[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:00] DC: Today, on The Print Report, live from Hall 17 at drupa. We're going to be talking with Bronte and you're going to love the story.

Welcome to the Print Report with Deborah Corn and Pat McGrew. All the print that's fit for news.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:17] DC: Hey everybody, welcome to Podcasts From the Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your Intergalactic Ambassador, and I'm sitting in Düsseldorf, Germany in the Messe with Patricia McGrew.

[0:00:27] PM: I am definitely, Patricia McGrew, and we are so privileged today, Deborah. Do you know who we have?

[0:00:33] DC: I do, actually. But tell everybody else listening.

[0:00:37] PM: So, we have for Francesco Crotti, and he is a very old friend, but he is representing a really cool new idea. So, Francesco, please say hello to everyone.

[0:00:47] FC: Hello, everyone. Happy to be here with you guys.

[0:00:51] PM: We love having you. One of the reasons we wanted to talk to you on The Print Report, is because you are coming at print from so many different angles. So, after many years with HP where I met you, you began working with a client that we both knew very well, the team at Rotomail, and the team at Rotomail asked you to help them with something that they had been working on, which is a really cool new approach to making book printing and publishing more exciting and easier to do. But could you tell us first? You know the history with Rotomail and what was going on there that made them decide that helping get more books into print was a good idea.

[0:01:37] FC: Thank you, Pat. Yes. It's strange to be here in HP booth with a Rotomail experience to tell to PSPs. But for Rotomail experience, what I can say, they started in 1997. But they were more focused on transactional. But then after 15 years, they decided to move also into the book printing arena. But they were not coming from this experience. So, the idea for them was to offer new services as something that could be unique for the market. They were fully digital. They never printed with offset. They were coming from data management experience. So, they start to understand that maybe they can treat data also to print books. The idea in the goal was, let's offer a book of one service solution. These adventures started 15 years ago, and then they start to work on a specific workflow. What they achieved today, now just to share the experience –

[0:02:48] PM: So, let me stop you right there. Because Deborah, one of the things that always intrigues me about this story, is this just a story of a printer, who saw an opportunity, right?

[0:02:59] DC: Thank you.

[0:03:01] PM: They were a transaction, for sure. As Francesco says, they understood data. They understood file management. They understood what it takes to get a file in onto a printer and deliver it to the right person. When they looked at the market, they said, "You know, books need that." And that is just so different. You always preach to printers that they need to expand.

[0:03:25] DC: I do. I also, I fully believe in customer convenience. That is the way of the future here. I mean, if I want to get something done, am I going to want to do it in the most steps? Am I going to have to learn the steps along the way? Or can I find a trusted partner that has invented some sort of system, that it's only up to me to upload a PDF? Or it's only up to me to make sure that my words are correct? I could leave the rest of it to the people who should be responsible for it, and not kick it back to me and say, "The gutter is this or that. And I'm a writer or publisher, and I have no idea." So, I applaud that philosophy and I'm glad that this is such a success story because hopefully more people will look at their own customer base and say, "How can we help them be more efficient?" Which by the way, helps the print shop be more efficient.

[0:04:21] PM: Right. So, a lot of that story is workflow. I stopped you at workflow. So, they started to look at the workflow.

[0:04:29] FC: Yes, because they were saying, listen, if you're going to print books in the same way the other printing, we are the last. So, we start with price in competition, only with price.

[0:04:42] DC: Yes. You're fighting over pennies.

[0:04:42] FC: We are not offering nothing that other ones are doing. So, we to find a different approach. Today, just to give you a dimension, in 2023 Rotomail printed 4.5 million books.

[0:04:58] DC: Wow. That's a lot of books.

[0:04:59] FC: And 3.5 million runs from 100 copy above. But they have one million books that are single copy or a few copies. So, in any case, less than 100. What I mean, if I look at the revenue, 50% of the revenue is represented over 3.5 million up, when 100 copies and above. Out of 50% of the revenue is for one million book that has printed in the single copy, only a few copies. So, means that there is a very business reason to try to understand what does it mean to print book of one.

[0:05:41] DC: Yes. I actually have a question for you, because you're my technical interpreter. A lot of conversations are going on here about almost trying to convince printers that you're going to have to be a printer of many ones in the future not looking for this thing. It's kind of hard to get around. This seems like a pretty good solution to help people do that.

[0:06:01] PM: It really is because it answers the question, how do I manage a lot of orders for very small volumes, which is what many book printers are not ready to do. It's what transaction people are used to doing all the time, which is kind of where the marriage of mind comes in. But when people say book of one, they don't always mean the same thing. I think Francesco's point is very important that it is under 100 books. It might be a single copy. It might be five copies. It might be 50 copies. But for most book printers, it's very difficult for them to manage the workflow and the printing of things that are less than 100 copies.

[0:06:49] DC: Yes. That's pretty much what's going on. The realization that they're going to have to change their business model, because volumes – look, 100 is a different vibe, but that's for a different audience, right? There's plenty of those people who might start off with 100, then

they need 200, then they need 5000. You can grow with them by giving them an opportunity. Those books, of those order of hundreds, aren't stagnant print. The covers could be different. I mean, you're still using digital printing.

[0:07:18] PM: And they're not sitting in warehouses waiting around to be sold. So, you discovered at Rotomail that there was this funny thing happening to your revenue. You discovered that, "Wow, I could do a million and still get 50% of my revenue, instead of printing 3.5 million to get 50% of my revenue." So, that's a different mindset for a business. Is that what led them to think there was a solution to sell here?

[0:07:49] FC: Yes. I mean, first of all, I believe that the PSPs sometimes confuse short run with print-on-demand. Because print-on-demand is driven by automation. Short run could be driven by digital hardware only. If you want to go in a real print-on-demand, you need to have a strong automation workflow. Then, the workflow is the to make the difference. The workflow is something that has to manage from the order entry from publishers. You need to have a digital archive, always ready for them to place order. You need to have a system when the publisher upload files, check files, in automation way. So, you don't need to have pre-press activities there, everything is automated.

Also, for example, you need to have function like at that spine adaption in automatic way. Because you need to have some standard where publisher can play with. Then, when they play with a PDF, you got a file that is capable to be printed. But at the end, you didn't do anything. You give to them only the opportunity to get what they need.

[0:09:07] PM: And did you make it? How easy is it? If I'm a publisher, and say, I want to come to Rotomail and I want to use this interface to put my book out. What kind of options do I have? Do you tell them we only print these sizes or we only print this many pages?

[0:09:25] FC: No. I mean, what we are offering is completely flexible. We cannot offer in a public market limitation. We need to manage our covers, soft cover, cover with flaps, without lamination, size of the book that could be completely different, because of different publisher needs and so on and so forth. So, you need to give to the customer the opportunity to do what they need.

[0:09:53] DC: Is it all perfect bound though, when you say publishing?

[0:09:55] PM: Yes. These are books and are your books are all perfect bound?

[0:09:59] FC: Yes.

[0:09:59] DC: So, wouldn't there be a minimum of pages for something that needed to be perfect bound? Or no?

[0:10:04] PM: You don't typically find a five-page book.

[0:10:07] DC: Okay. I'm just curious.

[0:10:08] PM: Yes. I mean, typically –

[0:10:10] DC: These are the Deborah questions that gets thrown in the middle of these.

[0:10:012] PM: Typically, if you look, I mean, if this was a video podcast, you would see that Francesco has in front of him a very nice piece that is about bringing publishing printing services for its pages, with the cover or something like that. So, it's perfect bound. It actually doesn't have to be large. It's still capable of being a book and going to a process.

[0:10:35] DC: I'm just saying like, as a print customer, when I hear soft cover, sometimes you can associate that with saddle stitch. That's why it's the question.

[0:10:42] FC: But you can also manage to have those stitched if you needed it. At the end, a book is a multi-page application. Okay.

[0:10:52] PM: The finishing is not near – I mean, the finishing is not what makes it a book. But it's what makes it feel like a book.

[0:10:56] DC: Yes, of course.

[0:10:59] PM: So yes, you can have every small number of pages in the book, one folio, say? But then you can also get to a quite a large one because I saw several in your shop that were really quick size.

[0:11:07] DC: I just want people to know that they don't have to have war and peace if they want to come to you, that whether it's 12 pages in a cover, or is that the right math? Twelve pages in a cover?

[0:11:20] PM: Yes. So, the thing is, to also remember that sometimes things are used the book process that we don't always think of as books.

[0:11:27] DC: Yes. Which is my favorite thing, by the way. When is a book not a book? When it's an annual report. When it's a legacy thing about your company. People got very crafty during the pandemic about that.

[0:11:38] PM: If you are part of a financial services house that does a lot of pitches, very often they need 20 or 30 copies of their pitch books.

[0:11:48] DC: Yes. We do that in the advertising agencies, by the way. Hand-bound, by the way.

[0:11:52] PM: But using the exact same process, it could come through this universe and it would be produced exactly correctly to their specifications.

[MESSAGE]

[0:12:04] 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, by providing resources and strategies that enable business marketing and creative success, reporting from global events, these podcasts, Project Peacock TV, and an array of community lifting initiatives. We also work with OEMs, suppliers, industry organizations, and event producers, helping you connect and engage with our vast audience, and achieve success with your sales, marketing, and conference endeavors.

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[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:12:59] PM: So, we did the workflow. Rotomail really piloted this for years before they turned it into a service.

[0:13:09] FC: Yes, because when we start to prove our automation workflow, we understood that this is an opportunity for many others. Also, because as I told you, is an end-to-end, then we have the front-end as I speak about. But then we have also automation in the production process that we are doing. You need to be more effective because I want to avoid to say that to do book of one, you need to do manually. No, no, no. You need to have an industrial process setup and this what we have today in our factory, managing different applications. This is an experience that from transactional data, I told you.

I mean, we are treating files and we have these production workflows that is able to track page by page and have on control all the books that we are going to produce. Then, coming back to your comment, I was saying, because we see that this approved solution that make up as grow, then we have an opportunity to start, with the relation with the customer in Japan, and she was looking about what we were doing. And then we understood that we can offer to others the opportunity to build an alliance. This is why we are calling Bronte Global Alliance to build the network and use the same system.

[0:14:36] DC: I'm just going to help with that for a second. Global Alliance. Go ahead. Yes, Global Alliance.

[0:14:42] FC: Again, after the first experience with this Japanese customer, then we start to move in different markets, and we are in a position to offer this opportunity to other colleagues.

[0:14:53] PM: Are we allowed to mention the Japanese customer?

[0:14:57] FC: Yes. KADOKAWA.

[0:14:56] PM: Yes. KADOKAWA. So, anyone listening, and here's a glow global audience, right? So, KADOKAWA is one of the largest producers of books in Japan. Japanese formats are very specific and their binding requirements are very specific. So, the solution had to be flexible enough to handle the things we're used to. And also, the things that the Japanese culture is used to, and it was.

[0:15:25] DC: Actually, now that we're talking about that. The interface, is it in? Can it be translated to Japanese? How did that –

[0:15:34] FC: Yes. We can translate in several languages. It partners you with the PSP that want to get it.

[0:15:42] PM: That is all doable. So basically, national language support is how we usually refer to it, right? So, it's possible for them to use it natively the way they need to use it, which is great. Deborah was asking about how you market the Bronte Global Alliance? And I think that's a really important question because it was an idea. It was piloted, you found the first partner in KADOKAWA. Then, the idea was, well, wait a minute, if we're using it, and if KADOKAWA can use it, there may be a whole solution here that we can form an alliance with. So, you work with both book printers and also publishers?

[0:16:31] FC: Yes.

[0:16:30] PM: How do you work with a book printer versus how you work with the publisher?

[0:16:34] FC: The idea is to also share our business experience, because at the end, also publisher and distributor as well, is an important part of this business model. So, you cannot talk about blueprinting if you don't have in mind distribution, as well. So, for a book printer, that want to jump into this kind of service, you need to look at the distributor or big publisher that have a huge catalog. So, they want to make these back catalog alive. Because at the end of the day, 80% of the books that are sold in the world back catalog. They're not new titles.

[0:17:22] PM: That's the publisher story, is that basically, if there was a book that was published 20 years ago, and I really want a copy of it, but my gosh, there is not one anywhere in the

system. That order can be placed by the publisher, through the Bronte Global Alliance, and a book printer will produce that and deliver it to the customer in their country.

[0:17:43] DC: Right. I also have another idea to throw out there. Recently, I think last year, I went to a conference called Digital Book World. These were the producers of audiobooks and podcasts and eBooks and things like that. What they were finding, and what I we spoke about, is how print can support these digital assets. What those producers were finding was that some of these true crime podcasts were popular enough that they could create a magazine about them. That they were popular – the cooking ones or the – it was mostly true crime, I have to tell you. It gets very popular. Historic ones. Even Rachel Maddow turned her podcast into a book.

So, these are people who want to test the waters with smaller runs and really do not have the chops, as we say, in the United States, the skills to deal with printers. This sounds like a perfect solution for them. If they knew about it.

[0:18:45] PM: Well, it can be I think, one of the challenges – so, with the way that Bronte Global Alliance works is that book printers can become part of the Alliance. There are two things that happen. One is that they can manage their own inventories because it has all of that there. So, basically, helps the book printer manage their relationship with the publishers they're already working with.

[0:19:10] DC: No, just in them –

[0:19:11] PM: But then it can also open the door to printing for publishers they've never worked with.

[0:19:17] DC: Right. That's what I'm saying that to the network here, or to get into the network, because you have new conversations to have with these digital producers. They don't have anything against print. They just don't – it's just not in their world.

[0:19:33] PM: They don't know how to do it.

[0:19:33] DC: They don't know how to do it. The same way I don't know how to create an audio file that lets me rewind and it gives me information about – I mean, some of those audio books are – I mean, it takes longer to program it than it does to record it. So, I just think it opens up for new business opportunities through the network, so it's just a matter of people on the other end knowing that there is this network and it exists which this podcast will certainly help with.

[MESSAGE]

[0:20:04] DC: McGrewGroup can help you with assessments, RFP reviews, education content, and surveys. Plus, our consulting practice to offer guidance on your best business workflows and integrations. McGrewGroup is ready to help you grow, expand, optimize, and thrive. Drop us a note on LinkedIn or at our website, mcgrewgroup.com.

[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:20:29] PM: So, Francesco, I know Ingram catalog is part of what Rotomail manages with Bronte, and Ingram is a global catalog. And Ingram –

[0:20:38] DC: They were part of the digital book world.

[0:20:40] PM: They are. I mean, they're stars in the publishing world. But if I am in the universe, and say I'm a book printer –

[0:20:48] DC: Printerverse.

[0:20:50] PM: – and I want to know more about the Bronte Global Alliance and how I might become part of it, and what the value would be to me. What do you say?

[0:21:00] FC: Okay, so first of all, come to the Hall 17. We are here. But maybe –

[0:21:05] PM: So, you might not be at drupa.

[0:21:09] DC: I can actually tell you –

[0:21:10] FC: We have a nice website. We are in LinkedIn. So, it means, we have the Bronte Global Alliance website where you can ask for the content, or you can find us in LinkedIn, or you can write to me –

[0:21:24] PM: And it's important to know, if you're trying to find the Bronte Global Alliance on LinkedIn, you need to be looking for the Bronte Global Alliance. One of the interesting things about the word Bronte is that it gets – there were those Bronte sisters who wrote books, and they have a large following. They have a lot of web pages and podcasts and things that are with them. But we're talking Bronte Global Alliance and Bronte Global Alliance is a division of Rotomail. If that's easier to remember, you could say R-O-T-O-M-A-I-L.

[0:22:04] DC: Well, first of all, let me just stop you all, because I'm going to put everybody listening. All the links to everything you need are going to be in the show notes. So, no one's going to have to like look things up unless you truly want to. You could just go to the show notes and click a link and you'll get right to where you want to go.

[0:22:21] PM: So, if they're a book printer, they can come to the Bronte Global Alliance, and they can find out more. If they are a publisher, and they'd like to know about this network of printers that can print for them, also come to the Bronte Global Alliance and you'll find out because you are signing up more people every day as part of the alliance. Can you talk about that?

[0:22:46] FC: This is what we are doing, but we cannot share too much.

[0:22:49] PM: Okay. I promise you, it's a really big one. So, if you are one of those people, Deborah, that even if you are a manager of a small publishing house, the Bronte Global Alliance could be an opportunity for you to find printers around the world who could do print-on-demand for you. I think one of the things Francesco has always said to me is that there is a huge difference between being a book printer, and a print-on-demand printer. One of the value propositions of being part of the alliance as a publisher is that there are opportunities for print-on-demand. But if you're a book printer, who doesn't know how to do print on demand, these are the guys who can help you get there.

[0:23:36] DC: Can you share, without mentioning names of the companies that are part of the alliance or might become, can you share how being a member has helped their business?

[0:23:47] FC: Yes. I mean, today, the companies that are printing, they are in a what we call the red ocean, because they are in competition on pricing, and they are fighting to get jobs at the end of the day. They need to make investment in sales. They need to do – they are treating the business as usual, but today there is another way to do business. The business is to build partnerships with customers with publishers. To make partnerships, it means to manage the inventory, to manage the title, to give them a service, to give them 48-hour SLA and not weeks SLA. It means, to be open to this what they need, it's a different way. We see that we start from scratch, and today, we are delivering the service. We are more than 500 publishers. We are working with a self-published platform. We are dealing with the main distributor that we have in the country. So, we start to be a real player, that makes a difference in the country.

[0:25:09] DC: So, Patricia, is this an integration for those printers? Is it a platform? How does it work? How did they get trained and supported?

[0:25:17] PM: Right. So, I would consider it a platform in the same sense that if you were a seller on Amazon, you don't have to know how all the magic happens on amazon.com. But if I'm a bookseller, I certainly want my books there, but I don't want to necessarily have the inventory. One of the ways that this works is as a platform is that you create basically a digital version of all your content, which you probably have already. You use the Bronte system to create your archives, your print files, what's available for print. Maybe even do versioning, if you need to do versioning. In that sense, it's a platform – integration comes in, because you probably already have systems in your shop. Your publishing systems or your book printing systems. You've got something there already and there is a handshake that happens to the Bronte –

[0:26:22] DC: So, it just needs to connect it, to be able to talk to each other.

[0:26:24] PM: It's a simple connection. Then, there is a team there that can support you, because I put my books up there, and they had to support me.

[0:26:31] DC: So, if the members of the alliance have technical problems, they just call up into the –

[0:26:31] PM: They get they get back to the –

[0:26:41] DC: It's not living on their servers or anything like that?

[0:26:43] PM: No. This is all cloud-based. The advantage there is that you don't have to be an IT expert, to take advantage of this great system that they put together. We find that everyone thinks everybody knows how to do book of one. Everybody knows how to do short runs. We've been talking about it for years. It must be easy. It isn't. Many book printers or publishers walk away from the opportunity because they find it too hard. This is a way to enter that world, in the easiest way possible.

[0:27:21] DC: That's literally what I was trying to make the point of before about all of these digital producers out there, just sitting there without printing their lives, because they do not – there's not an easy mechanism to explain to them, "Just give me the PDF and I've got the rest of it." You don't need a pre-press person on your end. You don't need a designer. You don't need anything. Just give me the file. Well, maybe you do. But I'm just saying it takes – recently I made a magazine for International Print Day. I was an editor at that point and a publisher. It's very time-consuming. This is a bleed and this is not a bleed. A lot of stuff can go wrong if you're not – is it centered on the page? Is it all of that?

To take some of that fear away from people, especially spine. A spine is a crazy thing to have to figure out for both. You don't know what it is. Then, the other day, I just heard like, there's different measurements if the spine – your pieces on one side of it, if it's in the middle. I mean, nobody has time to figure that out. So, I'll just tell you from my perspective, thank you to Bronte because print should be that accessible to people. We know it's a complicated process. We know it's a science. We know it's a craft. But it also has to be accessible because everything on the Internet, you log on, you push a button and you get everything you want.

[MESSAGE]

[0:28:56] 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.

[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:29:31] PM: I think you've summed it up very nicely. Francesco, is there anything else we need to know about Bronte that we haven't covered?

[0:29:41] FC: Okay. We talked more about the front end, what we can add is something about the back end and the production. Because this system is able to be integrated with the ERP of the PSP. It can also be integrated with a carrier, so you can track delivery as well.

[0:30:04] PM: Which is very important.

[0:30:04] FC: You can send invoicing in an automatic way.

[0:30:08] DC: Where is it, is the most question.

[0:30:09] FC: You can also manage different payment methods. So, it's really something, a comprehensive solution is not something that you – you need anything else. You take it, and then you manage your company.

[0:30:25] PM: And Deborah, that speaks to your integration question because Francesco made a good point. Your ERP, your existing invoicing system, your existing relationships with your carriers, your common carriers, all of that just becomes integrated into the bigger hole and works together.

[0:30:43] DC: Excellent.

[0:30:43] PM: Okay, well, Francesco, I want to thank you so much for taking time.

[0:30:49] FC: Thank you. Grazie.

[0:30:51] PM: We hope that everyone who's listening, if you have any interest in books at all, that you'll go take a look at the Bronte Global Alliance, because I personally am a fan.

[0:31:00] DC: Yes. We have seen it grow since the beginning. I just want to say, I'm really proud of all you guys for sticking with it, and much success. Everybody, if you're a printer out there, this is another opportunity. This is a new conversation to have to people. I'm not saying if you build it, they will come. But you can go out there and see what your customers are doing, or more importantly, what they're not doing with you, and see if there's a way that you can incorporate this. Because, by the way, we didn't even discuss this. There might not be people on the print shop who can handle the pre-press. I kind of think of this more as a pre-press thing than a production.

[0:31:43] PM: It's really not though. Think of it as super workflow for a book environment, whether you're a book printer or a publisher.

[0:31:52] DC: Okay. I will think of it that way. So, the thing is that print volumes are shift. Publishing is a good bet right now. It might not be as thick as it used to be, but it's probably out there. I did an interview with Mr. Magazine, Dr. Samir Husni. There's still more magazine titles every year. They're less pages in some of the other ones. But it's still moving and growing, and is to your point before, does it have to be a book? It doesn't just have to be a novel. Don't think of it as the –

[0:32:28] PM: A lot of pages.

[0:32:29] DC: There's a lot of things to do. Molte grazie. Thank you for your time.

[0:32:31] FC: Grazzie a tutti.

[0:32:32] DC: Everybody out there, everything you need to know to connect with Francesco and connect with the Bronte Global Alliance is in the show notes. Until next time, drupa long –

[0:32:44] PM: And print long –

[0:32:44] DC: Print long, and publish long, and prosper.

[OUTRO]

[0:32:49] 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]

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drupa Next Age (drupa DNA): https://www.drupa.com/en/Program/Forums/drupa_next_age
Bronte Global Alliance: https://www.bronteglobalalliance.com/
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