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[0:00:00.4] DC: This podcast conference is sponsored by Fiery, the leading provider of digital frontends and workflow solutions for the global printing industry. Discover how Fiery can help you power up your presses at Fiery.com and through the links in the show notes.

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:20.7] 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]

[0:00:47.4] DC: Welcome to the Fiery podcast conference, a four-part series crafted for print professionals eager to elevate their operations. Whether you're looking to simplify complex tasks, optimize your print processes, or explore new growth opportunities, this Fiery conference series offers valuable perspectives and strategies to stay ahead in the ever-changing landscape of print technology. My cohost for the conference is Pat McGrew. Hello, Pat McGrew.

[0:01:15.4] MC: Hello, Deborah Corn, and how are you?

[0:01:17.1] DC: I am fine. Pat is the managing director of McGrewGroup, and the cohost of the Print Report series, that plays on Podcast from the Printerverse, and our final session is called Unlocking DTF and DTG Potential with a DFE. A lot of initials there. The explosive growth of direct-to-film, DTF, and direct-to-garment, DTG printing has attracted a wave of new print businesses to enter the arena, and many are unfamiliar with digital frontends, DFEs, and they play a vital role in running an efficient, high-quality print business.

This session is going to highlight how a good DFE simplifies short runs, handles customization with ease, and ensures color accuracy and consistency. We are joined by Mike Chramtchenko,

the sales and marketing chief of staff at Fiery. Mike works hand in hand with the Fiery leadership team, as well as directly with the sales and marketing groups, to continuously improve the operational effectiveness of the Fiery sales and marketing organizations. Welcome, Mike.

[0:02:35.3] MC: Thank you very much, Deborah. Pat, pleased to meet you as well, and it sounds like a big job role, but it's actually very-very straightforward and quite simple.

[0:02:43.7] PM: It sounds great, Mike. Thanks so much for taking the time with us because I think this is an important topic. As Deb mentioned in her introduction, this is an exploding area, where we're watching printers who may have built businesses in other areas start to look towards DTF and DTG as ways to expand their business, but we're also looking to people who have been in those businesses for a long time, look to upgrade their approach to optimize, to automate, to make things easier in their universe.

So, let's start with a little bit of level-setting because direct-to-film and direct-to-garment may be well-understood terms to some people, but for those who don't understand what they are and why they're different, can you give us the one of one version of what they are and how they work, and what part of the print ecosystem they sit in?

[0:03:37.1] MC: Sure, absolutely. So, direct-to-garment, we'll start off with that one, because that's been around in the marketplace for longer than direct-to-film. Direct-to-garment is, as the name really implies, is, primarily used for printing on garments. It is basically ink jet printers that have been designed, either purpose-built or retrofit; most of them these days are all purpose-built, of course, because the market has evolved a great deal, to print directly onto garments.

So, meaning that the ink is applied directly to whatever type of fabric, primarily cotton-based fabrics, that you can print on. So, anything that you can lie flat or sit still, even ball caps, which don't lie flat, but there are special adaptors that flattens for them. The ink is applied directly to the garment, it is then pressed, so that it adheres and cures to the garment, and there you have it, you have a direct-to-garment print on whatever type of cotton-based fabric, primarily cotton-based fabric, you'll be using.

Direct-to-film is a little bit more adaptable than direct-to-garment. Direct-to-film is, by our standards, fairly as you have pointed out in the introduction, a fairly new technology. The technology of printing on film has been around for years, but really, the direct-to-film space itself, and that name for the acronym, DTF, really exploded, right around the COVID lockdowns in 2019, and we can touch on that a little bit later.

But very, very cool way that that market grew, but direct-to-film prints, as it implies, directly onto film. There is then an adhesive powder that is applied to that film, and then that is pressed onto the t-shirt or primarily t-shirt. The difference with direct-to-film and direct-to-garment, aside from how it's applied to the garment, is that it also is more adaptable to different types of materials. So, you can print on polyesters and different types of materials, whereas I mentioned, direct-to-garment is more cotton-based, generally speaking.

The other interesting thing about direct-to-film is there's other types of substrates that you can now print direct-to-film, transfers onto, including hard substrates. So, it's not just limited to garments, although, really, that's what the market is focused on currently, and has been for the last four or five years, but you're absolutely right. Both technologies don't necessarily compete with one another; they kind of complement one another. So, many shops are actually using both types of technology for their applications.

[0:06:05.8] PM: I just came from a print show, Mike, where they were showing direct-to-film, and one of the examples was printing on to fake animal skin, where they were doing like leopard spots, and tiger stripes and zebra stripes, and it was an interesting multi-stage process because they showed it all on the show floor of how they made it all work. So, it was a really fascinating example for one company of how they've made a specialty of it.

So, they're going to all the luxury purse manufacturers, and wallet manufacturers, and even one of the things they showed was miniskirts, and it was an Italian show, so there you go.

[0:06:47.6] DC: I've also spoken to several printers who tell me that the reason why they've – like, the direct-to-film better is because it's better for them to place it where they want it to go, like, on the sides of yoga pants and things like that, that there is – they needed it to be more flexible than whatever they were doing prior with the direct-to-garment, you know, especially

since people are getting crafty with printing on arms of shirts and things like backs of hats and in unexpected places, where the typical machines aren't built to place things there.

[0:07:22.1] MC: Yeah, I mean, absolutely. The market, you know, there's such competition within their direct-to-film market, and the benefit of that is for the consumer specifically is that, it's necessitating a lot of different types of new applications and creative ways in which to use the technology to sell products, different customized garments. So yeah, absolutely. You know, if you think about it, I mean, in its most simplest way, they basically, on the direct-to-garment and direct-to-film, both do very similar types of things.

But direct-to-film is generally a little bit more flexible in the applications, and as you pointed out, Deborah, in you know, positioning, placement, things of that nature, absolutely.

[0:08:03.5] PM: And so, Mike, I want to kind of draw in a little bit of cultural history here because this piece of the Fiery business that we're talking about is part of an acquisition that Fiery made, and some people might know you, it might know the concept from CADlink, and where we are in the ecosystem right now is that this is the technology that's now come into Fiery, and is now sort of embedded in that Fiery ecosystem.

[0:08:33.6] MC: Yes, absolutely. I mean, you're absolutely right. CADlink was a privately held company in Canada for 25-plus years. I was one of the partners and have stayed on and joined Fiery. It's been a fantastic fit, I think, for both companies. On one hand, it's provided CADlink, which was a fairly small, privately held company, the opportunity to extend our brands, and leverage all of the Fiery infrastructure and marketing and sales strength to go worldwide with our products.

And on the other hand, from a Fiery perspective, it's really added a significant amount of new applications to the Fiery portfolio, right? So, Fiery now, essentially, without question is the largest print provider, in terms of software solutions, across a variety of different applications, and there's huge amount of benefits for both the reseller channel and more specifically, end users, by having this kind of vendor that is a one stop shop, if you will, for all these different applications. As their business expands, grows, new profit centers are introduced.

[0:09:37.4] PM: One of the things we want everyone to know is that you're going to want to read the notes that come along with this episode because Fiery, as an integration adventure, is still having fun, getting all the websites aligned, and getting all the pieces updated. So, you can reach all of this information through the Fiery website, but you'll also be able to reach it from all the links that you'll see below in the notes, and we want to encourage everybody to keep an eye on that.

So, Mike, with that, and now that we've got the history figured out, let's talk a little bit about how a digital frontend works in this environment, and what the advantages of working with Fiery on the front end of your environment, of your devices. I know that for some organizations, direct-to-film and direct-to-garment, these are small batch, typically job orders, and managing those on some DFEs can be really difficult.

It can mean resetting things up, making a lot of changes, and in this environment, you have made it quite a bit easier for organizations to bring this technology in and actually optimize it.

[0:10:45.7] MC: Yeah, no doubt, I won't bore you with old stories, but you know, many, many years ago, I was at a trade show, and we were in the first iteration of our Digital Factory product, and of course, we were just learning about you know, what the end-users requirements were at the time, and an end user came to me and he said, "I love your software, but one of the issues is that I pop it open on my screen, and it's like popping open a Boeing 767 cockpit, and all I need is a Cessna cockpit," right? And that's never left me, and for years, following that, pre-acquisition and now, and it continues with Fiery product management group, is we've always kept that in mind, and ensure that, you know, that's such a valuable comment, right? When you're talking about user experience and user interface, is that you want to provide the customer with – the end user, with all of the tools they need.

But you also want to keep it very simple, and you know, when we're talking about direct-to-film, as specifically, right? And direct-to-garment, not as much anymore because the market is a little bit more mature, of course, but directly to film, specifically, the majority of customers still coming into the market are new customers, right? And many of these customers have never had a print business before.

They're coming in, they're maybe doing it as a part-time job to try and make some extra income, I mean, the explosion with online E-commerce since the COVID lockdowns, right? Have introduced all types of opportunities to people to start online businesses, and this is a perfectly suited business for an online business. So, many of these people, first-time users, super important that the DFE, the digital front end, provides them with the opportunity to grow along with their business as it grows.

But in the initial stages, it's got to be understandable, easy to navigate, you can basically print out of the box, right? We all know how you know, we've used manuals for years. Now, they're all online resources. YouTube has helped a great deal. But certainly, people really just want to open the software and start printing, right? And it's so important that the – not only the user interface, but the software is set up to work out of the box.

So, people have that simple experience right off the bat, and that's something with the Digital Factory product specifically. We've really always focused on, from that very early lesson we learned many years ago, through one single customer comment at a trade show.

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[0:13:11.0] DC: Whether you're a print veteran or brand new to the print world, Fiery's Digital Factory software is the key to unlocking the power of your direct-to-film printers. Offering significant enhancements and color accuracy, workflow automation, and print quality, Fiery Digital Factory's intuitive, user-friendly interface gives you the capabilities you need to create brighter, more detailed prints with greater speed, consistency, and efficiency from all your DTF printers. From the clearest colors to the most advanced workflow automation, Fiery has your back when it comes to DTF printing. Visit Fiery.com to learn more. Links are in the show notes.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:14:00.0] PM: And that is such an important story because we hear it from printers all the time, "Oh my God, I bought this solution that it demoed really well at the trade show I was at, but they didn't tell me I was going to have to be a 747 pilot," right? In order to do all the dials, knobs and levers, I think user interface is so important.

But with that in mind, because this is a market where there are a lot of people new to the industry. And they don't have, you know, a degree in print management or even sometimes, a degree in business, what are the big mistakes you see people making when they're diving into this business, and how can we help them not make them?

[0:14:38.7] MC: I think, you know, the biggest one is trying to tweak controls too much. So, you know, DFE has been around for a long time, right? I mean, and initially, a DFE, and it's a great name, you know, for it because originally, they were simply color management engines when they first came out, right? And you did need a degree to use them. I mean, they were very complicated in terms of creating color profiles, tweaking print modes, all that kind of stuff.

A good DFE has evolved over the years to be so much more than just the color management. Obviously, color management is at the forefront; it's the most important part of a DFE. Without good color, without vibrant color, and we can talk about that a little bit later, because there are a few components, when it comes to color, that are very important to users, you know, without that, you have nothing.

It doesn't matter what other tools you have. DFEs now come with a variety of different automation tools, you know, various types of workflow tools that come in to ensure a more seamless type of error-free work and production, and I think really, the big problem with customers first coming in, is they start to, like, rather than just try and print some jobs right off the bat with the default settings that are in there, they may start diving down into different menus and changing things.

And you know, from a support perspective, I'm certain that our support colleague's probably, you know, when they first get a call from a new customer, it's like, "Please set everything back to default, and start over again, rather than trying to play around with it." So, I think the big thing to do with any DFE is to learn how it runs out of the box, and once you're comfortable with that, then when you do have free time, you don't have production deadlines and start playing around with the different tools.

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See how you can learn and tweak, and they also do it without any education, and you know, that's why very customer-centric type companies will have communities, and they will have a variety of different resources. So, before they start playing around with all the settings and then wondering why things aren't turning out properly, educate themselves and be patient, get the grasp of the basics first, and then start playing around with the more advanced tools.

[0:16:44.5] DC: I have a quick question to ask you because you know, you mentioned the makers who are on Etsy and all those types – Zazzle, all those stores making garments and T-shirts, and you know, anything that film will go on stickers, stickers is booming at the moment.

Some of those machines are not very robust, you know? You can start with a little press one, almost. So, at what point does somebody need to start looking at this, and is there a certain, you know, level of machine that we're talking about, that would be the point that you need to start worrying about a DFE? Maybe I'm crazy, but I could swear that I've just seen presses, not a press, I mean, like a George Foreman Grill, what do you call those types of presses?

[0:17:29.9] MC: Oh, heat presses.

[0:17:30.2] PM: Heat presses.

[0:17:31.3] DC: A heat press.

[0:17:32.0] MC: Yeah.

[0:17:32.3] DC: A lot of people are just putting the film on the heat press and putting it in there, but we're talking about the film output, not putting it on the shirt, right?

[0:17:40.3] MC: Sure, sure. I think, you know, it really depends. I mean, what you're referring to, Deborah, is probably the hobbyist class, right? At the very beginning, who are generating some income, of course, selling their products online, on the Etsy's and other platforms as well, and I think, you have like various levels of user, if you will, within this technology, right? You have your hobbyists, and the hobbyists are people who are just doing it for fun, right?

Giving it away to their social groups and everything else, and not generating any income from it. Then you've got the little more serious hobbyists that are starting to say, "Hey, I can make some money doing this." And they start, and then there are you know, people who are actually setting up websites via various platforms, et cetera, and starting to sell at low volumes, right? At low volumes, to see how it goes.

They don't have a lot of money to invest, and the nice thing about direct-to-film is, you can still get in. Yeah, I mean, you can start a business for relatively low capital cost, right? I mean, it's not an expensive business to get into, and that's why we have so many new people. That's why that whole ease of use is so important, right? But you have that level of person, and then as they progress, they may be more, you know, inclined to not just dip their toe in the water, but actually, jump in and start producing at a higher volume, taking it more seriously. Some quit their permanent employment, some are doing this as their only source of income. So, there are a variety of different levels.

So, when you're talking about different devices, yeah, you're right, they are really small devices. In the early days, in 2019 and 2020, when we first started developing software for this market, there was a huge gray market online of people selling existing major manufacturer printers that were actually desktop printers that you use at your home, and maybe retrofitting all these to do direct-to-film.

You know, from a software development standpoint, it was a nightmare because these machines would constantly break down, and guess who gets the call, right? On how to support it. But the market has really evolved over the last four or five years. You know, there's a lot of Chinese manufacturers that have come into the market with affordable printing devices, and all the major manufacturers as well have started over the last three years or so, building purpose-built printers.

And so, you've got major, high-quality manufacturers, you know, that are actually providing these very reliable printers. So, it really depends on what the volume and what the level of commitment is on the user, as to what printer suits them best, but the important part, to circle back all the way to DFEs, because that's where my life exists, the important part about a DFE is that it's totally functional with the entry-level printers, right?

And then, as your business and as your requirements grow, and as your knowledge, as I said earlier, expands in terms of how to use some of these tools, the DFE is able to provide all of the tools without having to change software. Who wants to change software, right? It's always a bit of a pain. So, they want to maintain that same DFE all the way throughout the growth of their business, alongside the printers.

And that's where it's super important to support as many printers as we can, which we do, and also, provide all those great automation and workflow tools in the background as well.

[0:20:59.6] PM: So, Mike, that kind of brings an interesting topic of – because, as Deb said, you know, you've got a lot of these people who set up Etsy storefronts, Facebook storefronts, or Instagram storefronts, TikTok storefronts. I mean, they're all over the place, and this is a big business, but this becomes the business, the way they make a living, and as they get a little bit further down the line, out of that hobbyist category, workflow becomes a conversation.

And very often, they invest in web-to-print solutions to help them gather those orders, codify those orders, make sure they're paying the right taxes, do the shipping, all those things. So, if I'm in that mode, what questions do I need to be putting on the table? I'm looking at a DFE, I've decided to invest in a web-to-print solution, can I connect those together? Do I need to look at other software to bridge the things together? How smart and how complex does that environment need to be, to really function as a business tool?

[0:22:01.1] MC: Yeah, I mean, and that's a great point, Pat, and I think that you know, it really depends again on, I can't speak for other DFEs, right? But I can tell you that Digital Factory from a Fiery perspective has been designed to work with as many and integrate with as many e-commerce platform providers, both the large ones, as well as there is a lot of different web-to-print type of applications out there, right?

I mean, worldwide, there is an enormous amount, many of them have different APIs that you can contact. We won't get too detailed about that, that's more of a technical thing, but there's ways to connect with them, and so basically, a proper DFE if someone is looking to get into the

business, they should – that is a very important question to ask. Your business is going to grow. What is your primary selling mechanism, right?

Online, so originally, you know, initially, if they're doing very small volume, it's a very unsophisticated type of workflow approach, it's online, but as it grows, they will be using these different types of web-to-print applications, e-commerce service providers, and so it's important to ask, you know, how does the DFE work with these?

How does it integrate with these? Does it communicate properly? Is it easy to manage the transfer of files? Is it easy to process all of the backend? As you said, you know, shipping information, and things of that nature? Does the DFE, is it able to talk back and forth with both, right? To a certain extent, and I know that we've made every effort to do that. We have some of the more widely used types of applications that are available. From an online perspective, that is without question, the most important thing to look at as well.

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[0:23:42.9] PM: If what you're doing isn't helping you grow, let McGrewGroup help you fix that. Better sales talk tracks, more compelling print samples, and winning workflow strategies can be yours. With decades of experience in transaction, direct mail, and commercial print, as well as years of marketing expertise, we can help with business and production strategies, CCM advice, and develop your content. McGrewGroup is ready to help you grow, expand, optimize, and thrive. Drop us a note on LinkedIn or at our website, mcgrewgroup.com.

[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:24:17.9] PM: So, when we start to look at running it as a business, the question comes up, "How do I keep my customers happy?" They're going to send me a file, might have been created any number of ways, and some tools are better than others, and they've got expectations about the colors that they are going to see when this job is printed. So, how does this environment help me help my customer know what they're really going to get, and help me produce what the customers' expecting?

[0:24:51.0] MC: The market is so competitive, what you touched on is more important now than ever. Without question, customers are looking for good quality products, right? I mean, I'm stating the obvious here. I think everybody kind of gets that, but you'd be surprised at how many online providers. I know my wife has ordered different things online from various providers, and we get them, we're like, "Wow, this is really poor quality," right?

This isn't exactly what they offer. So, there are a lot of people still offering not great quality out there. So, number one, to keep the customers, retain customers, keep them happy, without question, has to be quality. When we're talking about printing, right? Specifically, as it relates to DFE, is color quality, right? And color quality is not just accuracy, right? I mean, there are people looking for different things.

So, obviously, color accuracy is of the utmost importance, right? You want your colors to match, you want them to look right, especially when you're talking about, you know, let's say you're printing photographs versus illustrations, like the classic old school illustrated t-shirts or photographs. This is always a good analogy, right? Because with photographs, the colors have to be bang on, right?

You don't want Aunt Mildred's skin looking yellow, right? You know, like she's not feeling well, or something like that. You want it skin-toned skin color, right? You want all the colors coming out properly, and with illustrations, you not only want accuracy, but you also want vibrancy, right? You want it to bounce, and there's always a bit of a play back and forth between color-accurate images and very, very vibrant images.

So, it's really important that from a color perspective, your DFE is able to kind of achieve a good balance between both, right? You want that color accuracy for specific types of print jobs without question, and you also want vibrancy for others. You don't want the print to be dull, looking like it's already been washed 10 times, for example, right? When you first open it out of the box, or especially when you're comparing it, you know, from one to another.

So, obviously, product quality is of the utmost importance, not related to reading the color more than anything else, and then also you want things more quickly, right? You know, you retain customers, the old everybody wants everything yesterday now, right? So, you are ordering a t-

shirt, you want it tomorrow. If it is in your inbox tomorrow, or your mailbox tomorrow, I think that's great.

You also want to make sure that the – you don't only get a quickly, but you get it right. So, especially in the customization, personalization market, which many of these, as you pointed out, are short-run customized products, you want to have various tools within the DFE, like variable data, for example, or what have you, where you're able to import or bring into the jobs all of the exact information that the customers want.

So, if you are doing, let's say, I don't know, jerseys for a children's soccer team, for example, right? You want all those names to be spelled properly, right? You want all of the images to match the name, right? If you're doing photographs alongside it, all of those types of variations that are included within customized work have to be error-free. So, you know, you want good quality, you want it fast, you want it error-free, right? And that's really the key to keeping and maintaining and retaining customers.

[0:28:05.6] PM: So, Mike, if I'm a printer, I already have jumped into the DTF pool, and I bought one of those low-cost printers, you know, off the Internet somewhere, and it came with something that lets me get the work to it, but we're not really sure what that was, and I feel like the machine is okay, but I'm not getting what I want out of it. Is that a place where Fiery can help? Can I, as an independent printer, can I buy a Fiery solution from you, and stack it in front of this device that I've bought to make my world better?

[0:28:42.1] DC: Supercharge it.

[0:28:44.2] MC: Yeah, absolutely. Many of the low-end printers come with either drivers or very – and when I say low end, I think entry level is a better way.

[0:28:52.1] PM: Entry level.

[0:28:52.6] MC: To be perfectly honest, but many of the entry-level printers will come with just a basic driver, or they'll come with a very, very scaled-down, limited functionality type of DFE, you know, something that's very, very minimal. A lot of times, they're not dialed into the specific

types of film and ink combinations that will be used. They are very limited in terms of quality; they're just maybe for a hobbyist, it might be okay, right?

And the first couple of prints, but then as soon as you start printing or comparing it to other work that you see that's out there, you'd be like, "Wow, I'm really missing the boat here." So, without question, Fiery products are sold through a channel worldwide, and a lot of our sales come from that scenario that you just identified. So, people will start with their printer, they'll plug in their driver, or their limited-use DFE into the box.

They'll say this is – after a while, at first it's okay, they're learning, they'll see that it's not exactly what they want. So, they will reach out to our dealer channel, usually download a free trial version from us first, so they can play around with it. The good news is, is that for years, our strategy has been to support as many of the different manufacturer printers available out there. So, for us as a front-end DFE, if we only support and work well with one manufacturer, we would have been out of business a long time ago, right?

So, our goal is to support most of the printers that are out there in the market, most of them widely used, not some of the really obscure ones, obviously, but the more widely used printers. So, the chances are if someone is using a DFE that they are unhappy with, with the existing printer that they have, there's a very good chance that Fiery Digital Factory would probably support it.

[0:30:34.4] PM: So, kind of another weird question then, if I am again in one of these e-commerce modes, or I am doing work for the local Chamber of Commerce, or whatever, the design files that come to me are probably going to be in PDF, right? And there's a lot of really bad PDFs out in the marketplace, some from well-known design tools. So, are there things that I can do to make sure that my DFE is going to be able to handle the PDF I send at it? If somebody used an arcane tool that produces a really sloppy PDFs, am I still going to be able to get it Fiery and get what I need out of it?

[0:31:16.4] MC: Yeah, I think, you know, PDF has been for quite some time the ubiquitous type of file format that people use. Many people in the DTF space also use PNGs.

[0:31:26.0] PM: Okay.

[0:31:26.6] MC: The appearance that's on the PNGs are pretty simple to use, especially in smaller file formats and things, and generally speaking, when you are printing on a garment, file format doesn't get too unmanageable. So, PNG is a pretty good way to do that as well, but as far as PDFs are concerned, yes. So, Fiery does support PDF. Fiery, actually Digital Factory supports, gosh, pretty much all the most popular file formats.

So, and that's part of the very beginning of this conversation, we were talking about workforce support, right? This type of file format support, people like to standardize it; we recommend that they standardize, that is the best way to get consistent quality output, but you do get a lot of different types of file formats for many different people, right? And there's that old expression on any type of production environment: garbage in, garbage out.

That used to be true. It's not so true anymore because many DFEs have evolved over the years to not only be color management tools, as I mentioned earlier, but also have pre-production tools within them. So, there are various ways in DFEs that you can actually improve the quality of the file that's come in. If it's really a really bad file, then that might be a challenge for sure, but in many cases, if less than adequate files come in in PDF format or what have you, I know that from our perspective, anyhow, we have tools that enable customers to actually edit them, and fix them up a little bit.

You can resample them if they are really low resolution, for example, that's a very basic one that happens quite often, right? People are grabbing a one-inch by one-inch 72 DPI file off of the Internet, and blowing it up to 12 by 12, and saying, "Why is it grainy?" right? So, that is a really a common issue that happens in many workflow scenarios. So, resampling, you know, actually, and then modifying a lot of the different, you know, editing the actual file can really drastically improve the actual quality of the poor initial file.

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[0:33:25.3] 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

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[INTERVIEW CONTINUED]

[0:33:58.5] PM: I think, Mike, that you've given us exactly what we need to help the people who are listening figure out where the Fiery solution can fit into the growth of their company, because it certainly feels like especially in the DTF space, there is going to be a lot of competition out there, there are going to be a lot of people spinning up small business that grow to medium and large sized business. And if you want to be on that growth path, having a common DFE like Fiery there for all of your growth path, as well as your color management needs, sounds like this is the smart way to go.

Deborah, I think for people who are listening to things, we want to remind everyone of is that there's a lot of help available. If this is a space that they want to jump into, if this is a space they're in, and they feel like they're making mistakes, the Fiery team and that the teams who are selling Fiery solutions as resellers have an awful lot that they can do to help you get the most out of your DTF and DTG plans for growing your business.

[0:35:03.0] DC: I will put links to all of that in the show notes. I just want to talk to the printers out there for one second, and say that you know, something that a wide format person once told me is that when it comes to print customers, if they are not buying wide format from the printers that they work with all the time, they are buying it from somewhere else because they are buying it.

So, I feel the same way about the items that fall under DTF, and many times in conversations I have with printers, they go right to, "This is a consumer application, and I'm not a consumer business," and I get it. So, let's just break it down for a second. First of all, you probably have companies that may be sponsoring Little League teams. I thought that was a great example. You might have customers who have annual picnics, or guess what?

Their families, they're personal business, they have family picnics, or events that they can sell merch at. So, your customers are a great place to go, and test the waters on if there is a market there for your business, and with the alternate being, "I'm going to 1-800 get me a t-shirt," okay, fine, but like anything else, you get what you get, and that is it, and I'm not saying there's anything wrong with that. I'm wearing a shirt that came through that process right now.

But on the other end of it, there is the opportunity once you have a process in your print shop that you can handle, there is an opportunity to start getting involved with those networks of printers, like Gelato and Cloud printer, and then you don't have to worry that you have to go find consumers. The consumers are going to come to you.

You just have to make sure that you're set up to print one yoga pant, one shirt, a transfer for a shirt, a transfer for a yoga – and it doesn't mess up your workflow. It doesn't start taking time away from the job that eats at margins, and things like that, and in a lot of ways, it can make you have a completely separate business going on, on those machines that don't require any salespeople. Pat, what do you think about that?

[0:37:21.2] PM: I think that these are all really valid points. I think that it is important to understand, you know I'm a workflow nerd, and which is why Mike, I wind up asking you all the weird workflow questions because I'm the workflow nerd in the relationship, and in the end, I think it's one of those areas that the best thing you can do is work with smart people to help you set your systems up to ensure that your workflow is meeting your needs, and your target customer's needs. And if you do that, and you hang off that workflow, a smart DFE with smart color management capabilities, and smart growth capabilities, then you're setting your business up for success.

[0:38:02.0] DC: Yeah, and that's what –

[0:38:03.3] PM: And you set yourself up, right? If you decide to go with the five-dollar DFE and the 10-dollar press to report your transfers, you're not setting yourself up for growth.

[0:38:13.1] DC: Exactly, and that's just the point I wanted to make here, is that look at the ten-year plan. Do not look at the two-year plan here. Work with companies and technologies that

you're outputting these things on that you can grow with, and that can grow with you, and that you don't have to keep reinventing the system. So, you want to stay within the ecosystem. I'm sure, Mike, that would – I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I'm assuming you agree with that.

[0:38:39.5] MC: Yeah. No, I'd love to jump in on this one because it's a very interesting – it's a key message in terms of how we position the Digital Factory product. I mean, first and foremost, talking about resources, I'd be very remiss if I didn't mention, and I have to mention it is, you know, that Fiery does have our community's section on the website, and that is a huge resource that people use on a daily basis to try and learn.

Obviously, there's YouTube videos, there's all kinds of resources online, but one of the things that Fiery is very, very good at, and much better than CADlink was in the pre-acquisition days, was being able to provide more and more resources to customer from a learning perspective, which is key in these new markets. But Deborah, very interesting what you said earlier. Our key customer profile, basically, usually has a customer using not just one type of printing application as part of their production workflow.

Usually, there are three or four, right? So, there are wide format customers who are also producing direct-to-film. They're also direct-to-garment, they might be doing sublimation, or they might be doing UV printing, right? Those are all separate profit centers that they can sell to the same market, and the really successful companies realize that pretty early on, they might start off at DTF and go, "Hey, yeah. You know, these customers of mine are buying all kinds of great T-shirts and garments and things like that from us, but hey, they are also buying – they're also interested in sublimating onto mugs and doing other types of different hard material products."

The nice things about Digital Factory is that there are software options for each one of those different applications. So, there's a wide format, there's sublimation, there is UV, DTF, DTG. So, there's a huge benefit, what you just said in that single vendor kind of platform from a perspective that all of the different software packages all have the same kind of user interface, so the learning curve and the level of expertise has achieved much faster because you're using the same software across all these different applications, and they're all compatible with one another too, right?

So, the typical customer from a Fiery perspective would get into DTF, the next thing you know, they want to extend their business, perhaps, in the sublimation as well. Well, guess what? There's a solution for that, and that is a perfect fit for consistency, and it's such a great solution, and that's one of the ways that we've always positioned ourselves, and continued to do so.

[0:41:12.0] PM: That's great. Deb, I think we met our brief for helping people understand what the power that the Fiery solution brings to the table for DTF and DTG is, and the power of a good DFE in helping you grow your business.

[0:41:25.3] DC: Yeah, I mean, that and ding-ding-ding, if you want to talk about the next frontier of where everything is going, it is DTF. I mean, I'm still on the flexible packaging thing as well, but this is creeping up there. I mean, I cannot believe the amount of people who are launching presses directly for DTF – and I mean, the big industrial ones, not for somebody with the George Foreman Grill heat press in their house.

So, this is a timely conversation, and honestly, it's a business opportunity. That's how I see this segment, and to Mike's most excellent point, if my software that – and workflow, which is what drives the printers insane, when they have to start – when things aren't talking to each other, or they have to train new people, or there's downtime because, you know, there's an integration or anything like that, to be able to just, I know, this is a very simple term, "Hey, we have a new product. Let's just add it to our system," and there we go, is way better than, "Hold on, we've got to come in here and assess what's going on and if everything's going to talk to each other."

I mean, I bet you 10 printers already – just went, "Oh," putting gas in the car or mowing their lawn, whatever they're doing right now. So, thank you so much for sharing this information. Mike, we've been mentioning everything you need to know to connect with Mike, and Fiery is in the show notes. Until next time, DTF long and prosper.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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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.

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