

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:00] DC: Today on The Print Report, live from Meccanotecnica in Hall 1 at drupa, we're going to be talking to one of my favorite people, Stefano Formentini of Meccanotecnica.

[00:00:14] DC: Welcome to The Print Report with Deborah Corn and Pat McGrew. All the print that's fit for news.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:00:23] DC: Hey, everybody. Welcome to The Print Report with Pat McGrew and Deborah Corn. I'm Deborah Corn.

[00:00:28] PM: Makes me Pat McGrew.

[00:00:29] DC: Pat, we have finally found our way to the Italians, and I get to say buongiorno, Stefano.

[00:00:36] SF: Buongiorno, Deborah, and buongiorno, Pat.

[00:00:39] PM: Thank you so much. Deborah, today we have a really interesting mission. We're going to be talking about something a lot of people don't know about, which is sewn book production, right, which creates really durable books. This is a specialty of Meccanotecnica. But we are also going to be talking about a new product that they've introduced which is their new perfect binder, Sirio, which is a really cool name. And we're going to be talking about some of the things they've done to prepare for the show.

Stefano, thank you so much for agreeing to take time out of your very busy stand to sit and talk with us today. What's your favorite thing about coming to drupa?

[00:01:23] SF: Yes. I mean, we are –

[00:01:24] DC: Besides seeing me.

[00:01:25] PM: Yes, really. Yes.

[00:01:27] SF: Definitely. Yes. We were and we are very excited. We believe that drupa is a great place to showcase what is new in our portfolio. We have a lot to talk about that because we are relentlessly innovating our digital portfolio, and we believe this is the way the company must go. Our vision is very clear, and we want to become a full solution provider. In this environment, we are adding new machines in our portfolio and thank Pat for mentioning that we have just added a new perfect binder for digital print finishing.

[00:02:07] PM: I'm so excited. I actually got to go to the factory, Deborah.

[00:02:11] DC: What?

[00:02:11] PM: And watch it being built. It is such an interesting concept because we know that book manufacturing is becoming shorter and shorter run. You and I have had a lot of conversations about this. We know that because of that, a lot of book printers are having to rethink the footprint of their book manufacturing. Sometimes, they're having to create satellite locations in order to meet the distributors' requirements. If you're working with the big online resellers and the giant book manufacturing equipment might not do it for you. So you still need the same quality, the same throughput, the same ability to produce the books. But you need a better footprint.

That's where Meccanotecnica comes in because we're sitting here in a booth that's a good-sized booth, but they've got a complete book line running here. I love that, and I love the ability to do sewn book blocks in a footprint that any printer would find advantageous. Even if you were never a book printer before but you see that book printing opportunity and you want to be your own finishing partner as well, Meccanotecnica, which in the US is known as Book Automation, these are the folks you should be talking to for a great footprint, high-quality durability, books that will last forever.

By the way, if you also want perfect binding, which is also a high-quality finishing product, they've got the new Sirio to do that, too. I love it.

[00:03:48] DC: In my LinkedIn group, I can see trends, whether people are posting questions or asking questions. Or, I mean, posting information or asking questions. Or I see an influx of certain companies coming in there. There has been a recent wave of people asking about book finishing. I mean, enough that I noticed it and I started wondering, why this sudden interest in book finishing?

To your point, Pat, it – first of all, what is a book, right? It's something with a cover and information inside. It doesn't have to be a novel. It doesn't have to be hardcover. A book can be a promotional piece. It could be a photo book. There are so many books out there. But everybody seems to be, at least this trend of a hundred people, seem to be really looking for a simple solution that they can adopt quickly because it doesn't seem like they are book printers. They just want to get into the space.

[00:04:59] SF: We see as well the trend you have noticed. There is a lot of interest around the book in its original format, the physical one. It's a means of communication that is not declining. It's stable. What we see is that books printed in digital are becoming more and more and in some regions of the world such as the US will be probably mainstream in five to 10 years.

This is why we are investing our resources, R&D, into creating and improving our existing book sewing machines for digital print finishing but also in creating new machines for the managing of the downstream processes because we want to provide customers solutions that can help them make and produce the finished product. This is why, of course, we are a market leader in book sewing technology. But we also want to help customers in preparing the book block for the cover application and softcover finishing.

This is why in a very small footprint, like you mentioned, Pat, we are probably the first to provide the line that is capable of two binding methods, thread sewing and perfect binding, in a very versatile line that offers multiple finishing options. We can do hardcover preparation. We can do softcover finishing. We can do the auto bind method that it's in between soft cover finishing and our cover preparation. It gives the softcover book an extra lay-flat property. We can also do books with flaps. We are offering a highly versatile line, multiple opportunity for our customers to make business and to provide new products to their customer.

[00:06:53] PM: Stefano, since 2016, you have added a massive amount of capability to your world. Because when I was working with you in 2016, we had to find partners to help us get to the finished, for trimming. Three-knife trimming, I think. But now, this is all Meccanotecnica.

[00:07:16] SF: That is correct.

[00:07:17] PM: Which is cool.

[BREAK]

[00:07:20] DC: Print Media Centr provides printspiration and resources to our vast network of global 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. Visit Print Media Centr and connect with the Printerverse. Links in the show notes. Print long and prosper.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[00:08:15] DC: If we could just take this conversation and divide it in half right now, people who want to be in this space and people who are already in this space, okay? I can tell you that I do not recall ever working on a project that required a sewn book block. Is that a different process for a printer, for a print customer? I heard you said that you help with that. Can we touch upon that a little bit?

[00:08:42] PM: The decision process is going to start with the content creator. If you're a publisher of a book that you want to have longevity, so maybe it's a science textbook, maybe it's a journal compilation that you want to last forever, library books. You want those sewn because they need durability. There are an awful lot of use cases; photo books, coffee table books.

Again, format sizes are going to be a little different. But sewn book blocks are there for durability and for the elegance and the quality that they bring. The pages don't fall out.

They created a set of videos that show the value proposition of sewn book block books that just makes me laugh every time I see them. But that's it. The designer says, "This is my project, and it has got to last. So this is the one I want, sewn book." Then alternatively, they might say, "Well, no. I've got something that I really want the perfect bind softcover feel. Maybe it's a trade book. Maybe it's a book for my association, and it's our year-end compilation. Maybe it's an annual report that really doesn't need longevity." It's the designer's desire that does it.

[00:10:05] DC: Okay. Completely understand that and thank you for giving people a road map for decision making. Is my file going to be any different if I'm doing a sewn book block? Does the printer need to have information that maybe they don't have now about how to make the book blocks? I'm just – for the people out there who are getting into it, this is certainly an avenue to investigate both things at the same time. They already know what a perfect bind is and a saddle stitch. But if they want to move into the sewn block, I just want to give some people – do you support them? Do you need more education around it? I think you understand what I'm asking.

[00:10:47] PM: I do. Stefano, I think that when we looked at even the preparation coming to the show, we knew which things would go to Sirio and which things would go to the sewn book block machines. From a design perspective, it's not as big an issue but at imposition time. So it –

[00:11:06] SF: That is correct.

[00:11:06] PM: The magic happens in the prepress, right?

[00:11:10] SF: Yes, you're right. Yes. In the content creation, you don't see any difference between perfect binding and thread sewing. But, yes, in the imposition, things must be done according to the binding method you have chosen. In order to facilitate our customers, we are collaborating with a software house, for example, that provides imposition engines. I can mention Ultimate Tech, a Canadian software house.

[00:11:37] DC: Oh, yes. We love them. Julie.

[00:11:37] PM: Yes. It's Julie and Ray.

[00:11:39] SF: Julie Watson.

[00:11:39] PM: And the team there, yes, are wonderful.

[00:11:42] SF: Exactly. We are collaborating with them, and we have added to their Ultimate Imposition, their main imposition engine, and Hot Folder. You prepare the content, and then you drag and drop the content in the Hot Folder. As a result, after a few seconds, you have a perfectly imposed PDF file that could be printed and then processed in our solutions without any issue.

[00:12:10] DC: Basically, with the right tools and a little training, anybody can make sewn books.

[00:12:16] PM: They can and I think from a design perspective. I think sometimes we think that with sewn books, you might need a little bit larger gutter. You might need – you might want to allow – that's where the design – knowing what you're trying to design for can help. But when it comes to actually the manufacturing piece, the magic is in the imposition, and that's your superpower. You get your imposition in there. Then the manufacturing process is so automated. It takes over.

[00:12:44] SF: Exactly.

[00:12:45] DC: You actually showed us a really cool sample. I know it was just a test, but do you want to talk about it?

[00:12:50] SF: Yes. We are collaborating with Ricoh. We want to show customers that with our solutions we can produce beautiful coffee table books. As Pat was mentioning before, thread sewing is, let's say, an application-driven binding method. Usually, the customers or the

publisher chooses thread sewing because of the application they want to produce, because the binding method affects the user experience of the reader.

[00:13:19] PM: Totally.

[00:13:20] SF: Totally. This is important to consider. Also, there's a topic of reliability, of resistance, longevity, and so on. We are collaborating with Ricoh. We will, let's say, show to prospects and customers in the nearby future a beautiful coffee table book. The characteristic of this book is that it's a very large in format and –

[00:13:43] DC: Yes. It's pretty big.

[00:13:45] SF: It's pretty big. It's pretty big as it usually is. With our book finishing line, we are the only one that we can process that large format. So it's very important for us as a differentiator, but it is also nice to see that, thanks to collaboration, thanks to, let's say, working together with people, we can make a perfect example of how our customers' printers and binder could exploit the new technology and producing coffee table books in short runs and have new business opportunities.

With Ricoh, and especially Ricoh UK, we are collaborating with Andy Campbell. This coffee table book will show Alan Shapiro pictures.

[00:14:27] PM: Which are beautiful.

[00:14:29] SF: Which are beautiful.

[00:14:29] PM: This is a casebound book. Deborah, I think one of the things, especially people who are maybe coming new into book manufacturing, they may not understand all their options, right? Sure, you can do a softcover book. We all know what they look like. You may even do a hardcover book, and you may understand what a casebound book looks like. This thing, it's the boxed piece that actually adds so much elegance to it, and that's another option that they can bring. I love it.

[00:14:58] DC: You finished the box that it came in, too?

[00:15:01] SF: No, no.

[00:15:02] PM: No. They were –

[00:15:03] SF: That was done by a customer of us in Italy.

[00:15:06] DC: I mean, the whole package was gorgeous.

[00:15:08] PM: The package is cool.

[00:15:09] DC: It matches completely which is, I mean – and it fits in there, which is the most important part.

[00:15:13] SF: Exactly. Also, the [inaudible 00:15:14]. At the moment, we have solutions that prepare the book block for their cover application. So we do the [inaudible 00:15:22]. We apply the reinforcing tape. We do the three-side cutting. Then we collaborated all as well with the group of [inaudible 00:15:29]. It's an Italian trade binder that is focused on providing customers with high-quality casebound products. Thanks also to them for this nice collaboration.

[00:15:43] DC: By the way, they lived up to their value proposition because that package, it's like a standup box, and you pull the book out.

[00:15:49] PM: Yes. It's beautiful.

[00:15:51] DC: The whole application is just breathtaking and the fact that, I mean, it just is not as difficult to do as people might think, as long as you have that imposition software piece. I think it – I mean, the opportunities are endless. We learned during the pandemic that this format got very creative and if people keep pushing the boxes. You don't have to only go to publishers about books. You can go to corporations. They are making stories about their companies as books now. There are – Vogue or Chanel. One of the really high-end couture houses made a fashion book about their new –

[00:16:34] PM: Oh, Lord. It's huge. Yes.

[00:16:34] DC: Their new offerings of the season. It wasn't just a photography book, so family recipes. I mean, there were so many things that were going on during the pandemic. To all the creatives out there listening, this is a great opportunity to really push the boundaries of what is a book. It is just a cover with your imagination inside of it.

[BREAK]

[00:17:02] PM: 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, reviews, 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 enhance your road to long-term growth.

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[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[00:17:40] PM: Last time for 2016, we did something that was a little unusual. We actually took someone's family history from ancestry.com. We grabbed those files. If you remember, we were doing all the different number of pages, so we ended up with a 13-volume set of someone's history, which it turned out included Francis Ford Coppola, the filmmaker, where it was in their line. A copy of that drupa sample was sent to Coppola, which was hysterical.

But we were using a friend of mine, his wife's family history, as a print sample. The cool thing was because it was so beautifully put together, it just became something that was beyond a print sample. It became a really valuable family heirloom, so it was kind of fun, right? That's one of the neat things about drupa, is you get to kind of try things.

Here, you had a lot of collaborations. Right, Stefano? You had collaborations. Not only the testing with Ricoh but with producing books with Canon and producing books with HP as well.

[00:18:53] SF: That is correct. Thanks to Canon, for example. We are also collaborating with charity publishers in the UK. Topic Heroes is the name of the publishers. Their mission is to create new author. So they collaborate with primary schools, with children, and they offer to children an online platform. We know that the new generation are very skilled in using online platforms. By using those platforms, they write stories about a topic. They choose pictures in order to convey their stories also with images. Then thanks to Canon, they print the content.

Thanks to Meccanotecnica, we are now creating thread-sewn children books. Those children books will be sent back to the UK to be provided to the authors and to primary schools because we know – I mean, book is a living thing, and book has an endless possibility now. In the past, only author that were chosen by publishers could publish a book. You need to be a very good author, very well known in order to have certain notoriety and be published.

Now, thanks to digital printing and self-publishing platform or platforms like Topic Heroes are possible. Everybody could write a book. This is fostering a new generation of authors. That's very interesting. Then, of course, we are also collaborating with HP producing perfect bound books. This is also very, very important for us. I mean, we are demonstrating to people that we can collaborate with everybody. Based on their singular characteristics, we can produce coffee table books. They can produce novels. We can produce children's books. We can produce corporate books, for example.

[00:20:49] PM: Well, you've produced your own corporate book.

[00:20:52] SF: Exactly, exactly. We produce our own corporate books, so there are endless possibilities. I believe that this time of history is one of the most important for books because things are changing. The digital transformation is becoming mainstream. I believe that in the future, the book as a mean of communication will become more popular and popular because we are human, and we love physical things. We love owning things and looking at them. I believe we are in the right position at the right time.

[00:21:24] DC: I agree. I'm looking at your array of equipment behind me. Some of it is pretty long. Is it modular? Does every – do people need all of these components? What is the right printer to speak with you?

[00:21:41] SF: I mean, yes, they are modular. They can be inline, or they can be standalone. Based on the production environment and based on the production requirement of the customer, they can choose a singular machine or an online. There are endless possibilities to connect those machines together.

Another important thing is that, yes, we provide the hardware and especially when we are talking about short runs or ultra-short runs or even book of one with the perfect binder. Hardware is one thing, but then comes the software, the electronics, and the digital workflow. We are also working in that direction.

Again, with Ultimate Tech, we are collaborating with them in order to have our solutions in their ultimate bindery software in order to automate the creation of JDF file or XML file because every single machine of us is provided with a camera. We read barcodes or data matrix. People and operators are not required to input information, format, dimensions because everything must be automated.

Otherwise, we will not be able to produce 800 different books in a row or 900 different books an hour without introducing inefficiency in the system. Both we have hardware. We write our own software. We are collaborating with software houses, and we provide a digital workflow to customers.

[BREAK]

[00:23:11] 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 a 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 podcast, and request a partner package today. Share long and prosper.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[00:23:45] PM: Deborah, in terms of what size printer might be interested, what I would tell you is that that's been a moving target because we used to think that book printers had to be 20 million turnover revenue printers. They had to be really on the larger side of medium. Today, because there's so much efficiency in the process, it doesn't take 12 people to operate this equipment. You could have two well-qualified operators that are with the equipment. Then you could maybe have some robots in the mix that are picking up pallets and moving rollers around and then a serious printing technology.

One the roll-fed printing technologies, one of the sheet-fed technologies with some cutting, and you're in business as a book manufacturer. If you are one of those people who wants to serve the self-publishing market or the low end of the education market, the academic printing market or the hobbyist printing market, you could set yourself up in business, and you don't need a giant Quonset hut to do all of this.

If I walked you through the factory at Meccanotecnica, what always impresses me is that the buildings never look giant to me, and the areas where they're building the presses are very compact. The finished equipment here in this stand is just very addressable and accessible. I think that any printer that wanted to could find their path to this solution.

[00:25:23] SF: I agree with you. I mean, it's automation. Of course, the goal of automation is to reduce and remove the touch points in a production workflow. This is what we had in mind when we designed the line we are showcasing in drupa, so reducing the touch points at the maximum. In fact, you have over here just one touch point at the beginning when you feed the roll into the book sewer. Then another touch point at the end when you take book blocks out of the trimmer.

[00:25:54] PM: Everything else is magic.

[00:25:56] SF: Everything works automatically. When we ran demos, it's unbelievable because we have two operators over here. But during production, they do nothing. They just supervise. As you said, you can have one supervisor that controls that production is going well and smoothly, and that's it. You can also add, for example, a robot at the end in order to eliminate the second touch point. The goal is to automate as much as possible, and the mantra probably for everybody working here in drupa is automation, automation, automation.

[00:26:34] PM: It really is, and I think it's going to be there. I love the story. I love the compactness of the line. I love the automation. I know you serve a lot of great customers worldwide. Remember book automation in the US, Meccanotecnica, pretty much around the rest of the world.

[00:26:52] DC: I mean, it'll be easy enough to find you, Stefano, because I'm going to put everything anybody needs to connect with you, Meccanotecnica, book automation in the show notes of this podcast. I just want to say moto moto grazie for being such a wonderful host, for keeping me fully caffeinated every time I see you. I still use the little espresso pot that you brought for me at drupa last time. I am so proud of you, to see your success as your booth size continues to grow.

I mean, there is a [inaudible 00:27:27] over your head the whole time. I've been watching these films you have behind you on this giant TV that I would like in my house, by the way, if you're finished. Just this booth is spectacular. Your team is spectacular. You, sir, are spectacular. Thank you so much for letting us come over and visit you. Have a fantastic rest of your drupa. Everybody, Meccanotecnica long and prosper.

[00:27:54] SF: Thank you. Thank you for having me.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:27:58] 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:

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

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

Stefano Formentini: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/stefanoformentini/>

Meccanotecnica: <https://www.meccanotecnicagroup.com/>

Book Automation (US & Canada): <https://bookautomation.com/>

Sirio: <https://www.meccanotecnicagroup.com/aster-europe/en/products/book-finishing/book-finishing-line/sirio-endash-perfect-binder/>

Ultimate Tech: <https://ultimate-tech.com/>

Ricoh: <https://www.ricoh.co.uk/>

Topic Heroes: <https://topicheroes.co.uk/>

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

Pat McGrew: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/patmcgrew/>

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