[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:03] DC: This is the true story of two printers who agreed to podcast with me and have their opinions recorded. Listen to what happens when printers stop being polite and start getting real.

[0:00:13] JM: Hi, this is Jamie McLennan.

[0:00:15] WC: And this is William Crabtree.

[0:00:16] DC: And I'm your host, Deborah Corn. Welcome to the PrinterChat Podcast.

[EPISODE]

[0:00:27] DC: Hey, everybody. Welcome to Podcasts From the Printerverse. This is Deborah Corn, your Intergalactic Ambassador. More specifically, I am here with the PrinterChat guys, who I just saw in Las Vegas last week. Hello, gentlemen.

[0:00:41] WC: Hello, Deborah. Hello, Jamie.

[0:00:45] JM: Hello, Deborah. Hello, Will. How you doing today?

[0:00:47] DC: Hello, William. Hello, Jamie. That's my favorite part. We actually got to hang out. We had a family dinner. We invited Jamie's co-workers to come with us, but they were very nice about it. Greggy, shout out to Greggy and Jay. All right, we're going to use this episode to speak about PRINTING United, which, if you are not in the United States, that is a trade show in North America. Arguably, the biggest trade show in North America. It is produced by PRINTING United Alliance. We were all there in different capacities. I think it will be interesting to dive into our experiences and see –

[0:01:33] WC: A recap.

[0:01:34] JM: Yeah.

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[0:01:35] DC: Yeah, do a recap and see what we all took away from the show, because it's got to be quite different. Will, you were part of the exhibitor crew working in the 4over booth. We'll come back to you in one second.

[0:01:50] WC: Okay.

[0:01:51] DC: Jamie, overall, what was your impression of the show?

[0:01:56] JM: Overall, I mean, comparing it to last year, which was in Orlando, it just seemed a lot larger, a lot more spread out. There was a lot more walking. Yes, it was a put your most comfortable pair of shoes on and expect to travel between both halls. Yeah, I had to visit people everywhere, and different companies that we wanted to see. We spent a lot of times trying to make sure we could find everything in the North Hall and then going over to the other hall and just making sure we can lock it down. Then once we get back, we're like, “Oh, we forgot somebody. We got to go back now.” Yeah. That was the biggest part. It was a big area.

What was cool was that big middle area where people could just hang out and just do stuff, which there was a lot of free space that, I guess, you would call it that was different before. They had that food court area.

[0:02:39] DC: You mean the lobby between the two halls? Mm-hmm.

[0:02:42] JM: Yeah, a lobby. Yeah, there was a lot of people hanging out there and just in between. I got crowded a couple of times during the day when cutting through. That's where you seem to run into the people you're trying to look for, cutting across. But I thought that was neat. It was still one of my biggest peeves is that a lot of the companies aren't near each other, so you could easily check them all out and compare them to each other. You have to spend a lot of time going back and forth and checking out different things. That's my biggest pet peeve, but that's been in mind for a couple of years.

[0:03:16] DC: It's not just yours. I actually brought it up again at the show. I'm like, when is the customer convenience going to come in here? It's not that they're not trying to address it. It's the

exhibitors who refuse to be next to somebody that has the same exact thing, or close enough to what they have, to your point, that it can be compared, which is insanity to me, because go to Best Buy, you can compare anything you want. You go to Amazon, it says, “Customers who bought this also bought this.” All of a sudden, I'm like, “Oh, I didn't even know that went with that.” I mean, I completely understand the exhibitors’ “strategy.” But I also think they're missing out on people who could easily find out that one vendor solution is missing one little thing that they need, and the person right next door has it, but maybe or maybe not, they'll make that journey across the whole to find that – or it wasn't even a hall. It was like two different buildings, technically, to see if they could solve their problem.

It's one of the reasons why Hunkeler Innovationdays in Switzerland is one of the best events, because everybody's just right next to each other, and everybody, you can do that comparison right then and there. Yeah, especially with the software companies, I don't understand, well, that's one of the bigger problems, because, okay, I have this press, but what are exactly other software that I can use with this press without changing my whole system? How do you figure that out if they're not all in one place? I guess you have to ask a million people, but I don't know. Customer convenience, I hope, comes into play.

[0:05:07] JM: The more suppliers did tell me, he’s like, “We picked this booth.” I was like, “You did?” I'm like –

[0:05:11] WC: Yeah, that's how it works. It's first come, first served. The map goes out, and who secures the spaces is who secures the spaces first. Some exhibitors will seek out to be next to competitors. Some will seek to be away from them. Think about it from this standpoint, right? Instead of going to Best Buy and you have the things that are all the same, all the TVs, all the computers, etc., think of it more like real estate. You wouldn't want to open up a print shop right next door to another print shop, right?

[0:05:40] DC: Yeah.

[0:05:41] WC: But maybe you do, because you got CVS and Walgreens across the street from each other. You got Lowe’s and Home Depot next to each other. There's a strategy on both sides of like, “I don't want to be next door to one of my competitors,” versus, “I want to be right

next to my competitor." It goes both ways, right? Because you will see a CNC next to a CNC and you will see software next to another software, but then you'll see software all the way out in the boondocks halfway across the show from their direct competitor.

[0:06:07] DC: Yeah. A 100%.

[0:06:09] WC: It'll always go towards the exhibitor side of things, because the exhibitors are really the ones that pay the bills. Attendees, revenue is icing, and attendees being there is why the exhibitors are there. It's all a thing.

[0:06:21] DC: Yeah. It's a total catch-22. And you're totally right. I just want to say that the shows could create areas, like this is the wide format area. I mean, they had the –

[0:06:33] WC: They kind of do with garment, right?

[0:06:35] DC: I'm just saying, they had the apparel zone. Yeah. Why is it that apparel printing can all be next to each other, but the rest of everything can't?

[0:06:43] WC: I think it should be segmented like, okay, here's wide format world. Here's offset world. Here's digital press world.

[0:06:50] DC: The software right in the middle of everything, because that's what connects everything.

[0:06:55] WC: Software suppliers.

[0:06:56] DC: I mean, I would make it like giant concentric circles, like Dscoop did that one year.

[0:07:01] WC: Make it laid out like a Disney Park, right?
[0:07:05] JM: Of course. Yes. Their app was great, because I used that app and just highlighted everybody I needed to see and then go, "Oh, well, we missed them. We got to go back."

[0:07:15] DC: Yeah. Jamie maybe used the app a couple of times. William, overall, what was your opinion of the show and your experience there?

[0:07:23] WC: I mean, it was great, right? We were part of the 4over booth. Printer Bridge is 4over's e-commerce web-to-print solution, and I am assisting and supporting that platform. I was working there and as a representative of Printer Bridge and got to interact with a lot of attendees at the show. I was busy the whole time. I did tons of demos, had tons of conversations, signed a few people up on the floor.

[0:07:51] DC: Yay.

[0:07:52] WC: I think one of the more exciting parts of it was getting to interact with the 4over team, because it's all Zoom and Slack and email. There's never really like, I haven't met any of these people that I work with face to face, so getting to actually meet them and hang out with them and show them the new platform, because they hadn't even seen it yet. They're super excited about it. There's been a lot of excitement just in general from the 4over side since the show. It was 100% worth me going, but great experience across the board.

[0:08:23] DC: I just released a podcast where we did a deep dive into Printer Bridge, and I will connect it in this episode as well. I suggest everybody goes and looks at it, because of the feedback that I heard myself when I was standing in your booth. From the 4over employees that you were saying that were raving about you, they connected with me on LinkedIn, by the way.

[0:08:48] WC: Awesome.

[0:08:49] DC: They really do love you, because we were sending a talking to at least two of the guys that were with you, and also the printers that were watching your demonstrations were definitely noticing a massive improvement to everything that is going on with that platform. Can you give just a really short explanation of why I keep calling it the revamped Printer Bridge platform?

[0:09:17] WC: Well, so the Printer Bridge platform has been around for a long time, and we have completely rebuilt the software from the ground up on a new framework. It's all bright, shiny new, new technology, lots of new features, lots of new functions, new CMS, and it's a

revival, right? The program has not been shelved, but not given a lot of attention. The technology has been stagnant, to be fair. It was the best thing since sliced bread in 2015. It was the best technology MIS web-to-print solution in the industry in 2015, not in 2026 or 2025, until now.

Now that we've rebuilt it and brought it up to date, it is again going to be the best thing since the wheel, or the printing press. The program itself is e-commerce web-to-print, MIS, CRM that connects to 4over. So, when orders come in through the website, the user, or the owner of the website, decides if they're going to fulfill those jobs in-house, if they're going to outsource them to another vendor, or it has a direct connection to 4over's workflow API, where they click a button and it goes in to be fulfilled by 4over.

4over is so confident in their product and their service that they're offering this platform as a way to connect to them, but allowing you to still use the software to run your shop, do fulfillment in-house, outsource to other vendors, etc. It's really a powerful system, and I'm super excited about being a part of it.

[0:10:44] DC: For anybody out there who might be confused, you don't work for 4over. You were part of the development team for the software, correct?

[0:10:52] WC: That's correct. Yes. I'm one of the engineers on the platform itself and have helped to develop the software itself, and that's my role. A lot of people that were at the show like, “Where's your business card? Where's your phone number?” I'm like, I sit behind the curtain; 4over has their own team that manages this and deals with this and interacts with the consumer side of things. When you give feedback of something that you want to see the software do, or something that it doesn't do well, that comes across my plate, and then we make changes and fix things.

[0:11:20] DC: Okay, I have one more question about this, and then we'll see if Jamie has any questions. What was it like for you to be a business owner who has been in charge of everything forever to essentially be working in someone else's booth, even though you had your own station and you were the master of that domain, as they say on Seinfeld?

[0:11:41] WC: I liked it that I'm a good team player. I was there representing another organization. As far as I'm concerned, I'm on their time. I didn't just leave the booth without asking permission, right? My main point of contact. When I left for the day, if I had to go to the bathroom, I wasn't asking for permission. But when I left for the day, because 4.00, I'm spent. I got to get out of there before the taxing line builds. I'm not trying to stay until the very last minute of the show. I'm courteous, and I'm saying, “Hey, is it cool for me to leave?” Not saying, “Hey, I'm out.” No. “Is it okay?”

I think that goes a long way, because like you said, the other people that were there had positive things to say about me. I don't want to go in like a wrecking ball and be like, “Oh, well, I just – I'm a business owner, blah, blah, blah. Yeah, yeah, yeah.” I'm there to represent that organization. I'm humble in that way that I can work for other people and work with other people. My ego doesn't get in the way. When I'm talking to printers, I say, yeah, like, “Hey, I'm a print shop owner, but I'm an absentee print shop owner, and I do this now,” which is the reality, right?

I spend maybe, I'm 95% absentee at this point. Ashley pretty much runs the show and she's the boss. I work on software now. That goes a long way when I'm talking to printers in the booth too, because they're like, “Oh, wait. Okay. You're not just some guy. You've actually, like, you know you've been in my shoes.” I built this thing with everything that I wish that I had when I started. So, like, this is how it works. I think that may be something that is missing on the 4over side with the existing team that they don't even really know everything that it does. That's my next goal is to educate them and get their team up to speed and really cultivate the momentum that I think I created by being in the booth and getting people excited about it.

[0:13:20] JM: Well, when we stopped by the booth, I thought it was exciting, because I'm like, first time I walk by, I saw – I’m looking for you. It was crowded. I'm like, “All right, I'll have to come back, because it's really busy there.” We came back later and got a chance to sit down with you and just check it out, which we learned about it before in our last podcast. But it was cool seeing you interact with everybody, checking out what was going on. I know a little bit about the platform to get myself in trouble, but it's definitely cool. It's definitely worth looking at. Then the second day, we actually brought those nonprofit people over for you to take a look at, for them to look at, because they really don't have anything. They have three presses, they have a bunch of people that work there, and they're just writing things down on paper, and they're

like, “This is what you need to look at, because this will streamline everything for you, help you keep things organized. I hope that works out.” It sounded like they were excited to learn about it, and it sounds like it'd be perfect for what their needs were.

[0:14:11] WC: Jamie, do you have contact information for that group?

[0:14:13] JM: Yeah. Yeah, I can get that to you. Yup.

[0:14:15] WC: Please send that over to me. I need to make sure I follow up with them. I connected them with the 4over team and then one of the reps in the booth, and I discussed it. I made the executive decision that we were going to just donate the software to them, since they were a nonprofit. I want to make sure that those dots got connected. I know they got connected at the show, and they all exchanged information, but I haven't followed up yet. So, I want to make sure that I follow up on that.

[0:14:36] JM: I'll get you their names.

[0:14:37] WC: Thank you.

[0:14:37] DC: Will, you're so good. I love that. Jamie, you and I will walk you around the show like lunatics. We passed each other a couple of times.

[0:14:48] JM: Especially bringing my owner with us and you're like, “You're in Deborah World now.”

[0:14:52] DC: Yeah. Jay was not prepared for Deborah World at the trade show. Okay. When we weren't together, you had done a lot of research as you always do before you went to the show. First of all, was all the research that you did, all the articles that you read, did what was promised manifest in those booths?

[0:15:17] JM: Oh, yeah, definitely. Yeah. First off, I'd like to seek out our suppliers who make the materials, papers, and stuff like that. Love to see what's new. Everybody usually has something, and get samples and make sure they're sending me things. I had stuff when I came

back, actually, showing up a day or two later, like sample rolls and stuff like that that we asked for, which were taken care of, which was great. I like doing that. Then there's a number of booths I like to go to to steal ideas. Some of the booths have great ideas. They've made things. They've done stuff just for the show. It's taking pictures, and I go back to my customers and go, “Hey, this is the stuff we print on. This is what we can do. This is what was done recently at a show.” That's one of my main things.

Then, as my group, we sat around, and we talked about it later after we were done. We’re like, we want to talk to all our OEMs, go through them, see what's new, what's coming up, anything that we need to keep further down the road, what's the next couple of years coming out, and keep that in our back pocket, saying, we're going to – we always have a plan. We put a wish list together every year, what we need for next year immediately, what do we need for a couple of years out. That helps with that. What's on our wish list for next year, we go through those booths and look. Then if something pops up that's totally cool, different, how can we sell that? Who can we talk to about it? Because if we can't get it now, we'll find a way to incorporate into what we need later. Yeah, there's a rhyme and reason for what we do.

[0:16:36] DC: Innvoke also has a label company in Atlanta, correct?

[0:16:40] JM: Yes. Yeah.

[0:16:41] DC: Did you guys also go to the LOUPE, which used to be Labelexpo? Did you find anybody talking about labels in a label business type of way at PRINTING United? First is just, “Hey, here's a new opportunity to get into.” Like, people who were really discussing the business of labels?

[0:17:02] JM: Of labels? Not really. I mean, Jay and CJ from our Georgia plant went to LOUPE the week before. Jay said this was definitely more people here. It was definitely a lot more people attending PRINTING United. Has to be, because it's a lot bigger for one thing. Yeah, they were there, and they were making connections with a couple people, because we're looking at Flexo and high-speed, digital label presses and stuff like that. We got to meet with our one key guy at Canon, because we've been looking at their one press that we’ve gone back and

forth with them for a little while, and escaping me now, because I'm not the label guy. But it's pretty cool. I got to take a look at the samples that they had and go over stuff like that.

I mean, it's something that's on our radar for the next year. It's going to be, there's probably three different presses we're looking at, going back and forth and finding out which is the best fit, what will help us? We got to spend time with the Canon people on that, so that was cool. I don't think anybody else. No.

[0:17:54] DC: Yeah. Interesting.

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[EPISODE CONTINUED]

[0:18:40] DC: We often have spoken about how trade show follow-up is just a bunch of generic, “Thanks for stopping by the booth. I know nothing about you other than I scanned your badge and completely used to send you to a contact form.” But you shared an email, Jamie, that you got from Roland right after the show to say, look at how you do it. Explain what that was all about.

[0:19:10] JM: Oh, that was great. Yeah. That came a couple of days ago, probably the beginning of this week. Yeah, we went to see the DIMENSE, which is our favorite for years.

[0:19:18] WC: We love DIMENSE.

[0:19:20] JM: It's a rolling product now. They're pressed. It was cool. Talked to them a little bit more about it. It's still in my back pocket. One of these days, something going to happen, and I actually have a contact that if I need to do something, I can send a job to them and get it done, which is really cool. The architects I know and the museum work that we do, somebody's got to be interested in it. It's something I'm dying to bring into the shop. Yeah, every year I talk to them and see what's going on. Yeah, they reached out and said, “Hey, send us your files. Now, can we do some tests, that way you can show your customers?” Putting up some plan together now to see what we can send them and then take it to a couple of my bigger customers and say, “Hey, look. This is cool. Are you interested? This is something we –”

I've shown them their samples, but if it's something more a little bit more than its own, I think they'll go over well. Then, like I said, we were at a couple of our material suppliers and a couple new materials that we looked at. I was like, I really want samples of that. I got back, and there was a roll here. There's another one. I got a tracking number for another roll coming. That was really cool. I even got an email from somebody that said, “Hey, you connected. You put in your app that you were going to visit us, but you didn't. Why? What can we do to help you?” I was like, “Oh, that was interesting. That's the first time that's ever happened.”

[0:20:29] DC: They knew that you had picked them in the app?

[0:20:32] JM: Yeah, I marked that click on something, but I never –

[0:20:34] DC: Oh.

[0:20:35] JM: Yeah. They were like, “You didn't visit.” Like, “Hey.” “Or, did you not check in when you visited?” I was like, “Oh, I don't remember. Apologize.”

[0:20:42] DC: Creepy.

[0:20:44] JM: Yeah. they're watching.

[0:20:45] DC: I didn't know that. I never pick anything. I just use it for the – I love the little directional thing. That was very helpful. PRINTING United, there was no north, south, east, or

west on it, so I walked the wrong way a few times following the map in the wrong direction. Got to work on that. Will, did you get out of the booth and gazelle around and see anything?

[0:21:07] WC: Well, I did no real gazelling at the show. I was in the booth. Outside of going to go to the bathroom, I was there the whole time. Just nobody can actually see this and this is the worst thing that you can do on a podcast, but they're like doing this little weird finger motion about me gazelling through the shop, or through the floor.

[0:21:28] DC: Just jumping around like a gazelle, because he goes so fast.

[0:21:30] WC: I'm fast. But no. I did on the last day, because the last day was slow and quiet, and that's what the last day is; I did venture out. Our DTG took a crap, right as I was leaving for the show. It was going to be 4 grand to repair it, which I'm still repairing it, because the machine's worth 16 if I sell it. We're going to sell the equipment, but I'm done putting money into it. DTG, you have to run all the time, and we just don't do enough volume to justify it. We're going to switch over to DTF. Right now, we do HVT is what it's called. It's a film that we can run on our roll-to-roll wide format printers. Then we cut and weed, and then we can heat press that to garments.

[0:22:15] DC: Wait a second. You can create direct-to-film transfers on a wide format press?

[0:22:21] WC: 100%. Yeah.

[0:22:22] DC: What the freaking hell?

[0:22:23] WC: Yeah. Here's the difference, right? This was my hang-up. I'm like, why would I invest in DTF equipment when I can do this on my roll-to-rolls? Here's the variable.

[0:22:34] DC: How does it not melt? I've got a million questions.

[0:22:36] WC: It's called HTV, and it's a heat-press vinyl that you can print. It has a film on it. So, you reverse print it, and then it gets heat pressed. It's almost the same thing as DTF. The difference is if you've got a white ink printer, you can do this. The difference is, is that you have

to weed it, so all of your negative space stuff. If you were just doing big boxes, whatever, right? But we have a roll-to-roll with inline cut, our Roland VG printer. It's a 54-inch roll-to-roll. We've been running this film on this stuff. We make transfers all day, which is basically the same thing as DTF, but we have to weed it.

The benefit, and this is why I went gazelling. I did gazelle for a few minutes, is I had to understand and figure out what the real benefit of true DTF was, because I'm like, I can already do this in my shop. Why would I buy different equipment? I was thinking, I'll just buy another 24, 36-inch roll-to-roll that does the same thing as my Roland and do it like that, which is super cheap. You can get a 36-inch roll-to-roll for 8 grand, 9 grand, a good one. These DTF systems, some of them, like the Chinese ones, you can get Chinese ones for really cheap that are 8 grand, 9 grand. But the real boss ones are in the twenties and thirties.

I wanted to understand what the real difference was. I also know there's a process with DTF, where you have a powder, and you have a heat element, and it's a shaker, and it's this whole process. I wanted to wrap my head around why and what the real benefit of that was. What it is, is you don't have to weed. If you've never worked in a wide format shop, Deb, you're looking a little confused. Weeding is –

[0:24:19] DC: No, no, no. I'm just concentrating, because I want to understand.

[0:24:22] WC: The weeding is you have to pick out all the little negative space elements, right? If you have an O, you have to remove the inside of the O. When you have a little letter that's only a quarter of an inch big, you can't do those little tiny details, and it's very labor intensive, right? You can do a peel-away and get a lot of the big stuff, but somebody's got to sit there with a little razor blade and have the patience and pick out all those little things. There's a huge margin of error. Somebody forgot to pick out the O on one shirt, I got to reprint that shirt.

[0:24:53] DC: But then you're taking those transfers to what I call the George forming grill press, right?
[0:24:58] WC: Yeah, the heat press. Clamps. The heat clamp. Yeah, yeah, yeah.

[0:25:02] DC: You can't do it in an industrial way with the film?

[0:25:05] WC: What we're doing now with the HTV and the roll-to-roll printers is that we print, weed, and then it goes to a clamp, and we can heat press on a shirt, or a hat, right? That's the process that we're doing.

[0:25:16] DC: Okay. But still one at a time. It's not like a human has to do that. Okay.

[0:25:20] WC: Yeah, it's still one at a time. We print them in sheets, so we'll print 25 transfers, and then you've got somebody that's weeding out 25 transfers, and then this get cut down to the individual, and then they go to the clamp to get put on the shirt. That's the process. Now with the DTF, the benefit is that you don't have to weed. You can now do smaller elements. Then there's other effects and things that you can get into with some of these pieces of equipment. That's the big variable is you take that labor out of the equation of having to weed out all of those things. Then you can also get smaller, detailed prints, more distress; you can do other things and other things with it.

That's what I needed to wrap my head around of why. I knew I wanted to get away from DTG. I'm done with DTG. I could already do this in the shop with the existing equipment that I have. Why wouldn't I just duplicate that in a smaller scale? What I figured out is the true benefit of the DTF is that not having to weed. I've gone down the rabbit hole on equipment since I've been home. I'm going to buy a full DTF system. I'm leaning towards Roland, because I really like my Roland.

[0:26:30] DC: Okay. Let me send you to my guys.

[0:26:32] WC: I really like my Roland, so I'm leaning towards them on the system that I've specked out; xTool has a system that looks really cool, but I think it's too small for what I do. But if you are looking for a super small footprint and you're really just now getting into garments, I think that their system is probably the best one out there for entry-level. I think we're a step too big for that. I'm looking at, do we get a system that we can just take what we do currently on our roll-to-rolls and move it away from the roll-to-rolls to take the DTG, or do I expand on it a little bit and start selling transfers and doing other things to where I'm not actually putting it on the shirt. I'm just selling somebody 50 transfers, right?

[0:27:15] DC: A 100%. There is a company that I see advertising on YouTube now. That's all they do is they make these transfers. Then I spoke to a couple of printers when direct to film first came out, and they were switching over from direct to garment. One of the benefits that they told me was that with the film, it's much more flexible, where you can put that art.

[0:27:39] WC: It is.

[0:27:40] DC: They were doing a lot of yoga pants with logos on the sides of them and hats that weren't putting –

[0:27:47] WC: Sorry to interrupt you, quick education. DTG, DTG, you have to heat, pre-treat, heat, right? Doing things outside of a T-shirt is very difficult. The platens that you have to get to be able to do those things is very difficult. You really can only print on cotton. You can't print on spandex. You can't print on polyester. You can't print on blends. DTG is super, super finicky. I really don't see it improving other than they've improved efficiency. They've improved ability to do more shirts faster. But I don't think that technology is going to get better from an output standpoint of quality of product and versatility. That's the biggest issue that I have with it is is that I'm limited on the garment that I could put it on. Most people, even in the T-shirt world and screen print, they're doing a 60-40 blend. If I run a 60-40 blend on the DTG, it's a crapshoot on whether it's going to come out okay.

[0:28:48] DC: Yeah, but it's also a volume thing and a business thing. It's like a primary business. I mean, Taylor Swift's concert T-shirts are not going on a direct-to-film. I find that very hard to believe, unless there's –

[0:28:59] WC: Well, they're going screen print. They're going screen print. They're either going DT – They're either going film, or they're going screen. Yeah.

[0:29:03] DC: Yeah. Because you've got to do a zillion of them right?
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[EPISODE CONTINUED]

[0:30:06] DC: Jamie?

[0:30:07] JM: No, I'm just learning a lot here. Yeah, I always go through that apparel area and go, “I don't know anything about what's going on here. Where's Will?” Yeah, that's interesting. Will did have a big moment on the third day. Got an interview.

[0:30:20] WC: Yeah.

[0:30:21] JM: That was really cool.

[0:30:22] DC: Oh, yeah. With INKISH. We’ll link that in the show notes as well. How was that, William?

[0:30:27] WC: That was fantastic. I don't want you guys to take this the wrong way, because I love you and you guys are dear to my heart and hanging out with you for dinner was a highlight of the show. But I got to hang out with Morten the night before.

[0:30:40] DC: Get to it.

[0:30:41] WC: We stayed up a little bit too late. That really was awesome, because I don't get to see Morten very often.

[0:30:47] DC: Okay. Well, I'm not offended by that. Are you, Jamie?

[0:30:49] WC: We hung out pretty late that night. I was like, “You should come by and see me.” He's like, “I'm too busy.” I was like, “Cool. I understand.” Then he still came by. It was really cool that he came and saw me and did an interview.

[0:30:59] DC: Awesome. I love that.

[0:31:00] JM: It was a good interview. Yes.

[0:31:02] DC: Very cool. Okay. One of the things that the show was hyping before the show, and I know because I did 65 interviews with exhibitors and the team from PRINTING United Alliance and expo before the show was the AI pavilion. I definitely passed by there a few times. It was pretty full, but there was always seats in the front, because nobody likes to sit in the front, but there were people standing in the aisles. I saw some pretty interesting speakers. I actually went to a session with Jamie and Jay and Greggy, and Joslyn came with us, too. That was really interesting. What was the company he was from? Sabre.

[0:31:48] JM: Sabre. Yes. Yes.

[0:31:49] DC: Sabre. It was really interesting, because, especially that one session. Because to me, it laid the foundation of how to get your house in order before you even embark on this adventure. Can you speak a little more about what your team learned prior? You also did the assessment, right? You had them come in to do the assessment?

[0:32:12] JM: Yeah. We did an assessment with PRINTING United. I wasn't in on the whole thing, but they basically sat down and went through everything that we have right now and, like, look, we're trying to – how can we implement AI to do more than we want to do in our systems. Our workflow needs to be upgraded, and a few things need to happen before we can do that. We are not slowly, but we've been working on it for a year, working up, changing everything over to the Microsoft platform and working with the Sabre group and PrintVis to change our system

over, so we can have our whole ERP system will be Microsoft platform and will introduce AI in there at some point, depending on how this goes.

We're working on it really quickly with our role department down in Georgia, because their software, as Will knows, was from 1984, ran this year's catalog at one time, or something like that. It's like doing DOS. It makes your head explode. That needs to get done by December.

[0:33:08] DC: Wow.

[0:33:09] JM: During the last couple months of getting them sorted out and getting that launched. They've been working on it for a while. But yeah, that whole incorporating in that. Yeah, it was interesting, because Ken there through Sabre went through the whole thing from the beginning to the end. What is AI? How has it done? What's going to happen? What's the good parts? What's the bad parts? All that. Basically, just laying the footwork for what your company needs to do and how it will help, like how it will help do your estimates and simple things can be done this way and done that way, and it will speed up timelines for getting back to people, like we can have quick estimates. If you need to talk to somebody here, here's Jamie's phone number; he'll reach out to you shortly and take over this, because we've taken it as far as our AI will take it as far as it can. That's where we're going.

It's been a lot of take 10 steps, take five back, take more. But it's been interesting. I'm looking forward to learning more towards the end of the year, while I'm doing really more – I get more time involved with it.

[0:34:05] DC: It was a really interesting conversation, too. I didn't understand the breadth of what AI can really do in a print shop. That, I guess, is because I don't use it for what a print shop would use it for. I use it for creative collaboration and to tell me weird things about why my cat is doing something crazy. The knowledge that you guys are PRINTING United Alliance members, so you did the assessment through the PRINTING United Alliance and then found out all the amazing things you could do, but you couldn't just start doing that because the system, the base system you had, needed to first be able to enable all of that now.

[0:34:52] JM: Yes. Yeah, that's a great way to put it.

[0:34:55] DC: It was just very interesting. It's definitely not an uncomplicated process, but it seems to me that if you could just get past this one point, it is the most amazing thing I've ever heard of the way that you guys are going to use it. I'm sure it's not unique to your business. It's what it can do for a print shop.

[0:35:16] JM: It'll help roll it backend and accounting and all that and be able to inventory. Yeah. So, stuff that I'm not going to use it for. But yes, it'll definitely work and make a lot of other lives easier.

[0:35:28] DC: Jay, who's one of the owners, right, he was basically like, all the information that I can get by asking a simple question is something that could take me three weeks to walk around and ask people with a piece of paper. What is going on here?

[0:35:43] JM: Yes. Yes.

[0:35:44] DC: It's crazy.

[0:35:45] JM: That was cool. What was also cool about that AI area was there are vendors and little pods along the edges, and there was that little clear booth. You could take time and go meet with them to review what you wanted. You went in their little pods. You could have seen. Yeah, the press was there, which was really cool. Got to talk to them for a little bit, because they have some really cool software. And there's a couple other companies there, too. It was interesting. I was just looking over people's shoulders. I'm like, “Don't know anything about them,” but trying to listen in like, why are you there. Yeah, that was neat. They had a couple areas like that in the show and a couple places where there were pokable vendors.

[0:36:19] DC: Yeah, and Focus on one too.

[0:36:21] JM: All in one booth area. Increased their traffic because they were with a bunch of others. That was the neat part. Some of the software was together. That's a good case of that.

[0:36:30] DC: Yeah. It was also smart, because you could have a brief conversation with someone in the little pod and then go to their big booth, wherever their presence was. I'm not sure if everybody had another booth, but some people did for sure. They had a great place.

[0:36:43] JM: Yeah. Some people had multiple spots. Yeah.

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[EPISODE CONTINUED]

[0:37:39] DC: I had a really interesting show, and I'm going to talk about DIMENSE, because day one, I spent at the show carrying 1,175, and there was a reason why it was that number, because there was 19 sponsors and then everybody got 50 to 100 buttons. They either got 50, 75, or 100 buttons, Girls Who Print buttons. Then I sent everybody who wanted a Girls Who Print button to one of the Girls Who Print sponsors, and it really worked. There was so many people wearing Girls Who Print buttons, and crazy people were telling me, “Oh, I got this button at the Canon booth.” “Oh, I got this at the Roland booth.” It was a really great moment, because not only were people saying, “Where did you get that button? How do I get one?” But it also enabled the companies to say, without making it a braggy thing, that they support women in the industry and our mission. Thank you so much to all the Girls Who Print sponsors, who gave out buttons and at the show, and supporters, and for everyone who asked me for one in the aisle.

On Thursday, that was my walk around the show day and see things. What I actually spent Thursday doing was bringing creative people. There were a couple of creative. Oh, you introduced me to that one guy, right, the photographer? I took him. Are we allowed to say his name? He's a cool guy.

[0:39:11] JM: Yeah. Justin. Yeah. We did some work for him for his photos that he won some awards in, and one of the shows he did in Vegas, so yeah, some of his embellishments. So, yeah, he was very excited to go.

[0:39:21] DC: What was his full name and his company, so we could tag him?

[0:39:23] JM: Justin Piccari. I think that's his name. That's his –

[0:39:28] DC: Okay, we'll find him.

[0:39:30] JM: His art studio. Yeah, I'll get that information for you for that.

[0:39:32] DC: Okay, excellent. I brought him over to see DIMENSE. My only focus was DIMENSE, because at this point, I need everybody using DIMENSE, because I want to play with it so much. I met Kevin O'Connor, who's the gentleman from Enhanced Color in Connecticut, who has a bunch of them. He was so cool and amazing, and he's also the guy who digitally prints carpet, which I'm obsessed with at the moment. Then on Thursday afternoon, I was introduced to somebody who prints on glass, not decals, but literally prints on glass, for really high-end think yachts, think million-dollar apartments. She's working, was working on a billion, B, with a B, Dollar Brownstone. She's creating all the glass cabinetry and the shower doors. I mean, it's incredible stuff. She was at the glass show, which was in another building at the Las Vegas Convention Center.

I gave her Roland's free registration code, and she came with me to the booth, and they're going to collaborate together, because now she can offer the wallpaper to go with the shower doors. Now she can offer anything she wants. This was a really cool part. She works with a muralist who hand-paints wallpaper. Because if you have a billion dollars, that's what happens.

[0:41:07] JM: Backsplashes in your bed.

[0:41:10] WC: You have a billion dollars, you might as well, right?

[0:41:12] DC: Yeah. I mean, but yes. Everything you're saying, Jamie, hand painted.

[0:41:15] JM: Amazing isn't it?

[0:41:17] DC: It is amazing, except the artist is like, “I don't want to do this all the time. Maybe I'll only do it for special things.” While we're standing there, the glass artist is sending photographs to the mural artist, and now they're both going to go to Atlanta to work with DIMENSE at the Roland headquarters.

[0:41:41] WC: Bitch, are you getting the commission off of this? Like, come on.

[0:41:45] DC: My commission is that she's going to use it, and then I'll tell the project. It's a Project Peacock story.

[0:41:51] WC: Okay.

[0:41:53] DC: I also found an interior designer who does wall hangings. Between the wall hangings, the muralist, and the glass artist, we're going to do some really amazing luxury items. Now, originally when I was talking to DIMENSE, and it's been for years, as Jamie said, I'm like, “This is too luxury. We need to bring it down to practical uses.” I've abandoned that. This is not for regular people. It is for those billion-dollar Brownstone renovations, museums, restaurants, billion-dollar apartments. I mean, luxury hotels. That's what I'm focusing on. It was just so exciting to see artists who use other mediums. The photographer, the glass designer. I spoke to some other people who designed fabric and stuff like that. To see their reaction to DIMENSE is just incredible.

I wish that I actually told them to keep a camera by the DIMENSE booth. Then after somebody sees it, to film their face and then do the hashtag, “I got DIMENSE at the Roland booth,” or something.

[0:43:11] WC: That would be cool.

[0:43:13] DC: I know.

[0:43:14] WC: That's a great social media campaign. I love that.

[0:43:16] DC: It really is, because I cannot tell you, every single person who touches it makes that, what the hell is going on your face? This is the coolest thing I've ever seen. If you don't know what we're talking about, get in touch with Roland and ask them for samples, because this is literally something you have to touch. You can't just –

[0:43:38] JM: See it. No.

[0:43:39] DC: Yeah. No. Because it's foam that puffs up, which doesn't make any sense, until you see it and touch it. It was so energizing to walk around with the creative people and just show them the cool things and let them brainstorm on how they could use it. I really enjoyed that. Will, overall, give the show a rating, one to five stars.

[0:44:04] WC: One to five, 4.2.

[0:44:07] DC: That's a very generous score from William Crabtree.

[0:44:10] WC: A 4.2.

[0:44:11] DC: Okay.

[0:44:12] WC: As an exhibitor, I had a great show, right? Overall, the experience was fantastic. I felt like the attendance was a little light. But I do have insider information, and I can't tell you where it comes from. I was told that the show had the second-best attendance, second-best registration of any show ever with PRINTING United. The first was the one in Atlanta; it had the best attendance.

[0:44:40] DC: That might have been the first one after the pandemic, or something like that.

[0:44:43] WC: Yeah. Maybe. Yeah. This is what I'm being told.

[0:44:46] DC: Well, I'm just saying, they sent out a press release that said there were 27,000 registrations.

[0:44:52] WC: Yeah. Second highest registration. Second highest registration. Registration doesn't always mean attendance, right?

[0:44:57] DC: I had 500 registrations – over 500 registrations for my summer summit and 50 people actually came. Just saying. But that's because everybody else wants the replays. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[0:45:09] WC: We know registration doesn't equal attendance. I felt like the attendance was a little light. Outside of that, I think the show was fantastic from an exhibitor standpoint. The trip overall, getting to see you guys, getting to see Morten. I had a blast. It was productive. It was worth the trip. That's why I give it a 4.2. I think for improvement, I think that the space doesn't have to be so big.

[0:45:33] DC: Hallelujah.

[0:45:34] WC: I think that they can consolidate it down a little bit. Just a little bit. It doesn't have to be as spread out as it is, because there's a lot of vacant space in there, which makes it not look as good, right? From an event standpoint, you want it to be busy. You want it to be bustling, right? I think if they consolidated and made it just a little bit smaller, instead of all of north, south and central, they just did north and central, and they could have put the same number of exhibitors in the space. That's my two cents.

[0:46:02] DC: Jamie, I want to get your score, but before I do, I want to mention something that we had a discussion about and I heard from other people and they were like, “I came to the show and I'm happy I came, but it's not like there's anything new here, you know?” I thought that was a really interesting comment, and I'm wondering if people are over-educated, you did so much research that when you got there, nothing was new to you. Maybe you were just going to see how it manifests in real life, but what's your thought on that and then rate the show?

[0:46:37] JM: I think I did say that to you. I'm like, one of the things was, I'm like, there was not – Because a lot of times I'll sit back and look around. I'm like, where's the wild spot? Where's where everybody's going? What's new that everybody's got to see? I didn't really see that. There were a lot of hot pockets. Like Will said, maybe it wasn't as busy. Seemed like it wasn't as busy, but there were sometimes where you couldn't walk down some of the aisles, because either people just ran into each other and just took over the whole area. Some of the booths were overflowing. Some of them were doing very well. Yeah, there wasn't that one thing that – Like, DIMENSE a couple of years ago, swissQprint with the chameleon last year.

[0:47:11] DC: Don't even start with the chameleon. They didn't bring the chameleon, and DIMENSE didn't bring Medusa. I'm like, big mistakes, everybody.

[0:47:18] JM: I tagged them on our recap from last year's, and I said, "Hey, this is what we're talking about the chameleon." I tagged them on it today. I'll see. We'll see if they'd say anything. "Where are you going?" "To go see the chameleon." They had a pyramid, a little different.

[0:47:29] DC: Well, the Medusa. Remember the DIMENSE's Medusa in silver? Freaking gorgeous.

[0:47:36] JM: Yup. They got to keep something like that. Yeah. Stuff like that. I mean, there was a couple of cool things that got my attention. Like I said, I think it was a solid four based on, because things that we're looking for and making sure we set the foundation for things that are going to come and making sure we know what's new and what's out there and spending time with the OEMs that you deal with and getting to know the people there is a big plus, because then when you call them, they're like, "Hey, Jamie. How you doing? What do you need? We're here for you." Same thing with our suppliers. One of our suppliers just took us out, grabbed some quick food for materials, and I'm like, "You don't have a booth?" He's like, "No. I'm visiting the eight booths that sell our product." I actually had a better show than I usually did, because they didn't have their own booth, because they went to whoever their distributors were. They spent the time with the distributors. It was 3A.

They said it was great doing that, because they got to spend all this time in a lot of different places, which was cool. I'm like, “Oh, I can see that.” I'm like, “I like your booth. Your booth always has the best stuff that I can borrow.”

[0:48:36] DC: Yeah, totally. I wrote an article for Printing Impressions that went out on the last day of the show about the trends that I learned from the exhibitors that I interviewed. One of them was walk around, see cool ideas and share them with your customers. I know you didn't get that from me, because you are creative strat, print strategist.

[0:48:58] JM: I took so many pictures.

[0:49:00] DC: Yeah. That's an amazing thing to do, to make those connections, to always keep in mind which one of your customers would be perfect for that. That's why I always say, even if you think it's too expensive, if you send me a sample, it's going in my dream drawer. One day, the right person and the right budget will come along, and we will pull that out and say, “Ta-da, we get to do this now.”

[0:49:26] JM: One of the other things was, as you said, speaking with Justin, the artist. Having Justin go around with us who's never been to PRINTING United before, and Joslyn and Roger from Fresh Artists Kids Who Print, who have never been there before, because she was like, “I need to spend time with you. I want to follow you. I want to go everywhere you go. I need to meet Deborah.” It's like, she saw her the first day; she had a button. I'm like, “Where did you get a button? Did you see Deborah?” She's like, “No, but I got a button.” I'm like, “Okay. We'll solve that tomorrow.”

[0:49:51] DC: That was amazing. We walked around with them for a while, while he was carrying a big box of T-shirts there.

[0:49:55] JM: Yeah, but it was great seeing it through their eyes, which who have never seen it before.

[0:50:00] DC: Yes.

[0:50:01] JM: That was the part that was really – That was exciting, because it was like, “What is this?” And you have to explain, “This is what you do here.” And they’re like, never bored.

[0:50:06] DC: I know.

[0:50:08] JM: Everybody should do that, is bring somebody who's never gone before, because it'll make it so a hundred times better for yourself. Yeah.

[0:50:14] DC: That is such a great idea.

[0:50:16] WC: I've done that before. Remember when I brought my brother? He was in awe the whole time. Just everything was like, “Oh, my God. This is so crazy.”

[0:50:24] JM: That was one of the best parts.

[0:50:26] DC: It is. It was so amazing. I love walking around. People introduced me to their creatives, who are walking around. I'm like, “Aha, come with me.” I'll ask them, too, like, what would you use this for? If you could print it big and make it small, what would you make? If you can cut it out? I just want to know where their brains are going. I would give the show, I think I'm going to give it a four as well, Jamie. I like that score. The only reason it's not higher is because customer convenience, it was too insane. Going back and forth and back and forth and back and forth. I was trying to be smart about it and do all my business in central, then do all my business in north. But it doesn't work out that way, because everybody at the show is busy.

Then all of a sudden, you get a text and someone's like – I remember I was in the north hall and you guys were all in the 4over booth in the central hall. I was like, “Damn it, now I got to go over there.” Then I went over there and somebody texted me from the other hall that somebody who I was looking for was back. It was a lot of running around.

Overall, I thought that any place where everybody gathers to learn from each other and learn what is possible is only a good thing for the industry. Thank you guys so much for spending some time with me in Las Vegas. Thank you to everybody for spending some time listening to

this podcast. Everything you need to know about things we've discussed in the show are in the show notes. Until next time, PRINTING United Expo long and prosper.

[END OF EPISODE]

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