

[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.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:00:30] DC: Hey, everybody. Welcome to Podcasts From the Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your Intergalactic Ambassador. Today, we are speaking with Stephanie Doyle. She is the Director of Design Implementation at HBX Branding, a creative agency that has been building and activating iconic brands for over 40 years. With deep expertise in packaging design and production for consumer packaged goods, Stephanie leads teams that bring creative strategy to life with precision and impact. Her work blends vision and execution, helping brands move from concept to shelf with clarity, consistency, and lasting presence. Welcome, Stephanie.

[0:01:17] SD: Thanks, Deborah. It's an honor to be on your podcast. I'm sure you've heard that many times over and over, but I just wanted to say it again. I've been at HBX Branding for a little over 11 years. Not the 40 years it's been in existence unless I was a prodigy child. But I was not. We work with a lot of CPG brands, whether it's in the pet space, candy space, or natural space. I mean, you name it.

My particular role, though, really comes into play what we like to call the back of house, right? I manage our production team through all panel layouts, extensions, whether it's different SKU sizes or different flavor varieties, also all the way through mechanical preparation. Then once that all happens, it comes time to have prepros with our print vendors or a separator. I will spearhead those conversations. I'll review the drawdowns, the soft proves, hard proves. I've been on many, many press checks. Really, like I said, it's the tail end of our creative services that we offer that really my role comes into play.

[0:02:31] DC: Are your clients dictating your vendors to you, or do you also seek printers or other service providers?

[0:02:41] SD: I would say the majority of our clients do come to us with vendors already established, whether it's through a contract or a vendor they've worked with in the past that they've really liked. There are opportunities where we can give a recommendation. Say if they're not quite thrilled with how things are going with the current vendor, we certainly have a list of preferred vendors that we like working with. We know the quality is good.

There are, say, smaller companies that we work with that don't have print vendors yet, and they're new to this whole game. They're a startup company, so they're really leaning onto us with that knowledge and history. So we will make recommendations, and I truly think that's why we have good partnerships with our printers because a lot of times, we're giving them clients. But sometimes, it comes back to us, and they provide us with clients. They say, "Hey, I got a brand that is looking to do a redesign," and they contact us. It's definitely a mutual give-take relationship with them.

[0:03:48] DC: That's really cool. I worked at a company once, and it was an agency. But two of the clients brought their own printers with them, and that was it. You had to use them. One of them was in China, by the way, and they made me go on an emergency press check to Shanghai, which was not as fun as it sounds. I have to say that the printers were assholes the whole time because they were like, "What are you going to do about it? I'm just going to call the client," and that's what they would do. They would call the client and say we were giving them a hard time because I don't know. We were an advertising agency, and deadlines are fluid in our world until they're not. You know I'm saying. Like they know that they have the job, so they don't really have to do much, except keep you quiet and make sure you pay the bills.

[0:04:42] SD: Yeah.

[0:04:44] DC: I'm not saying you come across that with your current vendors, but I'm just wondering if that's the same situation now.

[0:04:49] SD: Yes and no. I would say the majority of the print vendors that I do work with, and I go and press checks for, they're very accommodating. They want to work with me. They know I'm representing the brand. I have the knowledge of the brand standards, how the colors should actually look, and the design intention, and to make sure that that's met. Like I said, most of the print vendors, press operators, they really want to work with us. I have been on, though, that other back half of it where they want in and out because press approvals eat up time. Let's face it. I'm making little tiny tweaks, and sometimes they just need to rip it and print it.

Yes, there is – I feel like they're like, okay, we do have a contract in place. They got nothing to worry about, but reality is they should care because we're always giving a recap, or at least I am. I'm always giving my clients a recap of how that press run went. How was it throughout the process? Are there any improvements that we can make?

[0:05:57] DC: Yes. I mean, also, for any printers out there who are just sailing along because you have a contract with a client, people like Stephanie have 30 other clients like that on their roster. If you actually go that extra mile to treat someone like Stephanie as your client as well, there could be I don't want to say a payoff at the end, but a bonus of you already have a great relationship. You have a great process. Why wouldn't you keep taking advantage of that?

[0:06:26] SD: No, that's 100 % true. That's why we do recommend certain vendors because I know it's a fluid process. I know their work is going to be good. I know they want to work for us, work with us to help problem solve any questions that we have. I mean, they are the experts in what they do. We're the experts in what we do. When you mesh those two together, I mean, that just creates dynamite. You're setting yourself up for success.

I would encourage these print vendors to, even though you have a creative agency coming in, still treat them like they're the brand. They're the ones giving the paycheck because at the end of the day, we're the ones that are recommending them to other clients that we have. Let's face it. I told you before all the different CBG categories we work with, and we have a lot of clients that we work with, all different sizes. It would behoove them to not –

[0:07:23] DC: Mess with you.

[0:07:25] SD: Yes, yes.

[0:07:26] DC: No, totally. I went on your site, and I'm like, "Oh, I know that. I know that. I know that. I know that." Okay, you said something really interesting, which brings me to my next question. I mean, we've already established that you're in the packaging space. Packaging has to perform creatively. It has to catch your attention somehow, but there are so many technical aspects to packaging. How do you keep that balance in check on the agency side when creatives are running around wanting to be creative?

[0:08:00] SD: There's that saying like you have to be seen to be sold, and we take a lot of care in making sure our packaging is not only just eye-catching but clear communication. I mean, I can't express that enough. Get a hierarchy down. Make it very clear for the consumer. The design aside, the structure also really does play a role in it, too. If you want your product to look a little more premium, maybe you're going to use a UV matte finish, or you're going to use certain embellishments like hot stamping or cold stamping, whichever to really attract the consumer and give that premiumness if that's what you're looking for, right? Not every brand is looking to be premium in that sense, right? It does come with a cost.

But I think we have to take the whole thing into consideration because people are – they're going to brick and mortar. They're picking the products we're designing up on shelf and looking at them. We got to make sure it looks good, and it prints well. I mean, I can't tell you how many times our designers will design this amazing graphics, and we're getting it approved through PDF. Then it's time to print it, and that's a different story. Glows look great on screen. Beiges look great on screen. But as soon as you go to print them, it's a puzzle to be solved.

[0:09:26] DC: I'm laughing because you said glows look great on screen. That totally is something that would not translate to a designer in that way because they're just like, "Look at my whole vision," and we look at it like, "Yes, except a couple of components of that vision are going to be a problem."

[0:09:43] SD: Our designers always say – they'll be like, "They'll figure it out. Don't worry about it." I say that too because you never want to hold back creativity. You never want to put those

barriers on them because we can figure it out, right? We deal with a lot of flexible packaging, okay? Flexo, right? It's not offset. It's not digital. Well, we do some digital but –

[0:10:05] DC: It could be.

[0:10:06] SD: Yes, it could be. We're printing on standup pouches, and there are limitations. There are minimum dots you have to worry about. That's once again, and I keep going back to the collaboration we have with our vendors. How do we get our intentions, our design intentions, to actually print well and look good on shelf? Are there any customizations that we can do to stand out? Sometimes, as simple as taking, say, a squeeze pouch that has a different way to pour it or a reclosable, reusable – I mean, there's a million different things that you can do to stand out amongst the crowd. I think you really have to take into consideration the design and creative and the actual structure because they go hand in hand. You can't cheapen out on one or the other to be successful.

[0:11:01] DC: Yes. That all depends upon knowing what is possible and knowing what is out there and knowing what different equipment can produce and what can help you do something differently if you want to take it from a box to a pouch or something like that. What do you think the printer's role should be in educating their customers, and how do you like to learn? What is your suggestion for printers out there?

[0:11:34] SD: Yes. I think there's a couple of answers to this question. For me, let's take step one, which is really the education component, right? Everything I know, I've learned hands-on. I've learned through blogs that these printers post on their websites. A lot of them, they'll have a separate tab, and I'll list a blog, and they write these articles that pertain usually to their capabilities, but some insights into industry trends as well. It's an opportunity to learn what they can do but also what's going on. What are the things I need to know?

Then you have LinkedIn. I think it's a great resource to just get visibility through these printers and what they're able to do. Because if you don't know their full capabilities, you may not ask those questions. If they're not telling you, how are you going to know? I think the education component but also being stiff on social media or through web applications is really important for us to just be aware of.

I also receive a lot of samples. I will get a lot of samples from print vendors, which I think is great because once again, it should be the best of the best that you've printed. It should be relevant to, say, what I was asking for, right? If I'm asking for something with a dual finish, I'm going to want to see it with a dual finish. Please, please do not send samples that don't look good because there are a couple of occasions where I receive samples, and the imagery is pixelated. You could be the best printer in the world. But if you're sending me samples that don't visually look good, I hate to say it, I'm not going to show those to my client. They just can't wrap their heads around that aspect of it. You kind of focus in on the wrong thing, which I should really be focusing in on the print quality or the embellishments or customization that they can do. I really encourage –

[0:13:37] DC: Or how something folds or how it sits on a shelf. Printers don't understand that we on the other end cannot get over bad printing. I mean, it does not matter. Business cards, I have a trim pet peeve. If my stuff is trimmed, and I can tell by one space if it's off, it drives me insane. Yes, we cannot do anything if, first, we look at and go, “Oh, my God. What is going on here?”

[0:14:09] SD: Yes. I think it's 100% true. I would encourage them if they have – some printers do have an internal artwork department. If they can't work with that – say if a printer has a new innovation that they want to show and they don't have anyone currently printing with that new innovation, their internal art department may need to create something. If they can't do that, hire an agency. Hire a freelancer. Hire someone that has a design aesthetic that can really bring it home for you.

Because once again, I don't care how great your printing is or how amazing the structure is, or the material you're using. If it doesn't look good design-wise, I'm going to struggle a little bit with it. I don't know if it makes me sound vain. But being a designer at heart, like you said, you zero in on those things.

[0:15:09] DC: I also would suggest that printers send samples of things that people know what they are. For example, an abstract painting. Lovely. But I don't know if that's the green it's supposed to be, so how do I know? It's a Jackson Pollock. I don't know if that's the right shade of yellow that was used, but I certainly know what color a beach is. I certainly know what color

someone's skin should be, depending upon who they are. I certainly know what the color of a brick is or at least the range, right? A lot of times, you get these abstract photos, and it's like, "Well, I'm glad you enjoyed printing that. But what am I supposed to do with this?"

[0:15:54] SD: Yes. Yes. Because I am looking at not only the finishings of the product, but I'm looking at the details. There's a lot of printers that have different plate-making capabilities, and some are better than others, right? I want to see that high-depth imagery.

[0:16:10] DC: People, solids. I mean, if you can print a solid black, and I don't see any streaks in it or modeling, you've got a good process going there.

[0:16:19] SD: Yes. Yes, I agree.

[BREAK]

[0:16:23] DC: Girls Who Print provides women in print and graphic communications with information resources, events, and mentorship to help them navigate their careers and the industry. As the largest independent network of women in print and a nonprofit organization, our global mission to provide resources, skill-building, education, and support for women to lead, inspire, and empower has never been stronger or more accessible. Through our member platform and program, as well as regional groups forming around the world, your access to Girls Who Print is just a click away. Gentlemen, you are most welcome to join us as allies. Get involved and get empowered today. Link in the show notes.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[0:17:10] DC: Packaging specs can often be very complicated and have multiple components. What is an acceptable timeframe between sending an estimate request and getting the quote? How can printers help packaging customers streamline this process?

[0:17:30] SD: I think you're going to find this interesting. We as the creative agency are not directly involved in the monetary amount of these quotes. We can recommend the print vendor to our client. Then their department, whether it's procurement or whoever's handling it internally

there, they reach out with the quote with the specs. They'll say, "I need X amount of pouches. This is the film I need to use," et cetera, et cetera. They get the quotes back.

The only thing I hear is, "Oh. Well, their quotes were too high," or, "They didn't get back to us for an extended period of time." I do find that a little interesting because as much as they lean on to us for our device, we're not involved in the actual dollar amount. But you did ask the question about how quickly should they be getting these quotes back. As quick as possible and I'm saying that because there are a dozen printers out there. If you're taking your time, you're missing a potential new client because someone else is going to get their quote in faster. If it's, say, a comparable quote, not much different, well, I'm going to go with the person that was responsive the fastest because, to me, that just instills trust that they're going to be that responsive throughout the whole process.

I don't want to be chasing someone down writing multiple emails, being like, "Hey, where's the quote?" Yes, as quick as possible, within obviously let's do our due diligence and make sure all the T's are crossed, and all the I's are dotted. No mistakes within that but –

[0:19:18] DC: Don't change anything because you want to or you have to without letting someone know, "Hey, I just want to let you know. I can't quote this because we can't get this paper in time or this board in time. Do you want me to switch it out?" Because if they switch it out, your other two – I'm assuming somebody's triple bidding somewhere in your process.

[0:19:39] SD: Yes. Yes, always.

[0:19:41] DC: The brands that you work with, there's no way that they're not triple bidding. But what I'm saying is that they can't compare them if somebody's switching out a paper, especially a paper. That's something else to consider. I have another question for you about this. It falls under education. Now, you're a seasoned professional, so I'm not saying this necessarily applies to you. But I have heard from packaging printers that one of the things that they could do to help the process is to help these new packaging producers with scheduling. That there's a lot of packaging producers that don't understand that maybe the last thing actually has to be printed first. There's all these different weird things. What is your advice about that? Just speaking to other packaging producers out there, how do you learn how to schedule correctly?

[0:20:36] SD: Yes. I mean, we always build things from the back. When does this need to be at the co-packer, right? Let's build back from there. Okay.

[0:20:45] DC: That's the person that's going to put the product into the packaging?

[0:20:49] SD: Yes, correct. Usually, that's probably not even the first step, right? The first step is when is this going to be on shelf? Is it a soft rollout? Is it – I would say the brands do have those dates, and it could be a little flexible. Let's face it. Timelines, as much as we love them, sometimes you got to have a little budging, a little –

[0:21:13] DC: Yes. But let's not skip over the fact that sometimes it's tied to ads in newspapers and things like that.

[0:21:21] SD: Yes, and social. Yes. I think I want to say the vendors need to be very clear about their internal process. They need to say, “When we receive files from your creative agency, this is our X amount of days we have to turn around to show you then soft proofs.” When you review soft proofs, give you a day or two days, depending on the amount that we need to review. Then if there's any changes, the next step is hard proofs. It's almost like outlining the various steps that it takes to actually get it on the production floor and get it printed.

I think the key component here is showing your process, exposing this is the first step we take, this is the interim, and then build from there because if people don't know, well – oh, your lead time is, say, six to eight weeks upfront. Then we as the creative agency may need to then give the printer the files a little bit quicker than we expected. Once again, routine. It could be the opposite. If your creative agency is taking their time and giving the printers files late in the game, and they're a disaster, and the printers got to rework everything, I mean, that's going to eat up cost and time.

That's why I think it's very important for them to, whether it's on a spec sheet or through a prepro discussion call, even before then, to really lay out the foundation of like, “This is how we work. This is the timelines and the amount of days that we need as a standard process,” right? There's going to be fluctuation.

[0:23:17] DC: I think that's great advice because you're right. Usually, just like, "This is when I need the file." Maybe the next thing you know is when the proof is going to come, and then everything's – until they have approval, they're not really going to tell you what the schedule is. But if you at least have some understanding that from the file it might take a day or two to get the proof and then all the steps that you mentioned, then as the print producer, the customer on the other side, you have enough information to say to people, "Listen, it doesn't matter that the photographer didn't get us the retouched art in time. If this is still going on the shelf on this date, we are the ones that have to rush here, unless –"

[0:24:01] SD: Ramble. Yes.

[0:24:02] DC: There's just not enough time to print or there's not enough time in the day. There are not enough days in the week. There's just – it's not going to happen unless you can take split shipments and things like that, so working, at least having that baseline. If you're not sure, call printers, and I would say have it broken down, just like Stephanie said. Sometimes, printers don't want to tell you how the sausage is made, so to speak. But for God's sake, we're on that side. Who doesn't buffer a schedule? You got to be a lunatic not to buffer a schedule. So buffer your schedule, right? Buffer your schedule.

Then everybody – well, not everybody, just the customer and the printer should know where the wiggle room is. I never told the creatives where the wiggle room was.

[0:24:52] SD: No. We did that a lot.

[0:24:53] DC: Yes. Oh, my God. No, this is the drop dead date and a week after that. But they don't need to know that. All right. Well, that's interesting. That's really great advice. It really truly is, especially now when that legacy, like print buyer legacies are gone. Do you have people that you're training now to be you at one point, at some point?

[0:25:14] SD: I mean, yes and no. It's a tough question to answer. I think it's – I sort of evolved into this role. I started out as a designer and then slowly started getting into it.

[0:25:27] DC: Wow, went to the dark side. Yeah.

[0:25:30] SD: I did and I feel like once you go back, now I can't even imagine doing anything other than this, so it is a great journey. But, yes, I do have people that lean on to me for advice, whether – it doesn't necessarily even have to be someone in production, right? It could be a designer being like, "Hey, Steph. How would I build this, or what would be the proper way to do this?" I think that's what kind of separates us from other agencies, is our files are really buttoned up, right? By the time it does go to the printer, it's smooth sailing. We've already figured out what needs to overprint or what are the proper colors to be used.

I think, once again, going back to timing with your print vendor, and I mentioned it before. If they're receiving files that are a hot mess, it's going to eat up the timeline. I don't care how fast you are, especially if you're dealing with, say, 20 SKUs that you just received from a design agency, and they're a disaster. We take pride in making sure that our files are meeting their expectations, and that's the whole point of having a prepro call and why we always ask for the dielines to come with a spec sheet because if they don't, we're just wasting time, assuming, okay, well, I'm going to guess what the minimum knockout copy type is, right?

But you don't know every equipment is slightly different, so having all that information upfront saves everyone time at the end of the day because I've seen it happen where we haven't received the print specs for some reason, despite everyone asking a million times, and things weren't within their tolerance. It had to come back to us. We had to make that change. We had to send it back to them. I think you really have to make sure all your ducks are in a row in order for the operation to run smoothly.

[0:27:41] DC: I would say this. Probably a thousand printers applauding you right now that you even have a designer that says, "How do I build this file correctly?" I don't think I've ever heard that from a designer.

[0:27:48] SD: Well, it's the young ones. The old –

[0:27:52] DC: It's like, "What? That's not my job." Your job is to print it correctly, glow and all, right?

[0:27:58] SD: It's the young ones where their minds are still like sponges, and they want to learn. They're not the old dogs that are like, "Yes, whatever. She'll figure it out." It's not to say we have that.

[0:28:08] DC: Do you have a digital production studio at your agency or the designers are literally building the print files? I'm going to fall off my chair.

[0:28:17] SD: We have a production department. Okay. We're not separators, so we're not separating the files at all. But we're making them as close as possible and as easy as possible for the printer to separate the files or a separation house, right? We do have a separate component. Since we are a small agency, there's a lot of crossover. If I have a designer that maybe they did the initial conceiving and they really want to see their project finish through, we'll give them that opportunity. That's also a really good learning experience, and that's why I mentioned they may ask, "Hey, how do I do this?" Or if I come back with a comment for them, they'll ask, "Why? Why did you tell me to switch this and do this?"

I think, once again, there's an advantage of working for a small company at times, and that's clearly one of them where you really can wear multiple – we do have, like I said, people that will work on mechanicals full-time versus upfront design conceiving, but it's not limited. If you want to put your hat in the ring for initial concept, go right in. No one's going to stop you. Just don't blow the budget, but you know.

[0:29:36] DC: Right. I love that, and you're right. That's the best way to learn what to do, what not to do, the tricks of the trade, and how something is going to translate from a screen to a job. Do you ever take them on the press checks with you, so they could see what's going on there?

[0:29:55] SD: Yes, I have. It was a great experience for them because they had been working with us for several years on mechanicals. I said to them. I was like, "Once you actually go on press, then it's all going to click. You're going to see why we're doing certain things. You're going to see the good, the bad, the limitations that it's not just control print, right? It's not that." It is important to get them out there on these press checks to watch over the whole process, get the tour of the facility.

I love it when printers give me a tour. I've been on so many tours, but I love it every time. You know why? Because I learned something new every opportunity I get. To actually see the ink buckets and just to fathom, oh, wow, it truly is in a giant drum or a bucket or a tray or whatever the printing method is. But I think seeing firsthand and then also seeing the limitations. You can only push and pull so much on press, and nothing is perfect, right? We strive to get it as close as possible to perfect.

But sometimes, you just got to give a little, and you have that hierarchy in your head. Okay, I want my brand logo colors. Those need to be exact. I want any process imagery to be as best as it can. Sometimes, there's room for improvement. But at the end of the day, you don't really realize all that goes into it until you are physically there because it is not a quick science.

[0:31:47] DC: Even then, you're still at the tail end of everything that's gone under the print shop that none of us ever see because it's happening behind the scenes.

[0:31:57] SD: Yes.

[BREAK]

[0:31:59] 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.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[0:32:52] DC: You just mentioned color, and we spoke before this podcast, just to get to know each other a little better. You mentioned that you have been actively investigating digital

packaging for various reasons. Is the industry improving on color management and consistency across the offset and digital packaging, in your opinion, based on the samples you've been seeing? Where do you think the holes are as somebody who's been relying on offset for so long?

[0:33:27] SD: We've been getting more and more clients staying about digital printing. I think a lot of that is stemming from the size of the client, right? Maybe they don't have a large distribution, and they want to test out the initial concept. We have been exploring more digital presses. What I'm finding is it is getting tighter between offset and digital as far as color or work order goes. Is it perfect? No. Okay, there are limitations, right? You can have a Pantone color. It may not translate into EG. There are certain colors that just don't, and you need to work around it.

You need to be flexible, too. You have to understand you're using two totally different printing methods, maybe different substrates. That's been just from offset to digital. That could be from – a lot of our clients have multiple print vendors that are producing the same thing. We need to hold that standard across the board. I think what we do as tools is let's send a reference, right? We're going to send you a color target for process symmetry, okay? Those are our intentions that we would like you to match, okay?

There's a reason why we get drawdowns. There's a reason why in visual printing, your contract proof, what you see is what you're going to get, essentially. Those are the opportunities to really align those colors together. I can't stress enough. You got to be a little flexible. It is getting better, but it's not going to be apples to apples. Or at least I haven't seen it like that. But I think each method has its own place and its own purpose, so it's good to have options.

[0:35:20] DC: Yes. Your clients who are asking you to invest in digital printing, is it only because of the quantities? Or are they taking advantage of the customization and personalization possibilities?

[0:35:34] SD: For us in particular, it is the quantities. I would love to have a client that did a seasonal lineup. You're seeing a lot of cans, right? They'll do some fun limited edition varieties, whether it's a beer or soda. I mean, I mainly see it within the beverage, the beer category. I wish

we had that. But for us in particular, it is a matter of quantity. It's a matter of speed. Digital, we're cutting out all the pre-press work.

[0:36:08] DC: Well, a lot of it, not all of it. Yes.

[0:36:09] SD: Yes, yes. For them, if they need to get it to the market quickly, that's a great way to do it. Once again, keeping in mind the quantities, right? There gets to a point where digital could just – the cost of it could be too much. Then you have those hybrid presses which combine digital and some spot colors. I have not worked with any of those vendors yet. Some of the vendors I have worked with do have both capabilities, though. They do have strictly a digital press, but then they have the hybrid press as well. It's just a matter of the client's budget or whatever reasoning.

[0:36:53] DC: I don't think it's a secret because it's on your website that one of your customers is the Nerds candy. It's all over your website. I mean, what an amazing thing. Put up a website. Let people type their names and get a box like, "I'm a Nerd." I mean, there's a reason to use digital printing and get engagement with everybody and get a social media campaign going because you take a picture with your own personalized box. There's an example for you.

[0:37:22] SD: Yes. We did the initial Nerds rebrand. We did the famous – the Nerds Clusters that everyone's raving.

[0:37:29] DC: I love the little like cartoon characters that are on the box. They're very cute.

[0:37:34] SD: Yes, yes. They have since moved on, so we haven't done some of those social engagements that they've been doing. But there are a lot of brands that do those customizations. Coca-Cola, Oreo, you can have your own –

[0:37:50] DC: M&Ms. You can get your own M&Ms. Yes.

[0:37:52] SD: M&Ms, yes. Yes.

[0:37:54] DC: That's cool.

[0:37:54] SD: I think it's great. It's a good opportunity. I think in today's world, people like that customization, the personalization. They're not looking for the masses anymore. They wanted to feel special and unique to them. I think digital printing is a great way to do that. I would encourage brands to experiment. Try it. See what happens.

[0:38:18] DC: You deal with a lot of pet foods. Why can't my cat be on my cat food? I mean, there's really no reason it can't. If you're digital printing, it's just – you just have to have the photo. Make sure it comes to me. But that's no different than a photo book getting printed or anything like that.

[0:38:34] SD: Yes, yes.

[0:38:35] DC: Luckily, we don't have to worry about that. The press has cameras and barcodes, and it knows what goes with what.

[0:38:39] SD: That is true.

[0:38:42] DC: Speaking of printers, how can printers add value beyond production, especially in creative and strategic phases?

[0:38:52] SD: I think it's getting involved early and showing us the capabilities. Because you may show us something, whether it's verbal or you sent a sample, that'll spark creativity. If I know you're really great at foil hot stamping or embossing, debossing, obviously dependent on the printing method and the surface we're printing on. But if I know you can do all that, I may start to incorporate that in some of our designs. There's a lot of different extra UV varnishes that you can do and tell us because it may spark something.

I think the opportunity comes, once again, going back to the knowledge of what they can actually do. I think getting involved early with the capabilities is what's really going to drive the creative agency and the brand to just be aware and see the possibilities.

[0:39:58] DC: Do you have a dream draw? That's what I used to call it. Like the –

[0:40:02] SD: You mean as far as –

[0:40:04] DC: The samples that you have that you're like, “One day, we’ll have the right client for this.”

[0:40:09] SD: Yes. Yes, I definitely do. Like I mentioned before, most of our clients were printing on flexible packaging, right? But I would love some crazy customized folding carton with all the embellishments; the embossing, the foils, the spot varnishes. You do see that a lot in the beauty industry or personal care. We don't necessarily have a big client range in those categories yet, but I have worked on some of those in the past, and that's fun. I feel like that's when you can really reach out and experiment and get that customization, so it's unique to you. You're not buying a dieline that already exists. You're creating your own cutouts within those dielines. I think that's where the fun creativity part comes into play. That would be, I would say, one of my personal goals. If you know any luxury brands, send them my way.

[0:41:19] DC: Oh, I can help with that, for sure.

[BREAK]

[0:41:24] DC: Like what you hear? Leave us a comment, click a few stars, share this episode, and please subscribe to the show. Are you interested in being the guest and sharing your information with our active and growing global audience? Podcasts are trending as a potent direct marketing and educational channel for brands and businesses who want to provide portable content for customers and consumers. Visit printmediacentr.com, click on podcasts, and request a partner package today. Share long and prosper.

[INTERVIEW RESUMED]

[0:41:59] DC: The last question I want to ask you is still in this wheelhouse. You also have some natural products on your site. If I think what does a natural product look like, it's going to be in a craft box. It's not going to be a lot. It's going to be muted colors. It's going to be very green and brown and nature-y and things like that. How are printers communicating sustainability to you when and if? By the way, your agency could be the primary one saying,

"Hey, we don't care what our clients say. We want to be in a sustainable lane of printing."
There's that aspect of it.

Then there's the other aspect, which is the client is telling you that it has to be that way throughout the supply chain, not just the agency and the printer. But there's a lot of people involved. How is that working out for you and what is your advice to the printers on how to communicate this clearly? You can go back and communicate clearly that you're following what you're supposed to be doing.

[0:43:07] SD: I think you hit the nail on the head is communicating it clearly. Sustainability, like this black hole, once you get in it, there are so many twists and turns. I at least feel there's a lot of strides that have been made within sustainability. That's whether it's material, life cycle, carbon footprint. I mean, we have to understand. Sustainability encompasses so many things. It's not just one thing. Our clients all have different objectives and different goals that they're trying to meet, whether it's an immediate goal, or it's a projected goal in a year or two years out from now.

I think it's just because there is so much to know that you could almost become paralyzed if it's not digestible. It needs to be to the point something that's easy to understand. How is it really going to make a difference for my company? What are the implications of it? Will it affect, say, the visual appearance of my product? You have the difference between a recycled paper board versus a virgin paper board. Obviously, there have been great improvements in getting the white whiter on these recycled materials. But once again, it's sourcing that. It's finding that.

I think printers are now getting themselves more educated, and therefore projecting that onto their clients, onto us, whether that's through, once again, social, through webinars, getting it out there, getting those certifications, which a brand loves. Because guess what? I can put that how to recycle logo on my pouch, and that makes the consumers feel good. It makes everyone feel good. It's getting those certifications. It's just making everyone aware of the different processes that they can take because one size doesn't fit all, right? I may pick and choose the certain recycled content I want in there. Or like I said, there's just so many avenues.

I don't even fully, to be honest, understand the depths of sustainability. There are experts out there in the field, and I truly appreciate them getting their voices out, making it easy to understand because it is something that you do have to educate. Don't assume your client knows these certain material types and the difference it can make and the impact because, like I said, there's just so many avenues. Cost comes into play, too. I'm seeing that a lot, right? Where our brands, they'll want to be more sustainable in their efforts with their material. But then they get the quote, and it's a lot higher, and they don't go with it.

[0:46:11] DC: I know. It's crazy, right?

[0:46:14] SD: Once again, the printers have to meet the brands where they're at, right? Maybe it's not totally switching out the material or getting you down to a monolayer or what have you. Maybe it's these other little baby steps just to get you to eventually the point where they ultimately want to be.

[0:46:36] DC: Thank you so much for your time today, Stephanie. I really appreciate it. I know you're busy, so I'll let you get back to work. Everything you need to connect with Stephanie, see her awesome agency's website, and connect with her is in the show notes. Until next time, everybody, print long and prosper.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[0:46:57] 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](https://www.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:

Stephanie Doyle on LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/stephdoyle/>

HBX Branding: <https://www.hbxbranding.com/>

Packaging PrePro with Stephanie Doyle, Director of Design Implementation,
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Transcript

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