

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:04] DC: It takes the right skills and the right innovation to design and manage meaningful print marketing solutions. Welcome to Podcasts From the Printerverse where we explore all facets of print and marketing that create stellar communications and sales opportunities for business success. I'm your host Deborah Corn, the Intergalactic Ambassador to the Printerverse. Thanks for tuning in. Listen long and prosper.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:31] DC: Hey, everybody. Welcome to Podcasts From the Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your Intergalactic Ambassador. I have a special guest with me today. His name is Mark Michelson. He is currently the Editor Emeritus of Printing Impressions, formerly the Editor-in-Chief and Director of Content for the last 42 years and nine months of Printing Impressions. Welcome to the podcast, Mark Michelson.

[0:00:58] MM: Thank you, Deb. It's a pleasure to be here.

[0:01:01] DC: Before we make this podcast completely about you, I wanted to make it about me for a moment. I did a little research, and the first blog you ever published for me was in 2010. It was the first time that anything I had written had ever appeared in an industry trade pub. It was actually called Coffee is for Closers. I will never forget it. I shared a story of how I tried to – I attempted to make a sale, my first sale, and all the craziness I encountered because I had no idea what I was doing. It really resonated with the readers of Printing Impressions.

I wrote for Printing Impressions up to October 2022. I just wanted to say thank you for inviting me, for supporting me online and offline for the last 14 years. You will always be one of my favorite event buddies.

[0:02:02] MM: Thank you. I think the first time we met was at Graphics of the Americas.

[0:02:07] DC: Correct in Orlando.

[0:02:09] MM: We were showing print samples. Your mother was there, and that was kind of – you were just sort of trying to make yourself known at that point.

[0:02:18] DC: I was. It was actually my first Project Peacock, and I didn't even realize it. Yes, I called the printers, and I said, "Send me your cool stuff, and we'll show people new things that are going on with print." It was really great. I can't believe you remember that. You hung out in my booth for quite some time.

Now, let's make this all about you. So, you have retired as the editor-in-chief, as I just mentioned, and you have achieved this emeritus title. To me, that's like the Delta Diamond of career status. So, after 42 years and nine months, you certainly have earned retirement, but I want to know how it feels to finally live in that decision after months of anticipation. Will you have any official duties as editor emeritus?

[0:03:09] MM: Yes. I approached my company last year, said, I was thinking about doing it because I wanted it to be a smooth transition to my successor, Ashley Roberts, who you know, and who's going to do a great job, and is doing a great job. I wanted to have the chance to mentor my successor. So, that was very important to me because I wanted it to be smooth sailing. But with that said, it still hasn't quite hit me.

Printing Impressions and my job has been such a part of my life and part of my identity, which I'm sure you've heard that said by many people that have – it's very unusual joining what is now, NAPCO Media, which was the North American Publishing Company. It was only my second job out of college. It's been my life, frankly. It's been a great ride, but I just felt it was time to pass the torch.

[0:04:02] DC: Do you have any official duties as the Editor Emeritus?

[0:04:06] MM: Yes. I'm going to still be contributing to Printing Impressions on a part-time basis. I'm still going to be doing some videos, still do some articles, probably more online articles, hopefully with some commentary, and still doing some webinars.

[0:04:22] DC: Any events? Will I see you at any events, maybe?

[0:04:24] MM: Yes. I think I'm definitely going to be involved in our Inkjet Summit, because I helped launch that, and I've been on the advisory board since the beginning. So, I will definitely be at that. Whether I will be at the Expo in Orlando next year, I can't say for sure at this point, but I hope to still be seen and heard periodically. Obviously, wouldn't be like it was in the past, where I kind of went to everything, but some people go into retirement, and they don't want to look back. They want nothing to do with their former life. I don't fit into that category at all. I still love this industry and hope to still contribute to it in some way and still be a part of it in a lesser way.

[0:05:10] DC: Well, I'll always take your blog contributions for Print Media Centr. If you have nothing to do, just send them on over, Mark. Happy to publish those for you. You wrote an article in Printing Impressions last month about passing the baton that I'd like to dig into. Regarding how you started at Printing Impressions, you alluded to this moment ago, “with a college degree in journalism and two years of experience as the editor of a small-town newspaper in Northern Illinois, I relocated to the Philadelphia area and answered a help wanted ad in the Philadelphia Inquirer.” Want to go back to, why journalism?

[0:05:49] MM: Well, to be honest, I was majoring in marketing and I struggled with the accounting part of it. So, I kind of – my degree was in journalism, but it was actually – I went to Northern Illinois University, actually four generations of my family that got degrees from there which is unusual. But I switched to journalism, and my focus was actually advertising. At that point, they had a news writing focus you could do, which really, back then, everybody went to work for newspapers, because that was pretty much the main employer of journalists. I switched, and I really thought I wanted to be a copywriter at an agency, which looking back, I'm so glad I didn't go down that path because –

[0:06:31] DC: That's interesting.

[0:06:31] MM: You would know, you lose an account at an agency, and they let everybody –

[0:06:35] DC: Oh, yes. Bye.

[0:06:36] MM: I would not be doing a 40-year plus –

[0:06:39] DC: No. No, unless your name was on the agency door.

[0:06:44] MM: Right, so I'm so glad. Of course, the professors, they didn't tell you that in college, but it ended up where I got my degree. First job I got was editor of a weekly newspaper, which is great experience. It covered three small towns. So, they were all right next to each other. Started to learn the politics of, everybody in each community feeling they weren't getting enough exposure or content with what they were doing. I remember the Baptist minister coming in and saying, I needed to ban some books in the public library.

[0:07:17] DC: Oh, lovely.

[0:07:19] MM: No, I dealt with a lot of things. Went to school board meetings, city council meetings, and covered sports, I wrote sports, did everything. I even delivered the newspapers to the distribution centers and paid the paper kids. So, I wore many hats, but you got to start somewhere. I actually have been editor of Printing Impressions almost 43 years I've been at North American or NAPCO Media. I've actually only been editor of Printing Impressions 40 of those years. I actually started as an assistant editor on our packaging magazine, which now called Packaging Impressions. But back then, it was package printing.

Then, I got promoted. We had two other publications that were both six times, and they alternated monthly. One was called World-Wide Printer, and that was distributed outside the US. But the other one was called El Arte Tipografico, which was in Spanish, and I don't know Spanish. That was quite an experience, because –

[0:08:19] DC: That was before Google Translate, which only does literal translation. It doesn't translate what it actually means, just the words.

[0:08:29] MM: Yes. We're talking about early 1980s. So, I had to prepare the content, send it out for translation, then send the translated copy out, because we're using outside typesetters. The galleys would come back, and I would have to proofread pretty much a letter for letter because I didn't know the language. God knows what kind of mistakes there might have been. So, I did that and then I got promoted to editor of Package Printing because the lady that hired me had a baby and decided not to come back. So, I did that.

In 1985, I got promoted to Editor-In-Chief of Printing Impressions, so I had that same job the entire time. People will say, "How could you do the same job for so long?" But the job requirements evolved so much. I mean, it initially was all about the printed publication, and we had several competitors. We were all battling it out for print advertising, and who had the highest circulation, and BPA statements.

Then, it evolved. I mean, as you know, videos, and webinars, and daily e-newsletters became much more. So, it was always challenging. What I wrote, I think, a little bit about in that editorial too, and I actually did kind of a follow-up piece on that. But even before all those other things, just watching the advancements in printing impact the advancements of the way that I was producing the magazine. I mean, we had to do mechanical boards and send out for color separations, and get v-locks, and photos. It was very labor-intensive.

I actually liked the production side of it, but I think back, how did we have time to even write and produce the content? Because we had a thick magazine, sometimes we'd have 10, 15 features, publication. Now, it's nowhere near that. But I think back at it, how do we even create the content? Because just the actual manufacturing side of it was so time-intensive, and we had art department, and opening up, we had art directors with T-squares, and X-ACTO knives, and fax machines, and just opening up the letting between lines, they had to manually do that.

[0:10:44] DC: Right. Totally.

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[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:11:49] DC: I want to get back to what my question was, which was about journalism. I think it's so interesting how you shifted into the production of the magazines, and how you got immersed in the analogy aspect of things. But I want to go back to the journalism thing and something that you just said. Which was that, those magazines used to have 10 featured articles, which I have to assume fall under the definition of what we think journalism is. There's a topic, you do your research, you do your interviews, you get firsthand quotations from people, and you write up an unbiased-by-any-outside-influence, one would hope, article that is trying to educate your audience.

[0:12:47] MM: Well, I always enjoyed English and was good at that. I always like to write. I can't say that I set out to be some people, they know at a young age they want to be a journalist. I can't say I really fall into that category. I mean, like I say, I was always good in English. I was not the left brain, big brain thing. Math was not my forte. But I always felt, I was a decent writer, and I just kind of went down that path.

[0:13:14] DC: Would you agree with the parameters of what a journalist is that I just described? Do you think that that was fair?

[0:13:22] MM: Yes, yes, definitely.

[0:13:24] DC: Okay. Now, based on everything you just said before, videos, and social media, and these outside influences when advertising is now sponsoring news and things of that nature. Do you think there is journalism in the printing industry today?

[0:13:43] MM: Yes, I do. I've always tried to hold things to a standard. It is a little different. I would say that, back when we had several magazines competing with like Graphic Arts Monthly, and American Printer, and High-Volume Printing, and several other ones. I do think the

journalists were tougher on the vendor community. You go to a press conference at Graph Expo and they would ask much more pointed questions. That was different. I wouldn't say there's – part of that is, there's not as many media brands around now as there were then. So, that would be something that has changed. It's not that it was ever confrontational, although I think there were some people that tried to get noticed by being that way, which –

[0:14:33] DC: Sure. You always have that, and you always have the people who want to be contrary just to be contrary, for sure. But I also believe that there is some authenticity in those questions. When I used to do the Printerverse at Graph Expo, I would import Jamie the Printer. Do you remember Jamie the Printer? He would sit in the front row and he was essentially my bullshit meter because he was the printer and he knew how all of these value propositions presented by the manufacturers and the service providers actually came to be.

Sometimes, he would agree that what they're saying is what I got. Sometimes, he would say, "Well, it didn't exactly happen like that." Or, he would say, "We had to get there, but it wasn't as smooth of a process as" – and that was fair because that helps people make informed decisions. I want you to know that I am speaking about journalism in the printing industry, not specific to Printing Impressions or anything, any NAPCO Media properties.

[0:15:42] MM: Right. I hear you.

[0:15:44] DC: I want to have this discussion with you because this is a discussion that is happening everywhere. I mean, whether it's in the, let's say the public world of fake news, or it's in the trade magazines as advertorials, sponsored content. Now, people have to make money, these things are businesses, I understand that. Media companies are not charitable organizations, but at some point, the audience stops believing anything. I think we are almost there, Michael. So, just in the general term, what do you feel about that?

[0:16:22] MM: Yes. Also, just to relate back in terms of, we don't have the analyst community like we had.

[0:16:30] DC: Oh my God, yes.

[0:16:31] MM: That's a whole other discussion. But it wasn't just the editorial side of, you know, people representing media brands. We had a large analyst community that was very involved in the industry. They're still –

[0:16:44] DC: And was essentially unbiased in a lot of ways.

[0:16:49] MM: That community has shrunk drastically. But no, I mean, fortunately, I think Printing Impressions was able to stay away from – I know, like back, I can recall, like American Printer and some of the other publications, we buy a page ad, get a facing page. Now, granted it would be labeled as advertorial, but we fortunately stayed away from that. Yes. Can I say that we did have some advertisers that ran ads where they tried to make it look like editorial? But we would always label it as advertisement.

[0:17:22] DC: I mean, there's no doubt about, and the newsletter says sponsored by, sponsored by, sponsored by, and then some bloggers. One, maybe an article from you, or an article from Ashley. I mean, there's at least one peppered in there every once in a while.

[0:17:35] MM: Yes. We have those featured resources, but I was talking more about the magazine itself.

[0:17:40] DC: Oh, okay. I'm sorry.

[0:17:41] MM: Versus the newsletter. But yes, newsletter does have sponsors.

[0:17:45] DC: I actually don't get the magazine. You guys never let me have it, because I wasn't a printer. Fine, I mean, I get it, it's totally fine, but I'm sorry, that's why I wasn't referring to it because I've actually never seen. Sorry, I've seen them, you know what I'm saying, but I don't get them.

[0:18:00] MM: Get it every month. Right. I think our editorial is very clear what's editorial and what's not. I don't think we've ever really tried to cross that line – because like you say, it's all about trust and it's all about reputation and believability. I've always tried to be very clear about that in terms of our reporting versus something that's presented by a sponsoring kind of relation.

I mean, it's a little bit tougher, obviously, in a newsletter when people are scrolling down and there's all that content. But I think in a printed publication, it's a little bit easier to make that very clear.

[0:18:44] DC: Yes, 100%.

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[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:19:22] DC: I just want to thank you for indulging me for those few questions. Okay. Back to what you wrote in your article. Regarding the vast industry evolution you have seen or written about over the last 42 years. You wrote, "It's been amazing to witness all of the technological developments that have occurred." Now, all of those developments have people behind them, so who are a few people who have inspired you and how?

[0:19:52] MM: That's a tough one. I think people like Frank Romano, who's been such a fixture in our industry.

[0:20:01] DC: You have emeritus status with him now.

[0:20:04] MM: Yes. He's certainly somebody that comes to mind. We had a very popular columnist for several years named Harris DeWese, who wrote about sales, but he did it in a very humorous – his column was very popular. He wrote in a humorous way and self-denigrating kind of way. He referred to me as Attila the Editor in his column. I would have a lot of

printers tell me that, first thing they went to was DeWese on Sales column, the first thing they'd read. That was always something they made sure they read. He had a real wit about him.

We have Bill Farquharson, who writes for us now. Has a lot of similarities. I mean, they're different, but Bill also writes with a lot of humor and wit. I just think I admire people that have that talent, because I think it is an innate talent that is not something that you kind of have that or you don't.

[0:20:58] DC: What about as far as the people behind the technology, the companies, and the people with the companies who have inspired you over the years?

[0:21:08] MM: Yes. I mean, that's tough because it's such a blur, to be honest of so many years. I mean, if you take computer-to-plate, Amos Michelson, no relation, but same spelling, no relation.

[0:21:22] DC: I was like, "Oh, are we getting some patent money, Mark Michelson?"

[0:21:25] MM: No, he was the CEO or President of Creo and Creo really launched the whole computer to plate evolution or revolution, however you want to reference it. Which was certainly a seminal moment in the printing industry in terms of changing processes. Then, we went through desktop publishing stage. There were people like Charlie Pesco, who created the On-Demand Show. When I think back, Frank Steenburgh from Xerox, who led the launch of the DocuTech. Certainly, Benny Landa from Indigo. I remember when he launched the first Indigo Press. I think it was at an IPEX show in England. On, and on, and on.

There's been so many people that have had left such important footprints in the industry over the years. I'd have to really think about it a little more, because those are just some of the names that pop to my mind, but that's certainly not an all-encompassing list by any stretch.

[0:22:28] DC: That's right. We could do a part two and you could fill in those blanks. The article that you wrote was titled "Editor's Note" Time to Pass the Baton," and you've mentioned her before. But I'd like you to take a moment to introduce our listeners to Ashley Roberts.

[0:22:45] MM: Yes. Ashley, she has been with our organization almost 10 years. I actually hired her.

[0:22:52] DC: Good job, Mark Michelson.

[0:22:53] MM: You could see very early on that she was a rising star in our organization, and she was managing editor of Printing Impressions for a long time. Then, we kind of promoted her and she was involved in a lot of other things. She has a master's degree from NYU, their publishing program. I think she got her undergrad degree. I think she went to West Virginia, but I know she got her a master's from NYU. Just really bright, likable, a lot of integrity. I was involved in the selection process, which was nice. Obviously, it wasn't my total decision, but I had input. I couldn't have thought of a better person really to fill my shoes.

[0:23:36] DC: Consider her a journalist, by the way. I sit next to her at events, and she's taking notes and she's got her Otter going, and she's pulls – I mean, I rely on her to tell me who's on stage when you're not sitting next to me, because you know I never know who's up there. I'm so happy that a woman's taking over as well. Yay, girls who print, right?

[0:23:57] MM: Yes. We obviously didn't move her into that, because she was a woman. But I think it is reflective on the change in dynamics in our industry. It's great to see more women in different roles throughout the industry.

[0:24:11] DC: Yes. I was just saying it's a bonus that she's in that role now. Not that it was – she's a plant, Mark, I wasn't implying that. All right, I have some random questions for you and then I will let you go back to your life of retirement. First, do we have to call you Your Emeritus Michelson, now?

[0:24:33] MM: You can call me whatever you want.

[0:24:34] DC: Do you have any like fancy robes that go with the title?

[0:24:38] MM: No, it's sort of, I guess, it was sort of an honorary title. It really means nothing other than the fact that my name can stay on the masthead. I'm still going to actually be helping

Ashley as well. If there were any question she has, I'm going to help her with some contexts for articles. I'm still going to be helping out with our Printing Impressions 300 ranking in terms of the compilation, chasing after companies to get the information for that, which is a huge undertaking. That, we publish every year in December. Although, next year, we're going to actually move it to, I think, the June or July issue.

[0:25:15] DC: That's cool.

[0:25:17] MM: But we just published the last list, which was a 40th annual list. I've been involved with that from the beginning. Was the Printing Impressions 500, and then it became the Printing Impressions 400, then the 350, and now 300. It has been for the last several years.

[0:25:31] DC: So, I don't know. It sounds like you're earning the title of Your Emeritus.

[0:25:35] MM: Yes, I hope so, because I'm still going to be contributing, and still helping, and like I say, I'm trying to smooth the transition.

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[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:26:21] DC: All right. While you're not doing that, I want to know, have you been binge-watching to fill up your free time and what is on your watch list?

[0:26:31] MM: Yes. On television, I mean, I watch a lot of sports. I did see *Baby Reindeer*.

[0:26:36] **DC:** Okay, here we go.

[0:26:38] **MM:** I don't have Netflix.

[0:26:40] **DC:** Do you recommend *Baby Reindeer*?

[0:26:42] **MM:** Yes. I found it very – it was a little bit bizarre, some of it, but it was certainly entertaining and I thought the acting was very good. I think it won a lot of awards.

[0:26:53] **DC:** Okay. What else is on your watch list or have you been watching?

[0:26:58] **MM:** Yes, like I say, it's pretty much sports. I mean, I do try to stay up on news and you want to watch different news channels.

[0:27:06] **DC:** Do you ever watch like those replays of old basketball games they have on TV sometimes?

[0:27:11] **MM:** No.

[0:27:12] **DC:** Do you watch Curling? I'm fascinated with Curling. When I see it on ESPN, I have to watch it.

[0:27:17] **MM:** That's a winter Olympic sport too.

[0:27:19] **DC:** I think I could be a sweeper. I really do. Like sometimes, I just watch these sports to see the ones I can do. That, and although I have a little problem with Cornhole just because my last name is Corn. But I think, I mean, when I look at these professional sports, I'm like, "Hey, I can throw a beanbag. I know it takes some skill to get it in there, but it's not like I'm riding a bicycle like 17 miles, or anything like that."

Okay. Last question for you. This goes back to the print chat rules, which you have to pick one, and you can only pick one. For everybody listening, this is when Mark Michelson's brain explodes, but here we go. If you were starting a mid-sized print business today and could only

invest in one press, would it be offset, digital toner, or inkjet? To reiterate, you can only pick one and you have to pick one. "It depends" doesn't get to come into this.

[0:28:24] MM: No, I've got a pretty quick answer for that.

[0:28:26] DC: Oh my God, I'm so excited. Go for it.

[0:28:28] MM: I think inkjet. I think that's the future of our industry, not to diminish offset because I still think it still has a huge role in the industry, but I think the future is inkjet. I think we're going to be printing on things that are even beyond our imagination. It opens up a lot of new windows because you can really print inkjet onto anything. So yes, I think that's actually a pretty easy answer. I thought it was going to be tougher than that.

[0:28:54] DC: Oh my God. Well, now I feel challenged. However, I just want to say you're the first person that's ever answered one of those third rail questions so quickly. So, no-brainer, Deb. This is it. So, thank you for that, Mark Michelson. Thank you for everything you have done to help me, and the industry, and for your service to the world. Through your journalism, through your integrity, and through really being there to help people stay informed, and make the best decisions for their business. Everything you need to connect with Mark and Printing Impressions will be in the show notes. Until next time, everybody, print long and prosper.

[END OF EPISODE]

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[END]

Mentioned in This Episode:

Mark Michelson on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/mark-michelson-b15a842>

Printing Impressions: <https://www.piworld.com/>

NAPCO Media: <https://www.napco.com/>

InkJet Summit: <https://ijsummit.com/>

'Editor's Notebook: Time to Pass the Baton': <https://www.piworld.com/article/editors-notebook-time-to-pass-the-baton/>

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