so that there wasn't one in 2020. and it really messed up a lot of the technology launches and research and development that companies target for to announce and launch at Drupa because it is the ground zero of new technology launches. Do you think that we're going to get back to that? Do you think that companies need to focus on only launching their technologies at big trade shows?

[00:19:37] FM: No, Deborah, you got it. Your question almost gave the answer. You don't have to announce at Drupa. Of course, it's convenient, because you have a lot of journalists in front of you, and you have a lot of customers in front of you. So, it's convenient. But it is not at all a must. You don't have to wait.

However, your story, your promises, and how you see the future, this is where you're going to reveal it to your clients. Because every market is evolving. Every four years, it's an opportunity to adjust your strategy, and this is a good place to communicate. Of course, if you combined the broadcasting of your industry vision. With new products, it's even better, but it's not a must. It is just very, very convenient. But my advice is don't announce products that will only ship two years after, because then it's not good. You can eventually, if you just mentioned them, you can refer to developments, you are doing – but don't announce a product that will only ship by May 2026. It will not fly.

[00:20:55] DC: I agree on that. And certainly, I think we have all experienced big announcements and not happening to people. You're correct. It's very frustrating. You have been spearheading a project called Drupa Essentials for Drupa. I believe this is your second time doing. Can you share what that is in some of the people who are helping you manifest it?

[00:21:17] FM: So, yes, the Drupa Essentials. We do it for the second time, the first time I being an influencer, journalist, and converter writing. On the way to Drupa, started in 2019. Then, Drupa did not took place. So, these articles we wrote at that time, were not really used because the pandemic became the big topic. Now, for 2024, it's incredible. We have 40 people who took the time to write amazing articles covering a wide range of topics, digital printing, workflow, sustainability, talking about labels, commercial printing, web-to-print, publishing software. So, it's a wide range across the globe, and this content is giving you an overview of what's going on in the industry and this is not written by manufacturers. This is really written by what I will call neutral people.

Some of them are journalists, some of them are influencers, like you, Deborah. Thank you, by the way for contributing. Then, some are converters, real guys, and we have a very interesting coverage, let's say, that like Paul Hudson from the US, Frederick Corbo from FP Matthew Mercure, talking about full digital packaging printing for [inaudible 00:22:46]. Digital printing,

digital converting, digital embellishment. Amazing story. We have Bob [inaudible 00:22:50] talking about digital corrugated printing. So, that's from converter standpoint. We have great journalists like [inaudible 00:22:58], who wrote something amazing on labels. We have [inaudible 00:23:02] who wrote something on packaging. We have [inaudible 00:23:07] writing a very clever article about how publishing is coping with the growing amount of titles and how to print books more effectively. We have Mike Ferrari talking about sustainability. We have Silas Amos, is our packaging creator, and he is talking about the beauty of what digital can enable. We have Pat McGrew talking about workflow and she has very good advice. We have Ludovic Martin, talking about web-to-print is particularly simply fantastic, and so on and so on.

So, we have of course, Dan Brunton, talking about folding on corrugated, how we see the trends, and what's going on in the world. This is refreshing. Before you go to Drupa, read some of them in the industry where you are, and it will help you to find more once you are on the show.

[MESSAGE]

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUES]

[00:24:45] DC: I will put a link where everybody can find the articles on the Drupa website in the show notes. Francois, in part of my travels with HP, I went with them and you, to Interpack in 2017, and you and I had a very interesting conversation in the booth that I will never forget. You wanted to talk to me about timeshare printing, and you had this idea where in the future, back in 2017. Now, we're in the future, right? That there might be a model where printers would actually share equipment and share resources. I looked at you like you have three hands. I'm like, "That's a crazy idea."

But I really think in some ways, it has come to fruition where, especially in the pandemic, we saw printers really working with each other in this manner. If people couldn't get to work, they were, you know, going down the street and asking people for help, and some of it has turned into these partnerships, of mergers and acquisitions, looking for specific equipment that they don't have. So, I now believe you can predict the future. In that, what is your vision of the future of print?

[00:26:09] FM: Wow. That's a big question. So, to go back to what we discussed, printers sharing equipment, they are doing it, but they could do much more, to be honest. They did it during the pandemic. Of course, some guys are outsourcing what they cannot do, and this is a way to share equipment. But once you look at new equipment, like digital laser cutting, or digital embellishment, just to take two. These machineries are fairly costly, and you will not need them 24 hours a day. However, they could operate 24 hours a day.

So, I think that converters, printers should really mutualize their equipment much more than what they do today. It will be beneficial for everybody. Of course, some of them do it through mergers and acquisitions. So basically, you buy your guy, and then automatically you have these capabilities as well for you. But this is today what I see. I see a lot of mergers and acquisitions. In commercial printing, it started back 20 years ago. Now, even in packaging, you see a lot of mergers and acquisitions. The main reason behind it is that you need to – whatever you do, you need multiple types of technologies. One size fits all does not work. So, you need A, B, C, D types of suppliers, and you cannot afford it.

If you get bigger, then you can potentially afford it. This is what's happening in all the industries. Even the big monsters continue to get bigger, just to be able to mutualize all the investments that they have to do. So, now if we look at your initial question, I mean, the future in commercial printing, and in labels and packaging is obviously fairly different. Commercial printing, we like it or not, there is a secular decline linked to the fact that all what we printed back 20 years ago, 30 years ago is not printed anymore. This is just what it is. However, that market will not disappear. There will still be a lot of things printed. The ones that make sense to be printed. And then for what makes sense, let's do it properly. And there will still be digital and conventional. Digital is certainly gaining, growing faster. Conventional is, let's say, running at zero worldwide. It's flat. From a technology standpoint, digital is growing at roughly 6% for the next 10 years.

So, in commercial printing, it's about optimizing your operations. It's clearly mergers and acquisitions. It's focusing on added value type of jobs, and just not printing for the sake of printing. Because you can print a lot and then at the end of the day, you don't make any money. In packaging, it's a totally different story. Packaging is something that is not declining because the population continues to grow, the population is getting richer every day. So, they consume. As soon as you consume, you have packages. However, packaging is also going to change, so they will get smaller, they will get smarter, they will be more sustainable, they will be less overpackaging specifically like in France, where I'm living, it's helpful. So much packages that are done for nothing.

Again, the industry will be more automated, and more digitalized. There will be more security and counterfeiting features on packages. I wrote recently a complete article about that. It's all world that is also going through its own transformation, specifically with what we discussed at the beginning, the entire supply chain. How to cope with a lot of type of packages in different languages for different types of customers, reducing the amount of waste the amount of inventory, and fighting against counterfeiting and so on.

That industry will transform, and it will be probably noticeable at Drupa. You probably can see new things. Of course, don't start a debate, analog against digital, because that's the wrong debate. Analog will still continue to dominate in packaging for the next foreseeable future because it simply makes sense. However, digital can do things not possible before, specifically for small brands. I'm very sensitive to small companies. If they need short amount of boxes and, short amount of labels, now they can get it at a very, very good price, thanks to digital solutions.

[00:31:09] DC: Francois, thank you so much for your leadership, for your partnership, and for telling a compelling, authentic story on this podcast. Everything you need to connect with Francois will be in the show notes. Hope to see everybody at Drupa and until next time, print long and prosper.

[OUTRO]

[00:31:32] 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:

Francois Martin: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/francois-martin-677915146/>

Francois Martin Consulting: <https://francoismartinconsulting.weebly.com/>

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

drupa Essentials: https://www.drupa.com/en/Media_News/Press/Expert_Articles/Overview

drupa DNA: <https://www.drupa.com/en/Program>

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

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

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

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