[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:00] DC: Today, live from hall seven, drupa DNA at drupa.

[0:00:06] PM: It's not a product until it's finished.

[0:00:09] DC: Welcome to The Print Report with Deborah Corn and Pat McGrew. All the print that's fit for news.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:18] DC: Hey, everybody. Welcome to Podcasts From the Printerverse. My name is Deborah Corn. I am the Intergalactic Ambassador to the Printerverse. More specifically, we are here with The Print Report series. That means I'm here with my cohost, Pat McGrew. Hello, Pat McGrew.

[0:00:34] PM: Hi, there. I'm not the Intergalactic Ambassador to the Printerverse. I'm just sort of a print groupie.

[0:00:40] DC: You are a print groupie, and you have what I have been here running this fabulous forum in hall seven, called drupa DNA, where we've been focusing on startup companies and technologies that are pushing the industry forward. You and your little feet have been clocking tens of thousands of steps across the messe, and looking at everything so that we can have nice reports – for The Print Report.

I would like to say that before we left for drupa, we did an episode on our predictions of what this drupa will really be. There are certainly people who want you to think it's the inkjet drupa, it's the return of the inkjet drupa, it's the inkjet drupa 2.0. But we didn't really go that way. I said it was going to be the flexible packaging drupa. Pat said it was going to be the finishing drupa. I would say that if it was a horse race, you won and I placed.

[0:01:48] PM: Yes, but just by a nose. I think it's like the Preakness Stakes where they had to put a camera on it, and then enlarge it to figure out who won. That's where we are.

[0:01:57] DC: I will take that from you, Pat McGrew. But let us talk about finishing, which by the way, flexible packaging, there's a role for that –

[0:02:05] PM: It's huge, finishing involved.

[0:02:05] DC: – in that too. We've had this discussion many times about flexible packaging and how I can see the trends in my grocery store. Just the things that are starting to be put on shelves in pouches, and just really the sustainability story around flexible packaging is unmatchable in many ways to the paper versions, which sounds crazy. Because you think, pouch, plastic, but it's not really that simple. But I think that's why there's such an interest in it because the segment is ticking up. But every booth that is selling equipment for the first time – I haven't been to many drupas, but I go to many trade shows. The manufacturers don't really have finishing equipment. They'll talk to you about what you might need, maybe, or they'll say now that you've bought the press, let's talk about finishing. The printer says, "Now, let's talk about finishing?"

I think that a trend I've picked up on is that, just like there was a little moment in time where they put all the software upfront, they're kind of highlighting the finishing this year. Please, take it away.

[0:03:17] PM: I think you're right. One of the things that I learned, especially in the last 20 years, printing has become faster, and faster, and faster. The type of finishing equipment you buy, how you set up your finishing lines. It doesn't matter whether it's flexible pouches, it's boxes, or it's a transaction print job. The finishing is your gating factor. You can have the fastest press on earth, but if your finishing is not running to keep up with it, you're not going to be making money, and it doesn't matter which of those segments you're in.

So, I think that this year, what I was hoping to see was more of the press manufacturers incorporate finishing into their stories. Here at drupa, we have a unique opportunity. Because of the length of the show, we actually see the manufacturers collaborating and bringing each other's equipment into the stands. So, if you walk into the Heidelberg stand, or you go out to the Koenig & Bauer stand in the offset halls, or you go to the Goss stand. You go out into digital land in 8A and 8B with Fuji, and Ricoh, and Canon, and even Hanglory, and that whole crew.

You're going to see finishing there as well because they've learned as well. They can sell a fast press, but they've got to incorporate and have a story around finishing. This time, I think we're seeing more finishing running here than we've ever seen before. We're seeing it in press manufacturer stands and we're seeing the finishing vendors cooperating with every one of the vendors out there.

[0:04:54] DC: Yes. It's not just that they are having finishing in line on the presses, or near line. They are actually creating products here at drupa that they're finishing live on the messe. There was a lot of collaboration going on that way as well, which really gives the attendees a unique advantage to be able to see everything from the software that gets it in, up into the finished product in one place. and not have to run all over the messe to see it. Which anyone who's not at drupa, there is no running across the messe. There's a bus that I found that is my new best friend, they'll take you to like hall 13, which is probably about a half a kilometer for me.

[0:05:47] PM: I did 8.5 miles yesterday, just to give you a sense, and I can't do that in kilometers. Forgive me. My high school math is failing me. But Deborah did find the bus and I have taken advantage of the bus a couple of times. But generally, I'm moving faster than the bus, so I just kind of power walk through. I came with my friend, Ruth [inaudible 0:06:07] from New Zealand. We did the power walk from 17 to get here.

[0:06:11] DC: Yes, that's a hike too. It's just right across. Pat, the other day, you know me, I find things out that I should have known for a long time ago. But either it finally hits me, and I realize the reality of the situation. We sort of had this conversation with Meccanotecnica, in where we hear all these discussions about workflow, workflow, workflow, in and out, workflow.

[0:06:36] PM: Guilty.

[0:06:38] DC: What happens is that, somebody sat me down the other day and was like, "Deb, there is no magic one end to another. Each of these stations, the press has its own workflow. The finishing has its own workflow. The secret is making all of those workflows talk to each other." This is your expertise. How is that getting better for everybody now?

[0:07:06] PM: Let me do a real quick history lesson. 24-plus years ago, we were talking about a way for all the machines to talk to each other, for the presses, and the CTPs, and the finishing machines to talk to each other. Out of an organization called [inaudible 0:07:22] was this idea that we could use a form of XML to let all the machines talk to each other, and we call it JDF, job definition format. It was going to use a job messaging framework, and it was going to be brilliant, and everybody was going to get along, and hug, and sing Kumbaya together.

Here we are 24 years later, and it's the first time it's actually working because it took, I think, almost until COVID for everyone to realize what happens when things can't talk to each other, when we're not exchanging data in a common format. So, today, if you go into any one of the stands in any of the 18 halls of drupa, you will find that all of the manufacturers, even if they don't have a fully-baked story, they can handshake with JDF data. Which means that if I'm a printer, and I want a dashboard that really tells me what's going on in my shop. "But gee, I've bought presses from four different manufacturers, and I've brought finishing equipment. I have my folders, and my gluers, and my binders are all from different manufacturers. How the heck do I see what all of those are doing? Do I need 14 dashboards?"

Today, the answer is almost every time, no. That there is always a way to get data from more modern equipment. Now, if your finishing equipment is from 1952, the second year of drupa, the answer is, maybe not. Now, we might be able to find a way to get you there using some of the sensor, the vendors here who do sensors. But if you've got anything that you've bought in the last 10 years, it is very likely that we can get to the data in your finishing equipment, map it into the finishing, or map it into the printing data, your workflow data, oh, your business data. You want a dashboard that tells you if you have enough paper in your inventory to actually complete the job and get it out the door. Now, we can handshake with some common data.

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[0:10:20] PM: But your point about workflow being module-specific is really important because it's rare today to see a printing company that has one workflow. They have lots of workflows, they have lots of things they've bought, lots of things they've written themselves. This is the drupa where I think many of those people who wrote their own solutions are looking for solutions that they can now buy, so somebody else will take care of them. Because when we start exchanging data with the finishing equipment, we're in a more complex universe than just exchanging with a CTP. Why should I host 20 programmers in my print shop to write a lot of code every time I buy a new machine when I can buy something from a vendor that's supported, that I don't have to worry about people retiring? That's kind of the world we're living in right now and it's all very business oriented. I think that that is something that we see more in these halls. It's a business story about print.

[0:11:25] DC: Well, it is a business story, isn't it? I mean, I'm so tired of these blanket words, automation, optimization. What are you automating? What are you optimizing? I mean, we learned from the inkjet days, we've just built the fastest inkjet press on the planet, great. There's no finishing equipment that can catch that, so you'd have to slow it down to a crawl for the other machines to catch it.

[0:11:49] PM: Which we see happen all the time.

[0:11:51] DC: Yes. Or you have to invent some finishing equipment that goes faster to catch it. This is what I call the, "Oh, Pat just said something, and now, I've got a million technical questions about it." But I actually only have one. I have been exposed to companies who really can give you an amazing remote view of everything that is happening on that press.

[0:12:17] PM: Digital twins.

[0:12:18] DC: Of everything that to know – not in a spy way, but in a business way. Is my second shift working as much as they potentially could when nobody's – the bosses aren't there? Has that moved into the finishing area yet, or in this new workflow world? Do I have more visibility into those machines?

[0:12:41] PM: You absolutely do. There are a couple of the software companies that specialize in operational efficiency. The magic three-letter acronym is OEE, it's operational efficiencies. So, think about this. I have even some older equipment, maybe I've got some finishing equipment I bought in the 1990s. The thing about finishing equipment, it lasts forever. It's amazing stuff. But maybe it's not running as fast, or maybe I have six that feed one printer, but that's okay.

There are companies that can come in, put a few sensors, delightfully sprinkled across your finishing environment, that will then transmit data to a central dashboard, so that even at three o'clock in the morning, when you wake up in a panic, because you're not sure that job that was promised to a customer at eight o'clock in the morning is actually going to get there. You can actually see the dashboard that says, "Oh, it's already sitting on the pallet ready to go," or "Oh my god, they've been partying instead of finishing my stuff."

But yes, that software is available. There are several people here in seven that can help you with that. Also, there are folks like OFS out of Australia, there are people like SpencerMetrics that you will see in a lot of the halls because they work with many of the vendors that will be able to build that dashboard for you. The thing is that almost all of them handshake, so it doesn't matter whose finishing equipment you have. It doesn't matter whose press equipment you have. They are focused on the operational efficiency aspect, and that's what they build their dashboards to do.

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[0:14:22] DC: McGrewGroup helps printers and the vendors who support them with strategy, product triage, print sample assessments, education, and consultation. We help our clients with assessments for views, workshops, research, and education. After all, understanding the capabilities you have isn't always intuitive. Let us help you polish and shine your processes to

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[0:15:01] DC: Another trend that I've noticed in my limited capacity of being able to walk around drupa is that I feel like the manufacturers are being more mindful of the actual, their customers. Instead of saying, "We're building this equipment because this is the equipment we want to build, and this is the way it's going to work, and this is the way it's going to be configured, because this is the way we say it should be."

[0:15:29] PM: Because we know better.

[0:15:30] DC: Because we know better than the person who doesn't have enough space in their print shop to put this magnificent piece of equipment. So, I have been seeing a lot of really interesting configurations of finishing equipment. I have to give a shout out to the Hunkeler Starbook that we saw.

[0:15:50] PM: Isn't that nice?

[0:15:51] DC: It was as big as this room, which I don't know –

[0:15:54] PM: Call it three meters by three meters. Maybe three times five, 25.

[0:15:59] DC: Twenty-five by 25. Okay. I think this room is a little bigger. But regardless, this machine can be configured in like – you can Tetris it as long as it's connected. Are you seeing that trend as well?

[0:16:12] PM: Oh, yes, because you and I were with Meccanotecnica the other day and same thing, so almost the same footprint. The Muller Martini solutions, the Hunkeler solutions, the Meccanotecnica solutions. If you go over to the Horizon stand, you'll see the same thing. I saw a box-making machine, I could have fit it in my garage.

[0:16:32] DC: Wow.

[0:16:33] PM: I was like, "Oh, I love this." So, like the pack-sized machines that you'll see, they're working with the Nozomi people. I think there is now a recognition that bringing a beast as a finishing device is not going to win you more customers. Because everyone is worried about the cost of real estate, everyone is worried about the cost of their buildings, the footprint that the machines take. So, everyone is trying to find compact machines that deliver as much finishing power as possible, but in a limited space. Especially when you start to talk to the new generation of printing companies that are growing up digital from day one, they're not really interested in something that takes a small power plant to run it. They need something that is going to be a good floor footprint, good on the energy consumption, and respectful of the training time required to use it. All of these vendors that I just named, they have that story.

[0:17:30] DC: Again, I've had limited time around the messe. So, I'm going to discuss what I saw, but please fill it in with the other people who are doing this as well. One of the other things that I really loved about the Starbook configuration is that it was the multipurpose finishing tool. It wasn't a one-size-fits-all, you could only do it this way. They actually showed three books of completely different sizes, completely different spine widths, completely different cover weights, stock, being finished in line at the same time. The only difference is that one would be directed one way to the blades, which were already set, no one has to touch them. So, multipurpose tools, really super – going back to why do I need six when I can get one that can do all of those six things.

[0:18:32] PM: The really cool thing is that, I think all of these vendors got the message that book manufacturing run lines are going down. That requirement for different sizes one after the other, after the other. So, I need an A4 size, I need an A5 size, I need this, I need that. That's all definitely something that is in their DNA. Love the Starbook configuration, love the horsepower, Swiss precision of it, it's just beautiful, the rest of the line, because that's one module of a bigger line that includes things from Hunkeler, additional pieces from Hunkeler as well as Muller Martini.

But then, you will also see technal, the Italians have a very similar line that uses technal and sigma technology. You go over to Horizon, you're going to go see Hunkeler with Horizon also

working in the same standard with their book finishing and magazine finishing operations. You're going to go over to our friends and Meccanotecnica with their Hunkeler and their book automation pieces. They are all striving for small footprints, energy efficiency, and ease of operation. Used to be, you had four operators on a book line, because every module needed its own person babysitting it. Now, you can operate two complete book lines with one person.

[0:19:50] DC: Correct me if I'm wrong, but printed materials was on the same roll.

[0:19:55] PM: They are. Yes, very often.

[0:19:55] DC: It's just was being diverted by the little barcodes that it was with.

[0:19:59] PM: Exactly. We're all barcode driven.

[0:20:00] PC: I mean, it was freaking it – there's like little conveyor belts. It's very cool, and you can stand in the middle of it, which was a lot of fun too. Sometimes I'm like, "I'm in the press. I'm in the press."

[0:20:09] PM: And you stand there with your cup of coffee watching all the books go by.

[0:20:13] DC: I mean, you don't need 20 people operating it. You don't need anybody cutting – I mean, just the automation is really fascinating.

[0:20:20] PM: That's the automation we should be talking about. We need the workflow automation to create highly efficient work channels and batches. Then, we need barcode-driven, QR code-driven, Aztec code-driven workflows that ensure that the finishing, which is designed to be incredibly efficient, is allowed to be as efficient as it possibly can. Yeah. So, Deborah is thinking, and when Deborah thinks, I can tell there's a question bubbling up. You're not quite sure how to say.

[0:20:56] DC: Well, this is also the sustainability drupa.

[0:20:59] PM: This is the sustainability drupa. An awful lot of the finishing that has been done with print partners, is actually being finished for specific causes.

[0:21:09] DC: It is, but I'm not really seeing a lot of sustainability story from the finishing companies. Is this just not something –

[0:21:19] PM: No, it's not really how they vocalize.

[0:21:23] DC: Because, correct me if I'm wrong, their sustainability is more on the energy of it. Is this true?

[0:21:30] PM: I think that that's a fair comment. The challenge, if you're a finishing device manufacturer, is that you don't actually know how your finished product is going to be used, you don't know if it's going to be sold, if it's going to be given away, if it's going to be a leaflet at a trade show. You just don't know. So, you rely on the content owners to have that sustainability story in mind. So, I think here, if we're being fair to all the finishing vendors, an awful lot of what they're finishing here is actually for a reason. It's actually going to be content that will either be given to different organizations, or it'll actually be sold on the streets.

In 2012. I worked on something they thought was crazy. We were actually finishing books in our stand that were going to be sold in bookstores the next day. This, I think, to your point about their sustainability story, here at drupa, in 2024, every single one of these printer hardware manufacturers can tell you to the nth degree what it costs to run their solution. That's so important because in years past, we never had that conversation.

[0:22:38] DC: Yes. I think that, as brands start looking at their total supply chain to feel good about what they're doing and to be able to correctly, and accurately report back to the Gen Zers and the Millennials what they're doing. Even a printer being able to say, "Our finishing equipment is more energy efficient" counts.

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[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:23:42] DC: Ultimately, what have you been able to ascertain any trends that you've seen in the finishing arena at drupa?

[0:23:53] PM: Smaller footprint of machine, more energy-conscious use of the machine, smarter use of the interconnect ability to others, and data sharing. I think all of those things to bring the most efficiency to that part because they know they were playing catch up with the capacity of the presses.

[0:24:13] DC: If you were buying finishing equipment, what are some of the secret questions you would ask, or the questions that you think that are the really important ones to get to before you're given all the value propositions?

[0:24:27] PM: I want to know if you can handshake with my workflow. I want to know if you can feed me data from the finishing components back into my primary dashboard. I want to know if I can work with you in a barcode manner, so that I can ensure that the finishing for a specific product is the finishing I'm going to get, so there are no mistakes. I want to know how to work with you to limit the waste. So, if you have specific imposition requirements for your particular finishing equipment, I need those specifications. I want to know how much you handshake with the workflow upstream. If your answer to me is, "Oh, we really don't do data handshakes, and we really can't give you any guidance on the imposition, or the ganging, or the nesting," then I probably am going to move on to the next manufacturer.

[0:25:15] DC: Were there any finishing equipment launches here that were of interest to you?

[0:25:20] PM: They're too long to list, so we don't want to be disrespectful to anyone. But what I would tell you is that, every single finishing manufacturer, the majors came here with a story. Whether it's the packaging, finishing people, the people who are building folding cartons, the people who are building the pouches, the flexo folks, it doesn't matter who they are. The people with production for transaction finishing, direct mail finishing, there is a lot of step change that has gone on.

Smarter finishing options, less waste options, faster options. I think there's just so much of it here, that we'd be remiss if we tried to start naming them. But I would encourage everyone, if you did not make it to drupa, and you're wondering what all the buzz that you missed was, go to all of your favorite feeds, go to LinkedIn, look around, go through the drupa.com website. You can get access to the drupa daily online. Every day, there is a finishing story in there that is worthy of your time to read to just see how other people like you are thinking about it.

[0:26:32] DC: I had mentioned to Meccanotecnica that in my LinkedIn group, in production professionals. I've been seeing an uptick in questions about book finishing. Did you notice among your travels, more of finishing equipment targeted specifically for that?

[0:26:49] PM: I think it's two things. I think there is, but it's typically built on a foundation that can be configured for other things. So, we've had this conversation quite a bit that books are not books are not books. It might not be a novel, it might not be an education piece, it might actually be an annual report, it might be a pitch book for an advertising agency or a financial services company. So, we think the book manufacturing vendors have learned to think outside the book for book finishing.

Now, also most of these pieces of equipment can also do magazine finishing. Think about it. What is a book? It's multiple folios. Well, what's a folio? It's kind of mini-magazines inside the book. All of a sudden, when we start thinking about other formats, magazine formats are now becoming – what did Mr. Magazine say, the number of titles of magazines is crazy big, but they're smaller in format, they're more customized, they're more targeted. Now, the book manufacturers are saying, "Oh, well, yes, you can do that on my machine too. So, look, here in one footprint, I can help you with books, different size books, different – whether number of

pages or a physical format size. Whether it's stone book, or it's perfect binding, but I can also help you with your magazines. I can do staple binding. I can do all of it for you

[0:28:14] DC: Multipurpose tools.

[0:28:16] PM: There they are. Would that be able to – the Swiss Army knife of –

[0:28:20] DC: I'm just saying, one fishing piece of equipment to rule them all. Pat McGrew, it is always a pleasure speaking with you. Some of the information that we mentioned in this podcast will be in the show notes. But Pat gave everybody really great directions. Go to whattheythink.com, check out the library of drupa dailys.

[0:28:40] PM: drupa dailys are on drupa.com.

[0:28:43] DC: Okay, or you can go there. Or you can also, if it's close enough to the show, if you look at #drupa2024, you should probably still see a lot of information there. We will be back tomorrow with another Print Report. Until then, everybody, print long, finish long, and prosper.

[END OF EPISODE]

[0:29:05] 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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