

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:00] DC: This podcast is sponsored by XMPie, transforming communications and print businesses across the globe for more than 20 years. Learn how they can help you enhance, and grow your services at xmpie.com, and through the links in the show notes.

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]

[0:00:45] DC: Hey, everybody. Welcome to Podcast From the Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your Intergalactic Ambassador. Today, we are beaming down to New Orleans. I think I said that right. We are speaking to Brian Hughes. He is the president of Pel Hughes. As a leading direct marketing service provider, Pel Hughes provides measurable marketing solutions to help companies efficiently acquire new customers, nurture existing ones, and maximize marketing ROI. If only every printer on the planet had that as their description, I would be such a happy person.

We also have Katie Fisher. She is a regional sales executive at XMPie. XMPie is a leading provider of software for cross-media, variable data, and one-to-one marketing. They offer solutions to help businesses create and manage highly effective direct marketing and omnichannel campaigns. Welcome to the program, Brian. Welcome to the program, Katie.

Katie, I want to start with you. Can you please let our listeners know about your work at XMPie and about your partnership with Brian?

[0:01:59] KF: Good morning, Deborah. Thanks for having us on. I appreciate the podcast, and the invite, and I'm really excited about some of the messaging that we're going to

provide today. As you mentioned, I work for an organization called XMPie. We are a leading provider in the personalization space. We've been working with Pel Hughes for, gosh, over 20 years now, started kind of in the very infancy of our company. Have grown as Pel Hughes has grown into other applications outside of just traditional transactional type variable print productions. So, really excited.

[0:02:40] DC: Happy 70th anniversary, Brian.

[0:02:43] BH: Thank you.

[0:02:43] DC: For Pel Hughes. The headline for your "Who We Are" page on your website says, "Creating a Legacy Through Resilience and Innovation." Can you share how your family has been doing that since 1954, and especially who started your company?

[0:03:00] BH: Yes. Well, thank you, Deborah, for having us on. It's great to be into your universe. I always enjoyed your podcast and your content, so I'm happy to be a part of it. The company was started in 1954 by my grandmother, Alice Hughes. So, she bought a small letter shop company and started a little printing company in 1954. So, she was very ahead of her time. Pel Hughes is actually her husband, my grandfather, who never worked a day in his life in Pel Hughes. He had another job and she utilized his – he had a little bit of a name recognition in the city, so she leveraged that name and said, "You go work in your job, don't touch my business." She started it in the '50s and she passed away in the mid-seventies. My father became the president in the early seventies.

We were a small print and direct mail company all the way through the mid-eighties. In the mid-eighties, we started to get into some transactional data printing to start to do some bills, and statements, and those things in the mid-eighties. That was one of our milestones as we started to grow there. We got into the data side of it, doing the transactional data printing.

In the mid-nineties, we started to get as the casino and gaming industry started to come into our region. Vendors were needed to be able to do graphic communications, but also handle intricate and complex data matrices, and offer matrices, and those things. That kind of merged a little bit into some of our niches with transactional data, and be able to handle data-driven content in the

transpromo and transactional space, but also do the print and direct mail with graphic communications. That kind of started to merge and form a little bit of how we handled that kind of work.

In the advent of the Internet, we saw that the different types of media whether it's print, radio, and TV, that's going to grow a little bit. And we kind of saw that the Internet was going to be a very powerful contributor to how people were going to consume content. So, we got into digital printing, got our first Xerox DocuColor, and went and sold "pleasing color" for a few years. That was always a fun way to sell that. We started to do some storefronts and started to do short-run digital color.

Then, in 2004, we started to have a discussion with XMPie, who is this great platform that offered the ability to take a data set, whether it's a customer data set or a list, whatever it was, any data set and be able to distribute relevant content utilizing full-color printing. So now, you can swap images and personalize things in full color. We saw that as a very powerful way because we always thought that we needed to deliver and distribute relevant content, timely content to the audience. But also gave us the ability to do, distribute content online too as well, whether it's e-mail or personalized URLs or those things. So, that was a platform.

We got onto XMPie in 2004 in very infant stages and have grown with them for the last 20 years. The resilient part, I would say, we've been hit with a couple of challenges through 70 years as everybody else would have. We ran into a little small storm called Katrina in 2005, the year after we've actually onboarded XMPie. Our building is dock high and we actually had about eight feet of water in our area. So, we had about two feet of water in the building. We were down for about 11 months.

As we came out of Katrina, and we repaired everything, and got new equipment, and those settings, we elected to pivot a little bit and focus more on the variable data direct mail and got away a little bit from the transactional data. Just because of that, there was a lot of disaster recovery-type things, and we actually thought that bills and statements, you know, as everything started to go in line with e-bill pay and those things, we wanted to leverage what we can do with the XMPie platform. That was the ability to, again, to distribute relevant content, utilize our data-driven tools. Obviously, we've been a big believer for the longest time of offline, whether it's print

collateral or direct mail. But then, also, be flexible enough to be able to distribute that content via email and online too as well.

[0:07:10] DC: Three years after Katrina, which was only two years after you got your print shop back up and running, the recession hit in the United States as well. So, you really had three probably years there that you were pulling that lovely head of hair out of your head. When I read your story and your history, I mean, resilience – I mean, Katrina alone could have been, let's just say a historic moment in your history there. I just lived through Helene and Milton back-to-back here in Florida, so I was really feeling for you when I read that.

Then, when I realized the recession was only two years after you got everything back up and running, that must have really been a disruptive moment. I want to get to that now but through kind of a longer way. That's going back to your website, which I spent so much time on, Brian because I just honestly think that there are just so many things to love there. The link to your site is in the show notes, and I would implore everybody to go take a look at it because the user experience is exceptional.

First and foremost, I am a user, I am a print customer, so I look at printer's websites to understand how I could immediately get how you can help me, and the areas that you think that your expertise. That's exactly what I got. I could quickly understand what you offered. You have it categorized in a very simple way. The results I could generate with the print offered in each of the categories, and the specific value proposition of why working with your company, not just the medium of digital print, but working with your company would give me an advantage and certainly generate the results that I want.

Obviously, after 70 years, you're doing that for clients and still doing that for clients. So, because your services are based on data-driven marketing and communications, you did mention before you saw this thing called the Internet and figured that it would be a great source of one-day content creation. I was actually there when – I worked in an integrated agency when – we were like, "What's a banner ad?" And all of a sudden, we were doing these things called banner ads.

But that, for a 70-year-old company, I have to admit, and family-owned, which I'll put that on top of it. I have to assume that that was a pretty hefty decision to change the structure of your

business, and how you communicate, how you sell, how you have to explain these technologies to print customers who also might be from hundred-year-old companies. I mean, you also have to understand where you are in the country. There's older stuff there. The casinos – I worked on casino accounts. We discussed that before. There was a crap load of print in casinos, and it changes every week. From menus, to who's in playing in the lounges, to what this – the lucky draw is, or there's a boat they're giving away. I mean, it is crazy how many iterations of things happen. I just really want you to share that conversation that your family had that was like, "Okay, there's a new frontier out there and we must not only take part of it, but lead the charge."

[0:10:47] BH: Yes. I think that's been a part of our philosophy for the longest time. I'll credit my father who's, back in the eighties and nineties, that we were always looking for somewhat of a niche or what was the market buying, or where was – it was almost the Wayne Gretzky thing. I want to skate where the puck's going to be, not where the puck is. Sometimes you get there too early, but that was always kind of a philosophy of ours of, what is the market buying, what does the market need, what are the technology available to us, how can we leverage that, the existing stuff we're currently doing.

I think that we always had that mindset, I think has helped us through the resilience – on the resilience side of it, even with the crash in 2008 and 2009. We lost one – our biggest customer was about 12% and 15% of our business that filed for bankruptcy, and that we took a big hit there. But I think as we continue to offer, and again, the XMPie platform, and how do we leverage that into the ability, because everybody, for the longest time – when the Internet came on board, the ability to distribute content so quickly, very personalized, and very relevant, is there, and it's still there. A lot of people saw that as a way to eliminate print, which in a lot of ways it has in certain forms of communication. So, you had to be, obviously, print and direct mail is still super powerful, and the return on investment has always been – has outperformed a lot of the digital media.

But you had to be there, you had to be omnichannel, and that's where I think the, us partnering with XMPie and the ability to leverage that, to be able to do what we currently do with our data team, and to prepare the data to distribute that content in a very relevant way. Again, I think we've always championed that what we're selling and what we can offer is the ability to have

your marketing dollars effective and your marketing dollars measurable. That's kind of what we try to sell, what we try to offer, and what we try to give our customers and partners.

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[0:12:44] DC: Are you looking to elevate your game, take your bottom-line customer relationships, and events to the next level? Then, I want to work with you. I'm Deborah Corn, the Intergalactic Ambassador to the Printerverse. I engage with a vast, global audience of print and marketing professionals across all stages of their careers. They are seeking topical information and resources, new ways to serve their customers and connect with them, optimize processes for their communications and operations, and they need the products and services and partnership you offer to get to their next level.

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[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:13:45] DC: When you say that direct mail is still one of the most effective communication channels, I don't disagree with you, but I think it needs a little asterisk there. Which is, when it is meaningful to the person who receives it, right? I mean, that's the difference between effective marketing mail and junk mail. Junk mail is just coming to my house and it's like, again, I mentioned I live in Florida. Why am I getting like carpet cleaning coupons? Like, they don't really have carpets in Florida. It's not a thing, because things get moldy and moist. So, we don't really have carpet down here. So, why am I getting these things in the mail just because somebody has me on a mailing list? As opposed to, steam clean my vinyl floors or something like that. Then, that's super interesting to me. Why am I getting something for a pizzeria 40 minutes from my house instead of four blocks from my house?

So, that doesn't happen without tools. Now, you made this decision a really long time ago. I don't know if this is an advantage or a disadvantage, but like I said, I was a print customer. So,

when I started hanging around with all you printing industry people, I only ever knew of XMPie as the tool that everybody uses because most printers, they certainly have name recognition in the marketplace. So, how did you land on XMPie all those years ago? Was it the only game in town or did you do some research and you were like, "This is the company we want to grow with"?

[0:15:22] BH: We were a Xerox shop for a long time, starting back in the eighties. So, a lot of our digital printers were all Xerox and Xerox was a great partner and is a great partner for us for a long time for over 40 years. Under Xerox, we utilize a variable data tool called VIPP to do a lot of our transactional data through the eighties and nineties. XMPie was something that was introduced to us through Xerox prior to then being under the umbrella of Xerox, that we started to look at that, started to look at some of the tools of what you can do for graphic communication. So, it was a natural progression.

There was some pluses and minuses of what XMPie can do versus VIPP. So, they're just two different tool sets, and it looked like we landed on that XMPie platform just because we saw the ability to do some other things into the variable data, omnichannel, communications with personalized URLs, and some of those things too as well. That was probably that progression there. But the tool we used prior was VIPP, which was very powerful, but then there was just, again, it's Philips screwdriver and flathead, and it seems like in these pluses and minuses, I guess from a lack of another analogy, but yes. Seems like it was a tool that was a natural progression for us of its capabilities.

[0:16:38] DC: And how did you start using it? Like with your own marketing to begin with, or did you find a willing customer to take a chance?

[0:16:45] BH: Back then, the big thing for us, the newer thing, the hot new button was the personalized URLs, and they're called it PURLs and people thought that was jewelry. So, that was obviously very bleeding edge, and it's like, "Oh, each person can have its own personalized website." To be able to try and articulate that into people that are just buying print, or buying direct mail, and this is what you can do.

Our challenge has always been, and whatever that new thing is, and tried to go to market with that is muscle memory. People have that muscle memory. Ten years ago, we could do

personalized QR codes on pieces that you can scan. It goes immediately to a PURL, or it goes to an offer. Whatever that is, we were doing that 10, 12 years ago. It was completely foreign then, and we can do that now with just the advent of QR codes since the pandemic has just skyrocketed.

Those have always been the challenges there, of how do we get those really new cool things, effective things to market and how to be able to do that with ears and audiences that have muscle memory that they've been doing for the last five or 10 years. Variable data colors, now, same thing. We were able to do that very seamlessly on seamlessly on an XMPie platform. But to go upstream, and have people build image libraries, and tag that in their data to be able to offer that relevant communication. There's a muscle memory there that always is a challenge to have people overcome.

[0:18:09] DC: Okay. I have one more question on this and then we'll move on, if you'll allow me. So, you mentioned people who buy direct mail and people who buy printing, but I'm sure you agree also have customers, I call them civilians. Just the people off the street who need things and don't actually buy print. There is an education curve there. As I said, your website is very comprehensive. I understand it, but I was a professional print buyer. The person who owns the yogurt store might not understand what data-driven marketing is.

So, how are you doing any further education on what those capabilities and the value that they bring. Most important, how are you training your salespeople to speak about them in a way that doesn't terrify civilians out there who are like, "Oh, you want a data?"

[0:19:06] BH: Well, I would say, yes, we can do print nerd stuff all the time, and do data nerd stuff all the time, and then people would start hanging up on us. What people understand is that I got to market my products, I got to market my service. And I'm going to go spend X amount into this campaign or X amount into this thing, and it better make me money. How can I tell if it makes me money? So, then, is it effective or are people going to respond? Am I going to do a TV ad or a radio ad?

Everybody's fighting for that marketing budget, and they have to answer to bosses, and it has to be relevant, and it's got to be effective, and it's got to be measurable. That's where I think the

power of what we can do is, "Hey, I can make your marketing relevant. I can make it effective. I'm not going to send a mail piece to someone in Florida that needs carpet cleaning, because there's data, there's information that we can use." There's existing data you have and your customer is rich. There's census data and all kinds of data overlay of modeling and profiling your best customers to be able to look, let's leverage that data and just market smart. We don't have to get into how we can do variable data and stuff like that. We kind of help you do that."

From a layman's, the civilian's term, you have to market your product, you have to market your service, you have to grow your business. We have ways that it's very measurable, to be able to measure it in real-time. Then, what's the effective part? How can you make it that effective? It's got to be engaging. It's got to be relevant. That's where the XMPie platform allows us to be really creative, utilizing all the Adobe products in all the different forms of media. But then, it's got to be relevant. So, that's where the data-driven content is based off of whatever those attributes are, gender, age, household income, other demographics, geography, all those different things. It's going to be relevant.

If I put "Dear Deborah" on a piece, and I say, "Dear Deborah" in full color, and I'm sending you carpet cleaning, and you got a house full of tile. Well, you don't really care if it's in full color, right? Talking through our sales reps, and there's always a challenge with price. Because the postage goes up every three minutes, which is always a challenge. Other forms of communication are very inexpensive and you can do a million emails. So, there's other forms of communication that people are –

[0:21:18] DC: Yes, but no one's going to open them, Brian. I'm just going to say that. No one's going to open those emails. Please continue.

[0:21:24] BH: You're right. People do, which I do every day, I do a mass deletion every day. You have to be in those channels and that's the power of XMPie. You have to be able to distribute that. You have to be on social media. You have to be in all these different channels to get your message out. I think the beauty of what XMPie offers is that you can do it all online and offline.

[0:21:41] DC: Yes. I mean, I couldn't agree with you more with everything you just said there. Katie, go ahead.

[0:21:46] KF: Yes. One thing I think Brian does really well inside his organization is, he does have a team that really supports going through the data, and setting everything up, and getting the XMPie laid out. So much so that I think you've done some in-house pieces that really talk to some of those vertical markets that your sales reps can use as well. I've seen your Christmas pieces that you do as well, to kind of talk to some of the innovative things that people may not even think about. Do you want to talk a little bit more to that, Brian?

[0:22:21] BH: Yes. We do, I would say, over the last maybe five to ten years. We do our self-promo holiday campaign. We really try to leverage all the different touch points and capabilities of what XMPie does offer. So, there will be a personalized variable data direct mail piece that goes out. We're utilizing PURLs, we utilize personalized QR codes, and follow-up emails based off some logic-driven, whether you respond or not respond. Then, do a customized or personalized gift based off of what you responded in. So, we kind of try and leverage, and market, and get it out to our customers, and our prospects of what the capabilities are, and what you can do to make.

It's always been, we try to make it engaging, so I think it's always been engaging. That's kind of helped us sell that and give our sales reps a lift of like, so now, you don't have to go speak and just say it verbally of what all we can do. Now, people are experiencing what can be done. So, that has given our sales team a lift too, as well.

[0:23:24] DC: Well, first of all, I need to get on your mailing list. That's the first thing. So, we'll have to rectify that after this podcast. But I also want to say that, the way that you have it positioned on your site, do you want more customers? Do you want to retain them? Click here, right? Yes, I do want that. Thank you so much. Do I need to understand how it happens? No. But what I do need to understand is that, if I'm that civilian, I must be a collaborator in this process, which also means that people don't have to get terrified. You can just know up to your most excellent point, a few data points about somebody, their name, maybe what their last purchase was. So, that you can say, "Well, okay, they purchased – they leased a car three years ago or two years ago, they're probably up for another lease." That's just human, that's deduction. That's not even data.

If a civilian print customer and a salesperson, or a representative from a data-driven communications business or printer can have that conversation with a print customer and let them know that it's not as scary as they might think it is. That all of this is going to getting you more customers, helping you to keep them. Then, there's all the stuff about loyalty programs and everything like that. The only other thing I wanted to say is that, through that personalization, even if it is minimal personalization, a business has the opportunity to create trust and authenticity with their customers, with the recipients. That is what gets those emails opened. It works together, in my opinion, moving forward. So, it is super important that your sales team, which is obviously doing it correctly, is not freaking people out, but letting them know with the most minimal information you can have an impact and you can even show them the results. How are you showing them results?

[0:25:31] BH: With the Internet and utilizing the XMPie platform, there's back-end dashboards that gives you all the email open rates, and response rates, and those things. So, as the ability with a personalized URL gets really granular, and the fact that now you know that Deborah responded, what Deborah clicked on and Katie did not, or Katie clicked on and fulfilled the form, or gave us information that we can append to exist in data. So yes, I'm interested. No, I'm not interested. Or, yes, I'm interested in choice B versus A. That is all real-time data that you can get that's not always measurable or challenging to be measured in other forms of media, whether it's TV, and radio, and those things.

So, the real-time data metrics that you can get in emails, and email campaigns, and online, and those things. Well, that extends now into direct mail too as well. Because now, I'm clicking on a QR code, and it's not just a QR code that goes to your main site. It's a QR code that says, "Welcome Deborah" that has relevant content, based off whatever information that is. Whether it's existing data that I have on your last purchase, or geographically, here's the closest store of our business. All those different things, it's relevant content. Again, it's not just Dear Deborah, the bunch of stuff that we don't know about you. It's Dear Deborah with relevant content.

Now, I'm capturing information that, "Oh, Deborah visited the page, she clicked on this, she didn't click on this." So then, there's follow-up communication that can be automated to be able to continue that conversation with those customers or prospects. That's where the relevancy, the real-time data, that's where it gets really powerful of what you can do there. Again,

sometimes we get into – yes, you can have a 17-touch campaign that has emails and printing, sales collateral, follow up, and all these different things, and then you can overwhelm somebody, and then they just hang up on you and say, "This is crazy. I just wanted to get –" To your point, it can start very small. You don't need a lot of information, whatever you can use, existing information that you have, and make it a little bit more relevant and make it also engaging too, as well. Now, you're leveraging some of the full color variable capabilities too.

[0:27:33] DC: Yeah.

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[0:27:36] DC: Printspiration is streaming across the Printerverse on the Project Peacock Network, and our mission to provide education and resources for print customers, students, and printers around the world has never been more accessible. Watch what you want, when you want, where you want. It's free. Visit ProjectPeacock.TV to access original programming, and replays from our online events. Learn about the Peacock partners and companies featured in our shows. Join our mailing list to learn about new episode premieres, and series launches, and create a free account to make watchlists. Ready for your close-up? Get your Peacock show on air by visiting ProjectPeacock.TV and request your partnership proposal today. Peacock long and prosper.

[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:28:27] DC: I mean, it's really incredible. Print can be used like programmatic advertising, just like the digital marketing when a data-driven marketing communications company or you call yourself a printer out there. If you can convince your customer to put that pixel on the website that's required to know that, "Okay, I've come in through the landing page. Now, what else am I looking at?"

I've heard some of the most amazing case studies for colleges and technical schools because they can drill down on the people who are consistently revisiting the financial aid page. Now, you could say that those people are probably the furthest down your sales cycle than anybody else. If this is what they're looking for versus somebody who keeps looking at the sports information, the teams that they could join. I played trombone in the marching band, so I was

interested in the musical programs that they had. So, there's a way to really drill down. Now, you have a ton of customer success stories, and I'm wondering if you could share a few with the listeners out there.

[0:29:43] BH: Sure. So, I'll touch on one of the ones that we've had, and I think you were referencing a little bit of what the new tool or it's been out for a few years with the direct mail retargeting, which is, to me, a game changer in the direct mail space because of what you can do, how it answers the question that we always get a lot. "Hey, when's the best time to send direct mail?" Which is, obviously, that varies. There's a lot of variables that go into play there.

[0:30:06] DC: I think Wayne Gretzky knows the answer to that question. It's right before I need something is the best time to get it.

[0:30:13] BH: Very good. The direct mail retargeting is, you put a pixel on your website, and then we start to capture the behavior of people that may have visited a bunch of times, or have come back, or have clicked on certain pages on your website. So now, we're building an activity of the ones that have and starting to score those folks that have a high propensity to act or a high propensity to add. If it's an e-commerce and you have a shopping cart, and the abandoned shopping cart. Obviously, those folks start to get tagged and segment an inversion based off of what they're shopping or what their activity is online on your website.

Well, immediately that day, we get a database of those folks that have visited and we're sending out a direct mail piece. One of our case studies is an apparel store, an e-commerce apparel store, a nationwide apparel store. That we're tracking that behavior and appending when we get that data every day, but we version it based off of gender. So, whether you're shopping for male, shopping for female, or there's three or four other versions that that we do there. We're capturing that data, it's segmented, it comes to us segmented at midnight every night, and we're then utilizing XMPie to be able to market in a very relevant way of geographic with their closest stories based off of their zip code, but also the content. If they're shopping for mail, you're going to get images from men's apparel, female apparel, and so on.

There's relevant content there that we're marketing to folks that have a high propensity to act because they've been on their site. If you go to someone's site and you got it for five seconds

and leave, you're not going to get this piece. But these are the ones that are peaking, they're on the goal line, they had that high propensity to buy or act. Those are the ones that we're sending very relevant timely content that they're getting a postcard. Again, direct mail being the biggest, most effective channel that outperforms digital channels for years. So, you leverage that channel, but also in a very relevant timely way that you could do digitally. So, that has been very effective.

We've seen four to six X of return on ad spend, and their goal was to hit two to 2.5x. So, over the last year and a half, they've consistently seen almost double of what they anticipated. So, that's been a very effective campaign.

[0:32:32] DC: That's incredible. I had a couple of friends last year who actually owned print businesses. They went to an eTail, eTailers' conference. As a printer, and I was so proud of them, they had a booth. I was like, thank you for infiltrating these spaces. This is what we need. It was really interesting because I said, "What did you learn from the eTailers?" Whether they have a brick-and-mortar store and they also sell online or they only are only online business, they have a significant people leave things in the shopping cart situation, where they believe the answer to that is send people an email, put another banner ad in front of their face. But that is not really triggering people to go back, buy the other thing. Where, they are getting results from sending direct mail to people, like, "Hi, I'm the lamp. You took the table, but you left me. I'm so lonely. Come get me." And maybe there's a discount, or there's some sort of incentive. You know that somebody was interested enough to put it in their shopping cart.

I mean, I'm glad that Amazon doesn't do it because I just kind of keep things in my shopping cart to buy them later. As I, of course, they know me at this point. They're putting all the things I must have. Not really, but I think I do. She and I should probably not be in the same room together. We'll buy everything. But there's such an opportunity. Look at online businesses, look at all those digital – anybody who's doing digital marketing and ask them, "How are you doing with those newsletters? How are you doing with those emails? Oh, your open rates are not matching up with your website traffic and what people are doing. Try print to emotionally connect with them."

The other thing I wanted to cover before the last thing we're going to cover, which is personalized video, which I'm fascinated with. You actually have a really interesting story about, I would say, backing in an inkjet press to your operation. Most people do it the other way, and I'll let you explain what I mean by that, please. How did the Canon ProStream come into your life, and how has it really changed your business?

[0:34:53] BH: In 2000, when we got our first digital color printer with Xerox, the DocuColors, we saw the ability to do short run color, but also the ability to do variable data printing. So now, I can take, instead of just pre-printing something and addressing it, now I can take your database and I can version, and segment, and deliver relevant content, relevant imagery, and offers, and all those different things through direct mail. The challenge with, for the years, we've all had sheet-fed toner devices that hit the quality that you need to get as close as you can to offset print, which that always became, here's offset print and digital print has caught up. So, we went through that kind of trajectory there.

We saw the ability to do data-driven content through direct mail. We loved it, but then you get limited on quantity because of cost and time of what that offered. So, a lot of our higher volume stuff we did was preprinted shells. You may have two or three versions of shells. And all the variable data was on black ink overlay of pre-printed shells.

For the last decade, we hated the workflow because a lot of our – we had really tight SLAs, everything had to be out yesterday kind of things. So, you had to pre-print shells, you had to wait for ink to dry, cut it, and put it into a tray, and then do the variable data, then cut it again, and then finish it, and all those different things. That process of the four to six-step process of things that we need to get out in high volumes in very tight turns. We started to look for technology that we can leverage what we've been doing for years on 5,000 postcard piece that's easily can be done in digital color. How can we do that with half a million? How can we do that with a million pieces? So, paying attention to that inkjet technology, you had to get treated stocks, and the quality wasn't there, and they came from the transactional side. So, there was a race to how do you get to the quality and the price and all those different things there.

We paid attention to all those different things and looked at a whole bunch of different OEMs, and we landed on the Canon ProStream, which has been in two years into its installment. We

basically say it was a plug-and-play because we were doing all the different things on the front end that you could do for 5,000 or 10,000-piece. Now, we can do and take the top off with what we can do. So, we call it mass personalization. Now, you can do that. Now, you're leveraging the content you have, and you can version that, and you're not limited by quantity.

There's a challenge there sometimes because the folks that we've been talking to that have done shells for so long, there's muscle memory in there. I'm saying, look, you have an 800,000-piece can be completely personalized and relevant to that person. You don't have to have shell version, but there's some homework you have to do upstream, and how do you do that, and segment, and create bigger segments, bigger versions or multiple versions, and those things to make it even more relevant, which we've done. That's the transition. The muscle memory of what was always been done traditionally to what it can do now, and the ability of the XMPie platform to be able to do that. Our data team, which has been superstars for us.

The ability to do that is very – that's not the challenging part. The challenging part is probably upstream to prepare that data, to get that data, and the imagery, and those things. How do you version those things to be able to effectively do it in the mail? So, yes, that's how we landed on the ProStream.

[0:38:12] DC: And combining these two technologies really does create a brand-new growth strategy for you. I assume you can go after completely different customers now.

[0:38:23] BH: There are existing customers that had larger projects that now we are able to play in that space, because we can do it effectively, we can do it at a good price point, and we can get it out at the same time.

[0:38:33] DC: I don't need to interrupt, but were you turning them away before with the bigger quantities, saying, "Sorry, I just can't help you with that"?

[0:38:39] BH: Well, yes. So, some of it, we weren't competitive because there was just – we didn't have the equipment to do that, to be able to turn it in the times the times we had, so we added capacity and added capabilities. I don't think we were playing in a certain space that had smaller campaigns. But now, we're able to take a look at some of those other bigger campaigns. Yes. So, some was existing customers and someone was existing – or some new prospects that

said, "Hey, now we can do this. Knowing about you guys prior to, having really had the opportunity to do that, but now we went back with newer capabilities and equipment."

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[EPISODE CONTINUES]

[0:39:46] DC: One of the things that you're moving into is personalized video, which is also a capability that XMPie can help you with, which is just fascinating to me, the whole thing. In your infant stages of developing this service, although you have been testing it out, I think it's just awesome that you're willing to have this conversation when you don't have exact answers at the moment. But there are other people out there that might also be trying to figure it out. So, why personalize video and specifically from a – I know you're a data-driven marketing communications company, which separates you from a print shop. But, I'm still curious, what is required on your end, including, do you need a video crew?

[0:40:36] BH: Yes. Personalized video, again, it probably plays in line with our history of how we're looking what's the next thing. I think with social media, what video is done in TikToks, and Instagram, and everything there. I mean, people are just consuming video all day, every day. The ability to align ourselves with – or utilize our data-driven capabilities in print and online channels with email, and do all those different things. Now, we're able to do that inside of a video. Now, if you go to a personalized URL, and you have images, and content, and offers based off of that data that we have of you.

Now, I can put a video in there, and embed a video, utilize the ability to do some data-driven, some personalization inside the video too as well. So, all the different practices we've done with

print, with direct mail, with email, and personalized URLs, we can now do that inside of a video. So now, let's engaged in – so, not only as video engaging, and obviously. everybody is just consuming video all day, every day. Now, it can be relevant based off of – so now, we're kind of leveraging and XMPie has offered the ability to leverage that ability to do data-driven content, but inside of a video. So, it's kind of a – I don't even know the statistics on how many videos people watch a day inside of social media channels. It's probably too much, I would say that, but that's where –

Again, it's engaging. We're always into, how do we make marketing effective? How do we make it engaging? How do we make – so people are investing their dollars, and they don't want to flush it down the toilet, they want to make it effective and want to make it measurable and see the ROIs they're looking for. I think video is the next progression of that.

[0:42:17] DC: Just the last part of it, about the video itself, where is that coming from?

[0:42:22] BH: Yes. XMPie is a plug-in in all the Adobe products. So, After Effects is the video component of Adobe, and it's utilizing an XMPie technology and plug it inside of there that you can do. Again, we are in somewhat of the infant stage and we've done a few ourselves. So, this is somewhat new to us. But the ability to be able to do that and plug in inside of those After Effects and do personalized content and you can obviously do a whole bunch of different – you're unlimited of what you can currently do in After Effects. You're just now implementing personalized or variable data areas, whether it's text, or images, or those kinds of things in there, into the video editing part of it.

[0:43:04] DC: I'm assuming you shot your own video for your own promo. Would your customers have to shoot their own video or are you going to offer those services as well?

[0:43:13] BH: Yes. There's existing content. So, if a customer or prospect has existing video content, that can be leveraged and utilized that, and then built upon that. We do not have our own video production, but we have partners that do video production that can do that. Or, there's some templates that you can download. Again, it's probably similar to a lot of other channels that you can buy email templates. You may have an existing campaign of an email template that you can utilize or you can have a complete HTML design similar to print. That I

have an existing catalog design I want to modify, or I want to design a whole new one, or maybe there's some template there. It's not too far different than any kind of other media that you can have. There's probably some templates you can buy. I know there's some templates you can buy. Or, I want to do a complete video shoot of brand-new ones or have all this existing content. Can you utilize that or can be mixed and matched?

[0:44:06] DC: You actually just brought it home and made it sound a lot more simple than I thought it was because you're right. If I think of the video as an asset, a logo as an asset, a photo of your business is an asset. Somebody's doing that, whether you're hiring a photographer, or a designer, or a marketing service provider has the capabilities of a design team. I mean, you work with your partners to get things done. Speaking of that, Katie, how does XMPie support somebody taking on something like a personalized video, and for all the other features that they might want to start implementing for their business?

[0:44:45] KF: Great question, Deborah. So, as far as XMPie, we're here for our customers to support them regardless of what their needs are. Looking at Brian at Pel Hughes, they've been through a lot of evolution over the years. So, they started with a very simple system for just print production, as he talked about previously. Then, they actually kind of evolved and went into more of a web-to-print to open up portals for their customers as well through the XMPie portfolio. They've also done some things with personalized images. So, those are kind of those wow-catching images like your name in the clouds, or in flowers, or whatever it may be. Then, they've grown.

So, going to production inkjet, that taxes systems because the production output is so much greater than what it would be if they were just doing overprints. So, we've really scaled with them. You know, we're excited. A lot of their Christmas projects and things like that, they've come to us for special things that we can do to kind of help them out to showcase what they're doing over there. And one of those is with the video. So, I know our R&D team has kind of had conversations with Brian's team over there to kind of help them work through some things on that end.

We also have our normal resources as far as the library of online resources that they're available to. We also have a really active Google group where we have a lot of users that are

doing things very are to what Brian's team is doing, and they can kind of converse as well. We have some moderators that'll jump in with some comments, and helps, and tips, and trips as well.

[0:46:25] DC: Excellent. So, Brian, in the beginning of this podcast, I started off by congratulating you on the 70-year history of your company, and we discussed legacy. You're leading the company into the next 70 years. What do you hope your legacy will be?

[0:46:44] BH: Oh, wow. That's a loaded question. First of all, the team we've had that probably plays upon their resilience. We've had very little turnover. We've had employees here that have been here for 35, 40 years. Our data programming team has been intact for the last 15 years. Obviously, probably since Katrina, we've been adjusting forces there, due to unforeseen things there. But anyway, the resilience that we've had, I think it starts with our employees.

We have an excellent team that has the experience, that has the willingness to go explore new adventures and always do that and bring something new to our customers. I think it's more on the service side of, how do we help our customers and our prospects? Again, not print more, not spend more with us. How do we help you guys be effective, and grow, and retain your customers? Does it have to be through print? We obviously believe in it. I think the data shows that print and direct mail is still effective. If it was, we wouldn't continue to invest in the equipment that we have, but it doesn't have to be just print. What other channels are effective? Can it be in those digital channels? Can it be in video or can it be offline too as well?

I think our legacy is always just trying to be of service to our customers. How do we help your business? How do we become an extension of your team and bring you effective and relevant tools to be able to help you grow those products and services that you offer? We play in a whole bunch of different verticals, so it's not just one vertical. So, I think it goes across multiple verticals because everybody kind of has the same needs, is how do I get new customers? How do I retain existing ones? How do I upsell, or cross-sell, or be there for my customers?

I think that's probably the legacy, and I probably a continuation of what my grandmother, and my father, and mother had done over the course of time. We've always looked at how can we be a more effective partner to our customers and prospects.

[0:48:44] DC: Well, I think your grandmother would be extremely proud of you. I implore everybody to go check out their website, everything you need to connect with Brian and Katie, and XMPie and Pel Hughes in the show notes. Until next time, everybody. Print long and prosper.

[END OF EPISODE]

[0:49:04] 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:

Brian Hughes: <https://linkedin.com/in/brianhughespelhughes/>

Pel Hughes: <https://pelhughes.com/>

Katie Fisher: <https://linkedin.com/in/katiecoleenfisher/>

XMPie: <https://xmpie.com/>

Deborah Corn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/deborahcorn/>

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