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[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:25] 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]

[0:00:53] DC: Hey, everybody, welcome to Podcast From the Printerverse. Deborah Corn at Labelexpo, your Intergalactic Ambassador, more like your international roaming ambassador, because I get to meet people from all over the world here, and it is so cool to run into the Aussies halfway, right?

[0:01:14] MP: Yes.

[0:01:15] DC: So, thank you. I'm here with Morag Pugh, from QLM group in Australia.

[0:01:22] MP: Hello. Good morning, Deborah. How are you doing?

[0:01:23] DC: Good day. I can't believe I miss my good day moment. Good day.

[0:01:25] MP: Good day.

[0:01:27] DC: I was just barely speaking Italian on the last podcast. So, we met this morning at breakfast and we have girls with Print Connection which we will get to. But for now, can you tell people a little more about what you do and what QLM group does?

[0:01:44] MP: Thanks, Deborah. QLM is Australian based with printing manufacturing in Brisbane, and in two sites in Melbourne, in Moorabbin, and flexible packaging in Ravenhall. We also have a very strong Asian footprint with businesses in Vietnam, Ho Chi Minh City, and in Kuala Lumpur in Malaysia, Cambodia and Bangladesh.

[0:02:09] DC: Wow. So, do you speak any of those languages?

[0:02:12] MP: No. Unfortunately, no. I only know how to say thank you in Vietnamese. That's about it.

[0:02:18] DC: Okay, well, a little goes a long way sometimes. Now, it says that you are the manager of people and culture on your badge, which might be my favorite title I've seen so far.

[0:02:27] MP: Thank you.

[0:02:29] DC: Intergalactic Ambassador is one thing, but this is based in reality. So, I really love it. What does that mean to you?

[0:02:37] MP: Quintessentially, we have 150 employees in Australia and I look after HR. I guess, people in culture, do recruitment, onboarding, welcoming people to the business across Australia.

[0:02:52] DC: Excellent. And you mentioned that you don't just work there. You actually have ownership in the company. Yes?

[0:02:58] MP: Yes. I'm second-generation business owner. Our parents started the business in 1974. My brother Simon Pugh is CEO, Managing Director, as we have recently appointed a new group company, CEO Tom Sullivan. So wonderful. It's so exciting to be here.

[0:03:18] DC: Yes. So, how many employees do you have?

[0:03:20] MP: Across the globe?

[0:03:22] DC: Yes.

[0:03:23] MP: Over 500.

[0:03:25] DC: Wow. Look, I just ran into you at breakfast and look at you, you're a global player here. So, it also just happens that I'm sitting in the HP booth and I didn't even realize that you are actually a pretty decent partner with HP as well. Can you share that story?

[0:03:41] MP: Absolutely. We have the six series HP, as well as the 20,000 HP which is used for flexible packaging. So, QLM has partnered with HP for a long time. We have, I believe, six print engines around the world, and we also love the wonderful technology that HP delivers to the market. It's a very innovative company. We have used Collage and Mosaic, particularly my brother-in-law, Lindsay Nutley, who's in charge of marketing is a super fan of those technologies, as they added this incredible embellishment to labels and wonderful outcomes for our customers.

[0:04:23] DC: Yes. So, you must be all being the Guy BB fan club. Yes?

[0:04:27] MP: Yes. We are the Guy BB fan club, for sure.

[0:04:30] DC: Did you see him? He's standing right over there.

[0:04:33] MP: Yes. I did.

[0:04:35] DC: You can't miss Guy BB at an event. So, were you always a digital printing facility or do you have both technologies?

[0:04:43] MP: We started purely as a flexographic platform, but we have certainly expanded that with HP and Currys group into the digital. It's a good combination, Deborah, to have the

flexo and the digital, both two very different types of product, and it means we can offer lots of different solutions to our customers.

[0:05:06] DC: So, in your company's philosophy, when do they start thinking digital as the recommendation when they're speaking to customers?

[0:05:15] MP: Probably depends upon if a customer, like a short run, high color, maybe high-end wine labels, high-end beverage labels, food labels, embellishments, your screen, your high build, your foil, and some beautiful stocks, beautiful raw materials that can put through the Indigo presses.

[0:05:37] DC: I've just ascertained a pattern that with everyone I've interviewed so far when it comes to the digital technologies that we're using it really for color, vibrant color, and quality, and that is why they chose the HP, the Indigos.

[0:05:52] MP: Hundred percent. HP is renowned for that innovative tech, for pushing the boundaries on what you can print, for coming up with new ideas. That, as a converter, is fantastic, because then we can offer that to market. We take that new tech, and that new ideas to market. So, you win the work.

[0:06:16] DC: When you put certain things on a table and you see what people pick up, and why they pick it up, I don't really drink a lot of wine. But I found the other day, I was buying some wine for a friend, and I had a price point, and I had a kind. It was a probably a rosé or something like that and I picked one. I'm driving home in the car and something like is shining in my eye. I'm like, "What is that?" I'm like, "Oh, my god, I bought it because of the label."

[0:06:46] MP: Absolutely, 100%. Humans, we buy through our eyes. It has to attract. It has to be inviting. It has to be engaging, and you have to connect to what you are purchasing. And printing adds all of that wonderful elements to the product and to the final outcome, and then to a customer's sales to their share of the market, and that's what makes it such a fantastic industry.

[0:07:15] DC: Yes, look at you, old-fashioned and smiley. So, flexible packaging, definitely trending on planet Earth. I like flexible packaging. But let's have a real conversation. It uses plastic. Now, paper pouches are allegedly coming. What is your story around that when brands out there are kind of looking to be sustainable? I mean, I could certainly make an argument for a pouch being sustainable. It's more in a box, it's less shipping because you ship more or less. But what is your story about it?

[0:07:54] MP: Flexible packaging for the QLM group was through a business acquisition of Red Labels in Ravenhall in Melbourne, and there is like all of our entire industry, there is a push for sustainability, and part of our quest here at Labelexpo is to find supply chain that offers that more recyclable element to flexible packaging. So, that is what we're doing.

[0:08:20] DC: Well, it's a good thing. You're here because they are literally – the three pillars, efficiency, sustainability, and growth is what's going on in this booth. They actually have a whole sustainability display. Have you seen it on the other side?

[0:08:34] MP: Yes, I have.

[0:08:35] DC: Did you see the water-soluble labels that dissolve? Is that the most incredible thing?

[0:08:39] MP: I have come across that tech before. It's pretty amazing.

[0:08:41] DC: Oh, really? I never saw that before. I thought that was really cool. It makes total sense.

[MESSAGE]

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[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:09:35] DC: So, as I said, we met each other this morning and it was because we actually have two connections. One through Stephanie Gaddin. Shout out to Rocking Rose down in Melbourne.

[0:09:46] MP: Yes. Hi, Steph.

[0:09:47] DC: Hey, Steph. And the other one is that you actually run or a part of the Woman in Print group in Australia. So, you tell everybody about that and what you guys are up to because you always have activities. I do get the emails about it.

[0:10:03] MP: Fantastic. I'm the Queensland patron for Women In Print for Australia, and we did our breakfast series, which is held in May every year, and we have a guest speaker. So, that was a very successful event for us this year across Australia. Coming up, we've got our other event series across Australia called Print & Prosecco, which is purely like a networking event.

[0:10:26] DC: I went to one of those.

[0:10:28] MP: So much fun.

[0:10:30] DC: Especially the prosecco part. That's the most –

[0:10:32] MP: Prosecco is always – I believe my colleague, Debbie Burgess, who's a New South Wales patron for Women In Print will be having her first event which kicks off towards the end of the month, then other states are going to follow throughout September and October, and it's about getting our pretty community together, be it any franchise owner, people from the visual arts industry. So, we're all about community and diversity. And we have a networking

gathering. It's very informal, one night after work. I have yet to organize Queensland when I get back home. So, about mine will be towards the end of October.

[0:11:15] DC: I had the privilege of attending a Woman In Print event at Printx in Sydney. I believe it was 2019 or '18, somewhere around there. What I noticed most was that the women involved were, there were some young women there, but most of them were established in their careers, and they had achieved pretty powerful and high positions in their companies. Do you think that that makes it easier/safer for women who might want to enter the printing industry in Australia to see more people like them in those types of roles?

[0:11:52] MP: Deborah, absolutely. Because predominantly, print has been a very male-dominated industry, and it's fantastic to see women, not just in the administration space, but moving into sales, sales execs, CEOs, ops managers, and also into the trade qualified section of doing a flexographic trade or a digital, or even in bindery, graphic design. So absolutely. It is a wonderful industry for women, not just in the creative section, as well as for the business section to come through and find a very, very rewarding career path.

I think even if I look back at my own personal situation, when my parents started the business in 1974, my mother was a pioneer for the print industry and for women, and encouraged women, regardless if you had a baby, or if you were young or older, there was always a job and included and welcome. And it was not about the agenda, but about your values, and your work ethic, and bringing that to the business. So, that's important for QLM. But I think that our industry is expanding. It's exciting. The print industry in Australia employs the largest number of people in any sector.

[0:13:18] DC: Wow.

[0:13:18] MP: It is an industry that is here to stay. It has growth. So, if you are looking for a long-term, rewarding career, choose your pathway, and go and find the rewards that it can bring to you.

[0:13:32] DC: When I was down there, I also went to a printing event. There was a like a gala, like an award thing. And when I first got to Australia, I'm like, "Wow, I wonder if they're all like

competitors with each other.” Because you are on an island in the middle of freaking nowhere. There's only so many business cards that you're doing before you have to start shipping them somewhere. And that is not what I found at all. What I found is, “Hey, mate, your machine is down, just send them over to me and I'll hook you up with it. No don't worry about it. I got you. You'll get me next time.”

When they were asking questions at the machinery, they were speaking out loud about their business and it wasn't like, “Oh”, a secret conversation I don't want anyone else to hear. Those conversations were helping other people and other people started chiming in. And it was such a community of something I've never seen. I think that there is an openness in Australia that is very unique to Australia, which might also account for why there are so many women who are obtaining these positions that sometimes, at least in the United States, they do not obtain.

[0:14:50] MP: Okay. It is part of one of the pillars of Women In Print to be able to support women from across our industry regardless of what position I have. And I think that's a little bit of the Australian DNA as well. We're always ready to lend a hand to someone that is quite a bit uniquely Aussie. Of course, everyone has that little bit of a competitive edge as well. I'd be lying if I didn't say that was there, because that is there. But it's about being inclusive. And a community is important to our industry and it's important to the Women In Print Association.

[MESSAGE]

[0:15:26] 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-member 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 programs. Visit girlswhoprint.net for information on how to get involved and connect with the women of print. Empower long and prosper.

[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:16:07] DC: I didn't realize that the printing industry was so large in Australia. Do you have the same problems we have in the United States? We are having a hard time attracting, let's say youth. I say it like that because I'm like, "Huh, I wonder why that is", to the industry. Now, mind you, it's a lot different in America than it is in Australia. There's definitely competition and co-opetition. But I would say it's more competition. But in Australia, do you have graphic programs in schools? Are you able to keep those open? Because some of them are shutting in the United States.

[0:16:45] MP: We have had some similar instances. There is TAFE Colleges, there are trade schools. I mean, Deborah, let's face it, with COVID, there has been this massive, massive supply chain interruption that's affected every single industry, as well skill shortages. That is the state of the world at the moment. But in Australia, it is the same. We need to market ourselves to attract young people who want to commit to say, a four-year apprenticeship, which is, it's an investment by a business and an investment by that person.

[0:17:20] DC: So, can I ask how does that work? Because now I'm fascinated by this.

[0:17:24] MP: Yes. For example, QLM, we've got five apprentices across our business. And at least the industry has come on board that there's – we've got two digital apprentices and three flexographic apprentices. It is on us as an industry to train and invest in young people to come through to get those trade qualifications for the sustainability of our industry. Now, that might be whether you're in a screen print business, or a signage business, or an offset business. You still have to invest and train and offer apprenticeships to the right people to be a part of the future of our industry. Because our workforce is aging, as you probably have the same, maybe the same thing in the States. The average age of a printer in Queensland is 42. The average age of a printer in Melbourne is early 50s. So, if we don't get young people attracted to our industry, we're in a bit of dire trouble. That's on everybody. Everyone has to invest, train, recruit, find those young people and promote print as a wonderful, wonderful career path.

[0:18:39] DC: Yes. I agree with you 1,000%. I'm fully on board with that mission. I live it every day. After the four years, is there a requirement that that person stays and works in your company for a certain amount of time for that training? Or do they just get to leave and go work in another printer?

[0:18:55] MP: Well, you love them to want to stay, and in so far, touchwood, all of our apprentices have. That gets on to the industry. That gets back to you as a business and what you do as part of your employee value proposition to retain that talent in your business, and how well you treat them and how well – it's a two-way street. It's a two-way dance. Don't get me wrong. It's on the employee and on the business to encourage.

[0:19:24] DC: You're absolutely right. The tipping factor is culture, and how comfortable, and do they see that potential growth path.

[0:19:33] MP: Do they see their future?

[0:19:34] DC: Yes, exactly.

[0:19:35] MP: And how that future looks, what promotion pathways you might have. Within QLM, we talk a lot about promoting from within the business, first and foremost. Your IP is in your talent already in your team. We will move mountains to find a pathway for a team member to get a promotion within we always look. And that's a thing for business. Look within first. A lot of your talent and your IP, it's already sitting there. You just have to engage it to then promote.

[0:20:07] DC: It's a great selling tool. Because, hey, I was an intern 10 years ago, and then now I'm running the department.

[0:20:14] MP: There you go, 100%.

[0:20:15] DC: It's incredible. So, as the people and culture person, and recruitment, job descriptions for the printing industry. My God, sometimes I read them and I'm like, why don't they just say, you will die in that chair, this cube, in a place that makes copies. Some of these descriptions are just so horrendous.

[0:20:42] MP: They're a little bit out of character. But, okay.

[0:20:44] DC: Yes. So, I'm thinking that you don't do it that way. So maybe offer some advice to people out there. By the way, it's not just an American thing. I've seen them pretty bad, because

they just follow the formula. “These are your responsibilities. These are your hours. These are your benefits. This is your salary.” You have no idea to know. What does it feel like working there? Who am I working with? What does this company care about?

[0:21:11] MP: It's interesting, you say that, because in my journey of recruitment, particularly, in the last year and a half, the main point that people talk to me about is culture. They want to work for a company that has a great culture and it's not always about money. Money is important for people, it's not always the main driver. You're at work more than you are with your family and your friends and your loved ones.

So, if that culture is toxic, and horrible, no amount of money that you throw at someone is going to keep them retained. They will leave. It's just a matter of when. So, culture is incredibly important for our business.

[0:21:54] DC: How does that get communicated through a job description or through a recruitment effort?

[0:21:59] MP: I think, certainly, I've actually recently gone on a journey of redesigning our job descriptions, because they are a bit wordy, and they are a bit dodgy, and they're a bit heavy, and that you read it, you go, “Oh, my God.” I'm indentured forever.

[0:22:15] DC: I don't want to do that.

[0:22:17] MP: I don't want to do that crap. So, trying to make it lighter, trying to descale. The responsibilities are important. But working with our marketing team, just lighten the messaging around the job decks. If you're a trade-qualified person, you know what you have to do. You have that, print quality is good, respectively and administration as well. You know the main items that you have to do. To me, it's lightening the format of the document. Make it a bit more interactive, adding some color. A lot of print descriptions are black and white and very boring. So, pop it with some color, or company logos, columnize it, freshen it, and lighten it.

[MESSAGE]

[0:23:07] 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]

[0:23:40] DC: And what about during the interview process? It has really changed from when I went on interviews and it was like, “Thank you. May I have another? Thank you, may I have another?” And it's like, do you want the job or not? If you don't get out. And if you do, then go do it and I don't want to ever see you again unless there's a problem. But the Gen Zers do not function on that plane at all.

[0:24:04] MP: No, they're very different beasts. If something does not grab their attention, straightaway, they're out. They're not going to do what say, you and I did in earlier working days where we might have swept floors, wash dishes, make cups of coffee for people, whatever or there may be lower scale jobs. They want more than that. They want an enriched working environment. And if you don't offer that, if you don't talk about culture, if you don't have a good employee value proposition, if you don't offer flexible working arrangements where you can, you can always. If you can, consider it, because this age group, they want those different benefits than what we ever considered when we were younger people coming into any working environment.

[0:24:56] DC: I think, in a lot of ways they also like – and I'm not speaking generally. Gen Zs out there, I know you're all individual people, and I do respect that. And this is a culture shift, which is why as someone who's not part of that culture, I can see it in a different way. And what I see is that something I admire is that they don't just want to be part of something that's making some money for some corporation. If that corporation is making money, they want to understand what else is doing good for the world? Are they part of something that is giving back in some manner? Do you find it the same way in Australia?

[0:25:33] MP: Oh, 100%, particularly, young people, when I'm recruiting for certain positions, they asked me, as a label converter, what type of raw materials do you use? Do you work with really great supply chain? So, we work with every Dennison, UPM Raflatac, Spices Group, all of those supply chains have got FSC, and forested trees. We don't cut down virgin trees, and even working in the flexible packaging space, looking for sustainable products that leave a lesser footprint. And because really, these guys are inheriting planet Earth from our gen who've mainly –

[0:26:12] DC: Messed it up.

[0:26:13] MP: Used and abused. So, they want to know, what are you guys doing to make amends for some of your predecessors, is very valid.

[0:26:22] DC: I mean, they live their lives that way. They're not going to go to an – let alone, a manufacturing industry. I mean, with chemical rooms, and there's got to be a balance to it. So, I'm glad we came back around to sustainability because that's actually why you're here at Labelexpo. Yes?

[0:26:39] MP: Yes, very important for QLM Group.

[0:26:40] DC: Yes. Talk about that and I'm also interested to know if your customers are coming to you, because either they or their customers are like, we want our entire supply chain doing something about sustainability. Obviously, we're not going to get 100% there, but we can make improvements that do matter to everybody.

[0:27:02] MP: Deborah, absolutely. It is a shift in the market. Customers are aware. They're bright, they're educated. They want to know what are you doing to lessen your footprint. Do you work with a reputable supply chain, be it global, be it domestic? Yes, absolutely. It is that soluble labels, as you talked about before, using that type of tree and no virgin forests. At QLM, we are working heavily with our supply chain around sustainability. You come to exhibitions like Labelexpo, and you get to see firsthand what the supply chains are doing in that space.

[0:27:43] DC: It's not just your business that needs to be focusing on the sustainability because you also have suppliers, and you have to justify your sustainability message with the partners you choose as well. So, I'm assuming that that is a factor in who you're working with. You mentioned a few partners before. How are they helping you serve this mission?

[0:28:07] MP: Deborah, great question. With our global supply chain, your Avery Dennison. They are doing your biodiversity products. They are looking at manufacturing different lines. UPM Raflatac, a Finland-based company, I know that part of the waste, they recycle, and they make housing panels as one example. These supply chains are really, really at the forefront of that innovation. Even Spices Group have done a lot of biodiversity and what they offer to market with [inaudible 0:28:39] products, some tinting products, other products.

So, all those global companies are taking this messaging very seriously, and offering different products to market, utilizing some waste, and some recyclability from what they manufacture, which is fantastic, because global supply chains lead the way. We all have a responsibility. Then, the industry gets on board and they'll follow soon, which it's a partnership. Correct?

[0:29:13] DC: I agree. And we do all have the responsibility. But to some people, it's a marketing thing. Oh, we're sustainable.

[0:29:21] MP: It's. It's choices.

[0:29:22] DC: Yes. And when you start getting out that magnifying glass, is when you start saying, "Okay." I'm not going to say they're not trying to be sustainable. They're doing some stuff, that's great. But here's a company that's looking at it beyond just their four walls. And I think that that's when it starts really becoming a differentiator, especially, I come from the advertising world. So, brands and agencies, when they say, we want a sustainable supply chain, they mean that. If they see their product in a landfill, everyone's getting fired over it.

So, all the promises you make around this, there are legalities around it as well, if you're going to start putting disclaimers that things can be recycled, reused, repurposed, and maybe they can't. So, it all really matters, and I just want to thank you for caring, for caring about the people, the planet, and prosperity, and my HP, and we happen to be sitting in this booth. So, everything

you need to connect with Morag Pugh, and QLM Group in Australia will be in the show notes. It was so, so lovely running to you in breakfast. Shout out to Steph again.

[0:30:32] MP: Hey Steph, and everyone in Print Australia.

[0:30:34] DC: Yey, Print Australia. And until next time, print long and prosper.

[0:30:40] MP: Thank you, Deborah. Thank you so much for your time. All the best.

[OUTRO]

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Morag Pugh: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/morag-pugh-bb897775/>

QLM Group: <https://qlm.com.au/>

Women in Print Australia: <https://womeninprint.com.au/>

HP: <https://www.hp.com/>

HP Indigo Digital Presses: <https://www.hp.com/us-en/industrial-printers/indigo-digital-presses.html>

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