

WINTER 2021

Leading **PRINT**

**YOUNG
AT
HEART**

**CROWN CONNECT'S
YOUTHFUL MINDSET
IS THE KEY TO LONGEVITY**

*Through the Fog • Q&A with Rob Styacich, President of MetroVCS
Keeping Pace • A New Day • Nose to the Grindstone*

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Thayer Long
President, Association for
PRINTTechnologies

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

OUR TIME

A little strength will go a long way this year. In other words, we can not turn away from the challenges of the current environment within which we operate. We, as an industry, cannot be afraid of the difficulties nor the responsibilities that were born from the events of 2020.

This is not a time to lose faith in each other. We must stay true to values like honesty, humility and warmth. These have been the bedrocks of our industry and they are what provide us the opportunity going forward. In spite of a world that seems a bit treacherous and lacking in

gratitude, it is important that we become the stewards of trust.

I may sound a bit like a broken record, but print makes sense right now. Consider the emotional distance that exists between buyer and seller. Pre-COVID, it was a pretty substantial gap but now the chasm runs far and wide. The lack of trust associated with the social networks and digital vehicles, combined with the inability to engage in person, has marketers scratching their heads on how to build a reliable community.

I am not going at it alone on this quest. We all need to climb the mountain and yell the same message—that print is the perfect tool to fill the emotional gap and build trust. In fact, we at APTech, believe that there should be a

constant drumbeat coming from all of us about the merits of honest content and creative design in print. It truly is the way to connect with people and is the best way to stand out in a crowded and digitally numb world.

We have taken on the challenge of promoting your wares to specific verticals. Our programs like EDgage and Wellness Marketer have developed communities that need to hear your message. In turn, we highly recommend that you trumpet the idea that you are the great connectors in these turbulent times. And, we are ready and waiting to help.

Our cover story this month highlights a guy who has been passionately pushing the value of print for decades. Denny Shorett's youthful enthusiasm for what we do is contagious (in a good way). Our second feature, "Through the Fog: Selling strategies for a changed world," should provide some ideas on engaging in difficult times. Spoiler alert—printed content works really well. And finally, our last feature, "Keeping Pace," discusses why we must let go of the delusion of innovation in order to grow.

All in all, this is our time. So, let's make it happen in 2021!

All the best,

The lack of trust associated with the social networks and digital vehicles, combined with the inability to engage in person, has marketers scratching their heads on how to build a reliable community.

2

REGISTRATION MARKS

Facts, figures and data that matters

4

YOUNG AT HEART

Crown Connect's youthful mindset is the key to longevity

8

THROUGH THE FOG

Selling strategies for a changed world

12

A NEW DAY

How B2B buying is expected to change

14

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

Economic outlooks, government issues, news

16

THE NEXT GENERATION

How Stephen Naughton is helping ring in the next generation of print industry leaders

18

KEEPING PACE

Why the delusion of innovation hinders our growth

22

Q&A: ROB STYACICH

What's in store for print and marketing in 2021?

WINTER 2021

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REGISTRATION MARKS

BEFORE THE PANDEMIC, OUR FOCUS WAS ON STRATEGY, VISION, EMPOWERMENT AND EXECUTION. NOW OUR LEADERSHIP GOAL IS TO CREATE AND EMBRACE AN OWNERSHIP CULTURE THAT SUPPORTS FLEXIBLE THINKING AND PRIORITIZES VALUE RESULTS VERSUS ACTIVITY RESULTS. »

— Dave Hopping, CEO, Siemens Smart Infrastructure

TOP OF MIND OUTCOMES EXECUTIVES HOPE TO ACHIEVE WHILE RESPONDING TO COVID-19

What's on your mind? Executives are, understandably, most concerned with preserving their business, according to Deloitte's "2021 Global Marketing Trends" report. However, another theme of connection surfaced, showing that in times of uncertainty, staying close to customers, your staff and society is crucial. The following outcomes are what executives hope to achieve in response to the pandemic.



- 42%...Improve productivity and efficiency
- 38%...Improve risk management
- 35%...Accelerate your move to digital platforms/technologies
- 33%...Improve engagement with your customers
- 29%...Retain top talent
- 28%...Increase company's impact on society
- 28%...Reduce internal/operational costs
- 27%...Change your business model
- 17%...Drive greater revenue
- 17%...Create differentiation with your competition
- 6%...Disrupt your industry

NEW YEAR, NEW TRENDS

5 business trends for 2021

If 2020 taught us anything, it's that we can't predict the future with 20/20 vision. Nobody saw the economic, social and political unrest that the pandemic would bring, but the strongest businesses adapted. Here are some trends from Forbes that CEOs and business owners expect to see this year.

1 EVOLVING OFFICE

Remote work opportunities, already gaining popularity before 2020's events, are expected to continue. Many companies have embraced the home office and have no plans to return to the physical workplace.

2 FOCUS ON NETWORKING

How do you grow new relationships in a world without handshakes and face-to-face meetings? A strong online presence is a must, even as normal in-person business practices return.

3 EMBRACE INNOVATION

In a world of uncertainties, you must be open to changing ideas, practices and technologies. Don't innovate just for the sake of it, but be open to new ways of improvement.

4 IMPROVE ONLINE PRESENCE

Your website and online support need to be as effective as an in-person visit to accommodate the remote workforce and digital shift.

5 STAY FLEXIBLE

If 2020 taught us anything, it's that adaptation is key to surviving and thriving. Stay on your toes and be prepared to handle the twists and turns that the future brings.





YOUNG AT HEART

**CROWN CONNECT'S
YOUTHFUL MINDSET
IS THE KEY TO LONGEVITY**

By Denny Shorett

If you would have asked me a year ago to assess the state of our industry, I would have taken a much more positive tone. I could have gone on and on about how the economy had been a bigger boost to us than at any time before. We were confident. Our customers were confident. A year ago, there wasn't any reason to think otherwise. Each of us was riding the wave, as they say.

Then, unexpectedly, our world changed in ways that nobody, anywhere saw coming. The blip, as too many found out that hard way, became a bump in the road that continues to impede our path forward. Today, after more than a year and counting operating under the restrictions and fear of what COVID-19 has done to our business and personal lives, we are facing a series of new challenges.

The question each of us ask now every day is, "How do I stay motivated and relevant to my customers?"

Riding a wave can cause you to become complacent. And, as history shows us time and time again, complacency doesn't work—especially in the new world we're operating in today. I've come to the conclusion that for our industry to survive these unprecedented times, it must become more innovative and focused on relevancy. We must, as an industry, continue to approach the future—and all of the blips, bumps and trends that come along—with a youthful mindset.

"Because of their exceptional spirit our team shows every day in the face of the personal despair and sacrifices made by them and their families, we will overcome this."

When I started this company in 1970, that approach was a given. I quickly learned that mastering the art of printing was the easiest part of building the foundation for a sustainable printing company. I also found that in itself that approach was not enough. To stay relevant, you must continue to stay one step ahead of the industry curve. That means keeping your mind open to the many new opportunities that the journey presents you. It means embracing and adapting to new technologies, understanding finances, adhering to government regulations, developing loyal customers and building the right team of employees.

Each of these tenets have been critical to the success of Crown Connect. Over the past five decades, we have built a reputation as one of Southern California's premier commercial

print and marketing solution providers. Our commitment to our mission is present in our promise of focused customer service, a commitment to creativity, innovative problem-solving and a clear communication process that is designed to earn our customers' trust and respect.

"To stay relevant, you must continue to stay one step ahead of the industry curve. That means keeping your mind open to the many new opportunities the journey presents you."

Our success can be found in our three-tiered approach: Collaboration + Solutions = Results. As collaborators, we listen well. We fully understand our customers' visions and objectives. Through clear and concise, two-way communication, we find the right formula to get the results our customers expect. As solution providers, we work with our customers to find the best fit for what they need, giving them every advantage to increase their return on investment. Together, the results help elevate our respective businesses and brands.

Fifty years down the road has given me a unique perspective into what it takes to build a business, surround myself with a dedicated team of professionals who can help carry out that vision, and find customers and partners willing to take a chance on our word.

NEW DAY, NEW CHALLENGES, NEW MINDSET

The younger me is not sure what he would have thought had he known a global pandemic would be the biggest challenge his company would ever face.

Over the years we've had our share of obstacles. Several recessions. A major terrorist attack on U.S. soil. An epic financial meltdown that brought our country to its knees. Still, these pale in comparison to a global pandemic.

As I reflect on what has happened, I am proud of the decisions I have made, namely being smart enough to have the best people in the industry on my side. Our employees have been—and continue to be—our biggest asset.





Over and over again, having competent, well-trained and loyal employees is worth more than any technology can offer. And it will take more than a global pandemic to change that.

A long time ago, years before the coronavirus made its presence felt, we saw how quickly our industry was changing. Instinctively, we knew that to survive this change, we would have to change, too.

For example, as technology evolved, many of our revenue-producing cost centers were eliminated or significantly reduced. So, even without losing a customer, our sales dollars declined as new innovative workflows were developed. But what do you do when revenue streams decline? Do you stick your head in the sand? Or, do you look for other ways?

A few years ago, when the industry faced the print service provider or marketing service provider fork in the road, we could have remained just a printer. We decided to become

more than a printer (a path some of our colleagues declined to take). That meant embracing digital technology early. And what do you do with digital printing? You mail it. So we also invested in innovative data management and mailing systems.

"Because of the exceptional spirit our team shows every day in the face of the personal despair and sacrifices made by them and their families, we will overcome this."

Remember, our mission is—and has always been—to be relevant.

We also were early adopters of wide format printing, which became even more relevant when COVID-19 hit. Today, it is one of our busiest departments. We support the

healthcare industry, educational systems and food suppliers, all of which had immediate needs for unique directional and notification signage. Our database management and mailing capabilities continue to play a huge role in supporting our customers' special needs related to COVID.

Aside from our technological advantages, nothing has been as valuable during these troubling times as our loyal and dedicated production and management team. Without their positive attitudes and commitment to our customer needs, this unforgiving journey would have been impossible for us to navigate.

Because of the exceptional spirit our team shows every day in the face of their personal despair and sacrifices made by them and their families, we will overcome this. We will continue to embrace the challenges, navigate the twists and turns, remain relevant and dedicated to our mission statement, and stay committed to giving our customers what they need, when they need it, for years to come.

Fifty years down the road, that type of youthful mindset—one where every day is a new day to embrace and conquer—is the path forward.

A person wearing a hat and a light-colored jacket is walking away from the camera on a wooden pier that extends into a body of water. The water is calm and reflects the overcast, foggy sky. Several birds are flying in the sky above the pier. The overall mood is contemplative and serene.

THROUGH THE FOG

Selling strategies
for a changed world



Joanne Gore is a storyteller. And when the veteran marketer, speaker, writer and mentor pans out over what has happened in today's selling and marketing landscape, the stories seem to write themselves. What that means depends on who you are, what you do and how your story shakes out amid the wreckage.

From a sales and marketing perspective, the stories are everywhere. For starters, finding new business and leads is more difficult than ever. There are no physical trade shows. No new leads. Offices are shut down, so cold-calling or drop-ins are out. And with so many people working from home, contacting them presents a whole new set of challenges (hello virtual calls with kids and animals part of the scenscape).

"The problem today is the lack of work, although it is slowly coming back in certain areas," says Gore, whose company, Joanne Gore Communications, works with the new generation of print and business buyers. "Companies are trying to stay in touch and stay close to their clients so that when things start to move, they will be ready. Right now companies are concerned about getting paid for past work, new work when it comes, and what the landscape will look like in the future."

To be fair, it is not all bad. Gore says that servicing existing clients is not as difficult, with many companies pivoting or updating their software capabilities and offerings. The recognition of the need for W2P and more automated solutions has addressed customer experience expectations for self-service and anywhere/anytime ordering capabilities, enabling companies to offer 24/7 service without adding staff.

"Sharing is the new selling. As more buyers turn to the web to research and collaborate, they are now well into the second half of the buying journey before they're even ready to have a conversation with a sales rep."

**— Joanne Gore, Founder,
Joanne Gore Communications**

It also has enabled printers to dip their toes into the automation realm.

"As companies began laying off people, they found ways to become more efficient through automation and workflow scrutiny," Gore says. "They are finding new ways to be more productive with fewer people. When the print industry was deemed an essential service, a perception shift started."

Gore says the print industry embraced valuable PPE solutions, adjusted to working remotely, and embraced new and more efficient solutions. "People became more human—reaching out and asking, "How are you?" changed relationships. Video calls quickly became the norm and a new way to have one-on-one and face-to-face (virtual) conversations. Implementing work-from-home solutions was one

of the biggest mindset shifts. Decades of that “you must be in the office” thinking was proven wrong.

The key in today’s new landscape is to establish your “quickest time to money” approach. Examine your CRM. Which customers in the past converted the quickest? How did that happen? Which are the most profitable? Find more like them and target them with the solutions and products that have worked before.

“It’s no longer about you or what you do—it’s all about how you help,” Gore says. “It’s all about making connections, engaging and establishing your voice as a trusted source.”

Another strategy involves creating “quick start” campaigns that enable you to test new messages, calls to action and offers. Once you figure out what works, replicate it, and then repeat the process with another offer. Doing so allows you to launch, measure and pivot much quicker than if you tried to overhaul everything all at once.

“Nobody has the time or energy to do any of that right now,” Gore says. “You need quick, repeatable programs that generate awareness, engagement and growth.”

SHARING IS THE NEW SELLING

If anyone knows the power of selling print, it is Matthew Parker, founder of Profitable Print Relationships. A global sales guru and author of “How to Stop Print Buyers Choosing on Price,” Parker trains and mentors printing companies.

In a time of great disruption, Parker was impressed with how some printers pivoted into the PPE equipment strategy. As the marketplace moves forward in fits and starts, Parker says the level of success printers will have varies hugely depending on the type of printing company they are and what they are selling.

“Honestly, it’s too early to tell what will play out moving forward,” Parker says. “For 2021, planning can really only be carried out in three-month chunks. The big challenge is getting ahold of people when they are working from home. Salespeople are going to have to be a lot more creative and a lot more persistent.”

One of the ways to push forward lies in what Parker believes some printing companies are strongest at—having empathy. That means not only attaining a full grasp of what is happening in the marketplace, but how it impacts each and every one of your customers.

“There will need to be more online communication,” Parker says. “Printers will need the ability to understand

7 PRE-COVID SELLING TIPS THAT STILL WORK

Sales reps today can easily adapt pre-COVID prospecting strategies to online social selling ones with just a few tweaks. Joanne Gore, founder of Joanne Gore Communications, offers seven strategies you still need to know:

- 1 Who are your top 10 prospects? (That hasn’t changed.)
- 2 Learn all you can about them. Look them up on social media (LinkedIn). They’ll see that you looked them up. (That’s good.)
- 3 Introduce yourself. Comment on one of their posts. Next, ask them an open-ended question. They’ll get notified about that, too. (This has replaced cold calling.)
- 4 Send a connection request. By now they’ve seen your name pop up twice, and that you’ve taken the time to comment on their post. (This helps get past the gatekeeper.)
- 5 Nurture the relationship. Engage, don’t sell. Learn about each other and what matters.
- 6 Move to a new channel—either email, phone or video call.
- 7 The rest is up to you—the rep.

how they help the changing business needs of their prospects and customers. Those who rely on selling just commodity print or blasting out endless standard sales emails will struggle.”

“Printers will need the ability to understand how they help the changing business needs of their prospects and customers. Those who rely on selling just commodity print or blasting out endless standard sales emails will struggle.”

— Matthew Parker, Founder,
Profitable Print Relationships

Gore says that the ones struggling the most right now are sales reps, many of whom are also owners. The goal, first and foremost, is to generate revenue to keep the doors open. And with cold calling as we know it dead, the future rests in social selling platforms like LinkedIn.

“Sharing is the new selling,” Gore says. “As more buyers turn to the web to research and collaborate, they are now well into the second half of the buying journey before they’re even ready to have a conversation with a sales rep. They don’t want to be sold to. They don’t want demos. They don’t want samples. And they don’t care what equipment you have. The best way to tackle these challenges is to really understand who you help, how you help and why it matters to them. Share relevant content and explain why it’s relevant.”

In the end, the success printers forge in today’s unprecedented selling landscape will come from having a clear understanding of your ideal target, what engages them and what drives their buying behaviors. “The importance of branding will see a resurgence,” Gore says. “Those who never neglected it will capture wallet share. The unboxing experience will continue to explode.”

A NEW DAY

HOW B2B BUYING IS EXPECTED TO CHANGE

Fifty-five percent of B2B buyers had to cut their budgets in 2020, according to the "Driving B2B Sales in 2020: The Definitive Guide for Understanding the Mindset, Intent and Journey of the B2B Buyer to Drive Your Sales Team to Success" report from B2B marketing agency Mission Control Marketing. That's not the only impact that the pandemic has had on the B2B buying cycle. We gathered answers from some experts on the most pertinent questions for businesses this year. Our panel includes Leah Strahan, Account Executive, Capital Printing; Sue Lampitt, Director of Sales and Marketing, Intech Printing & Mail Inc; and Paul Stackpole, Account Executive, Pel Hughes.



HOW HAVE BUYERS CHANGED IN THE LAST SIX MONTHS?

Leah Strahan: Buyers have become more aware of timeline and of new materials and needs. They are planning further out and taking on different types of projects to accommodate their audience's changed needs.

Sue Lampitt: Some clients continue to hold back on making purchases due to less events and decline in traffic to their businesses. Others continue to purchase daily and have pushed forward to break through to the slow down and stay in the forefront with their brand. It really is a mixed bag. It certainly seems to be getting better since the election is now over and I feel that businesses are figuring out that they cannot stand still and expect to survive without print and marketing.

Paul Stackpole: Due to the pandemic we have seen short term emergency shifts. We had to switch to COVID-19 lab kit fulfillment and have been 100% swamped. Traditional print and mail for my clients was down but I am seeing some indications of demand increase.

WHAT IS THE GENERAL FEEDBACK YOU ARE GETTING ABOUT PEOPLE'S CONFIDENCE NOW AND IN THE NEAR FUTURE?

Strahan: Generally, the feeling is hopeful. Projects have been pushed back, but with the extra time, there has been extra planning which feels like confidence coming back.

Lampitt: What seems to be important to clients is that they continue to want to work with a reliable resource that will help find solutions to keep costs down where possible. I try to educate whenever possible and be a part of their planning since purchasing certain substrates has become a challenge and planning ahead helps resolve the issue.

Stackpole: This is all pretty anecdotal but I truly sense that we'll be ok. There is a vernal opinion among clients that when we get the population vaccinated, we will see momentum swing. I'm thinking April or May could see an uptick.

WHAT KINDS OF THINGS SEEM IMPORTANT TO BUYERS TODAY?

Strahan: Timeline, and new substrates and applications. Since buyers are planning further out and are more aware of how their business/team is interacting with their audience, they are setting more expectations for when projects are submitted, approved, in production and delivered. They want to see creative solutions for changing how their message is delivered with new applications.

Lampitt: There seems to be a steady increase in my sales with current clients moving into 2021 and I am hopeful that this upcoming six months will continue on this trend. Confidence in business is building and I really don't feel that we will go backwards. There will be some soft bumps moving forward, but we will all continue to push forward and find our way.

Stackpole: I think they simply want to get their rhythm back within their business. But there is some movement to digital so we are focused on more services such as personalized video campaigns to add to our direct mail marketing expertise.

WHAT MECHANISMS ARE YOU USING TO ENGAGE WITH BUYERS DURING THE PANDEMIC?

Strahan: Direct mail, virtual meetings, packaged shipments of samples and resource materials, and contactless delivery of promo items.

Lampitt: The difficult part is reaching new clients because many are still working from home and hiding behind their monitors. I have tried some advertising this past summer with a package for restarting business and received no response at all. I chalked this up as a keeping our brand out in the market, probably in the worst of times as it ran weekly for six weeks from June into July. In addition, we have put out direct mail and monthly e-blasts again. I cannot say that this has made the phone ring but I do know how important it is to keep our message in front of many.

Stackpole: We really are not doing conventional prospecting now. We are concentrating on niche marketing such as lab specialist.

CAN YOU TALK ABOUT THE PROCESS AND HOW RECEPTIVE BUYERS ARE?

Strahan: With the changing needs of an audience comes changing needs of a buyer. They are challenged with handling projects that they have never been tasked with before, reduced budgets, altered timelines, and restricted shipping/delivery/receiving capabilities. In short, they are doing more with less. I think buyers are more receptive when a creative solution is being offered in a fresh way. They need to hear how switching to a new mindset will benefit them quickly, now during a pandemic, but also how that solution can support their traditional way of doing things once our world shifts again as the pandemic is behind us.

Lampitt: Moving forward we are hiring a marketing assistant so that we can produce more materials that focus on our company and promote the installation of a 40" press.

Stackpole: The audience is certainly more captive these days. And so, we are putting a lot of energy into engaging with labs with historical business lines that will still be ripe after COVID. Cardio and cancer labs are certainly receptive to creative conversations right now.

WHAT WILL BE NEEDED TO SUCCEED IN 2021?

Strahan: Affability. We have all been through a tough year, asked to take on more, and deal with difficult decisions and circumstances. Being more courteous, helpful, and intentionally more patient will go a long way in a post-pandemic year.

Lampitt: COVID-19 has freed up the time needed to expand our business with the addition of the press and extra production space as we now occupy two buildings. We are set up for growth as a mid-size printer in our location. We are the largest printer in our county. I believe we are the right size, in the right place and hopefully at the right time!

Stackpole: New services for sure. Things like video campaigns will be fun to sell but getting true inkjet press roll to sheet by the second quarter will be a game changer for us. I can start all over with new business lines. It is going to be different going forward. Print volumes have continued to change but adding these new services will be fantastic.

INDUSTRY INSIGHTS

THAT'S A WRAP

10 packaging design trends for 2021

Ask anyone in the commercial packaging business and they will tell you that it's what's on the outside that matters. How a product is wrapped and packaged creates a first impression that is oh so important. 99designs notes that the trends for the new year center on moving away from packaging that looks impersonal towards more artistic design. Check out the following packaging design trends that are expected for 2021.

1. Tiny illustrated patterns that reveal what's inside
2. Authentically vintage unboxing experience
3. Hyper-simplistic geometry
4. Packaging dressed in fine art
5. Technical and anatomical ink drawings
6. Organically shaped color blocking
7. Product names front and center
8. Picture-perfect symmetry
9. Story-driven packaging featuring quirky characters
10. Solid all-over color



GLOBAL COMMERCIAL PRINTING MARKET FORECAST

USD BILLION

730

Historical
Market Size
(2019)

2.24%

Forecast CAGR
(2020-2025)

USD BILLION

834

Forecast
Market Size
(2025)

Source: Expert Market Research





TOP 10 TRENDS IN COMMERCIAL PRINTING FOR 2021

The print and marketing world is constantly evolving, and the events over the last year show just how necessary it is to adapt. New products, services and equipment are just part of that change. Check out what digital marketing agency Linchpin says is in store for commercial printing this year.

1

DESIGN SERVICES

It's not news that print and marketing service providers merged, and design is an integral part of that. Customers expect you to be their one stop shop for logos and other graphic needs.

2

SHIMMERING

Add a little extra sparkle to any stock, especially wedding invites, with the shimmering technique.

3

LASER CUTTING

Intricate designs and textured effects are in, and brought to you by laser cutting.

4

DIGITAL MARKETING

While digital is no replacement for print, adding digital marketing into the mix increases revenue and grows your business.

5

MAIL LIST SOURCING

Increase profit margins and reduce overhead by sourcing your customers' mailing lists.

6

DIRECT MAIL CAMPAIGNS

Inexpensive and effective, a smart, targeted direct mail campaign is a great way to stay on customers' radars.

7

PRINT READY ART SOURCES

Advances in smartphones and cameras have made it possible for even novice users to provide print ready images.

8

RECYCLING EFFORTS

Many printing companies are focusing on sustainability and eco-friendly options, not just for paper, but liquid inks and toner cartridges as well.

9

SPECIALIZATION

Finding a niche market and being great in one area will ultimately help printers stand out in the industry.

10

DIVERSIFICATION

Partnering with another company that specializes in other print-related areas can lead to more growth.

FULL SPEED AHEAD

Stephen Naughton
VP of Sales & Marketing,
PrintComm

How Stephen Naughton is helping ring in the next generation of print industry leaders



Stephen Naughton stays pretty busy these days. And if you know anything about the son of Kevin Naughton, the owner of innovative marketing and print company PrintComm, you wouldn't expect anything less. Stephen started working at the Flint, Michigan company in the summers as a 16-year-old. In those days, he logged time on an old laminator machine creating book covers.

Getting a taste of the print life inspired Stephen's path forward, especially after watching his father rise through the PrintComm ranks, going from customer service, to design, director of sales and marketing, and eventually assuming ownership in 2011. Upon graduation, and a marketing internship at PrintComm, Stephen stepped into second generation shoes and accepted a full-time sales position.

Today, as a Campaign Architect, his primary responsibilities, along with continuing to learn the family business, are in business development and account management. "My job description seems to be a bit fluid at times," Stephen says. "Being the son of the owner makes it a bit tougher to answer what I do. I have served on the management team for three years. Recently, I have taken a lead role in our company's relocation to a new facility we are building in 2021."

Having an enterprising, hardworking student of the business looking at the industry with a fresh set of eyes is one of PrintComm's secret weapons, especially in times defined by a COVID-driven landscape.

But even before the pandemic, PrintComm's business was shifting. Stephen says about 80% of its revenue is now in direct mail, with that percentage rising every year. The company continues to focus its efforts on providing systems and processes to its customers and prospects to increase results and drastically speed up SLAs. "We believe that this has been



Future generation in the making:
The Naughton Family.

the biggest differentiator for us in the industry. By focusing more on the results, we are mathematically able to prove that what we're sending is working. That is powerful, and I believe what has moved the needle for our organization."

"I BELIEVE THAT THE NEXT GENERATION IS ABUNDANTLY IMPORTANT TO THE INDUSTRY. THAT IS WHY I ENCOURAGE YOUNG LEADERS TO ASK 'WHY' A LOT."

It is the kind of optimistic outlook the industry needs from its next generation leadership. The optimism is even more refreshing when you consider everything the industry has taken over the past year. Like every other print company, PrintComm was immensely affected by the pandemic. In March and April, with uncertainty running rampant, the company sent as many employees home to work remotely as possible. But being in manufacturing, that option was not a long-term affordable option.

The PrintComm leadership team, includes (L-R starting in the back) DeAnna Schillag, Kevin Naughton, Jonathan Naughton, Stephen Naughton, Jim Dornbos, Scott Finendale, Leslie Karhoff, Eric Bauer and Mike Philie.

We spread our workforce evenly onto three shifts,” Stephen says. “We instituted strict mask-wearing and cleaning policies, installed UV air filters and have work areas routinely bleached with a fogging product.”

And while much of PrintComm’s volume tapered over those first few months, it just finished up the busiest fourth quarter in company history. All told, the company added six digital presses, hired 20-plus employees in the last five months and is forecasting substantial growth in 2021.

YOUTH BE SERVED

The unrelenting wrath of the pandemic is something that will continue to test even the most hardened of industry veterans. Coordinating with staff working remotely, juggling childcare and trying to meet customer demands are all part of the daily to-do list.

But as Stephen views it, learning the intricacies of a complex business, reviewing the game plan and then respectfully asking, “Why do we do it this way?” many times a day is what young leaders should do.

“I believe that the next generation is abundantly important to the industry,” Stephen says. “That is why I encourage young leaders to ask ‘why’ a lot. Our industry has experienced big changes and shifts in the past. Some of those included the rise of digital printing



equipment, variable data printing technology and, more recently, inkjet printing technology. Accepting the ‘That’s how we’ve always done it’ won’t be good enough in 2021 and beyond.”

Stephen also believes that young professionals must remain patient—an area he admittedly says continues to be a growth area for him. “In working in a family business with my father and brother, I find myself lacking patience at times when things aren’t moving at the pace I would like. It is important to consider other opinions on the matter, and to take other team member’s expertise at face value. Your youth and fresh ideas are assets to your team, but so are your more seasoned members’ wisdom and experiences.”

With 11 years under his belt at a 60-year-old printing company that continues to reinvent itself, Stephen is eyeing the future with

promise and hope for even bigger things ahead. “My first goal is to continue to do good work for the clients who put their faith in us. Our team also has a commitment and desire to provide more jobs in the Flint area. Our expansion goals aren’t all dollar driven; they are also people driven. Furthermore, we support several orphanages and groups in need in Uganda and Chile. Being able to support these objectives on a greater level is something the team and I are passionate about and work hard to execute.”

His to-do list is set: New facility. Continued advancements in technology. Exciting product offerings. Innovative workflow improvements. Aggressive expansion plans. If you have learned anything about Stephen Naughton, you would expect nothing but every box being checked.



KEEPING PACE

Why the delusion of innovation hinders our growth

Here's the thing about innovation— if you get caught up in all of the hype and the buzzwords, and you don't take time to truly gain a richer understanding of what said innovation means and how it can help, what do you really have?

This is a question that Andy Russell, Ph.D., wants people to take a long, hard look at. Doing so is something that Russell's group, The Maintainers, believes serves in the best interest of everyone involved. The Maintainers are a global research network that is interested in the concepts of maintenance, infrastructure, repair, and the many forms of labor and expertise that sustain our human-built world. Its members come from a variety of backgrounds—engineers and business leaders, academic historians and social scientists, government and non-profit agencies, artists, activists, coders, and the list goes on.

Russell, who serves as co-director, says that when it comes to innovation, people tend to only think about the end products—the gadgets and consumer goods. But what they need is to appreciate, in a more holistic and realistic way, is the work that goes into bringing the positive aspects of innovation to consumers.

According to a McKinsey & Company report, 90% of executives believe that the COVID-19 crisis will fundamentally change the way they do business over the next five years, with 85% concerned that the pandemic will have a lasting impact on their customers' needs and wants over the same time period.

These are the kind of numbers Russell believes print executives should pay close attention to moving forward. "It's important to start with good data and a clear understanding of the world around us," says Russell, who also is Dean of the College of Arts & Sciences at SUNY Polytechnic Institute. "Leaders of companies or organizations also can play a big role by reflecting on what values they think are important, and what they need to do to sustain those values. In many cases, maintenance goes hand-in-hand with deeply held values, such as caring, community, sustainability, reliability and respect for tradition."

From where Russell sits, innovation continues to be a foundational concept in business and many other aspects of global society. It remains deeply embedded in 21st Century notions of progress, economic growth and other positive outcomes—despite the fact that most attempts at innovation fail and that many developments touted as "innovations" incur steep costs.

"There is a delusion when it comes to innovation," Russell says. "This comes in the form of a false belief that innovation can cure all kinds of societal problems, whether it's slow growth in business, poor outcomes in education, or massive gaps in the social safety net. The fact is that innovation can exacerbate existing problems, rather than cure them. Notable innovations of this sort include highly addictive drugs such as fentanyl, and financial arrangements such as credit default swaps that were at the root of the global financial crisis of the early 2000s."

When delusion sets in, Russell says it can draw a company's attention away from its core competencies and most loyal customers, and distract leadership and workforce from executing on the fundamentals—key tenets like reliability, consistency, quality—that every business needs to succeed.

"It is important to keep maintenance and innovation in balance," Russell says. "Even really innovative companies need to provision for the maintenance and sustainability of the new products or services that they roll out. Otherwise, they will earn a reputation for abandoning their products and customers, because they have neglected to maintain the products and relationships that generate value over the long-term."

FINDING THE SILVER LINING

The pandemic and all the havoc it has wreaked on everything and anything in its path has taken each of us to the limits of our resolve. But as we sift through

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**— ANDY RUSSELL,
CO-DIRECTOR, THE MAINTAINERS**

the disruption that the past year has wrought, there has been one silver lining beaming brightly in the distance—the pandemic has drawn our attention to the hollowness of the popular term “disruption,” or, in the popular phrase, “disruptive innovation.”

Today, perhaps more than any other time, we have a greater understanding and awareness of the immense contributions of essential workers. In addition, the pandemic has forced many companies to innovate into spaces that they may have once deemed unrelatable.

“The pandemic has impacted us all,” says RJ Hines, an executive board member and advisor with Pro Cloud SaaS. “What we have seen is great firms rising to the occasion and dedicating additional resources to compensate for what was happening. What has made you successful? Is that still relevant? Are you still delivering that product or service at a high level?”

Pandemic be damned, Hines believes the tidal wave of technology enhancements will continue to roll on, with a caveat. “I think there needs to be a balance with reliable infrastructure coming to mind. True innovation can only happen when your core deliverables, customer support, logistics, etc., are running smoothly. Innovation alone will not maximize a company's long-term success.”

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But what will, Hines says, is the industry's commitment to finding balance. Somewhere in the spaces where people think innovation can strip you of what brought you to the dance, stay focused, and don't believe everything that you hear.

Which leads back to the question that many ask when they are standing at the edge of an innovation revolution: Is there a delusion when it comes to innovation?

As an example, Hines references one of the print industry's long-running delusional battles—the demise of print as we know it. “Print is not dead,” he says. “It can very effectively compliment a firm's marketing message and brand persona. It now must be co-mingled in a multi- or omni-channel marketing strategy. This is where companies should not fool themselves. Hire experts who can seamlessly integrate digital and print marketing into a cost effective ROI generating segment of a companies' overall business strategy.”

To summarize, learn to innovate and do it now.



Q&A

**ROB STYACICH,
PRESIDENT, METROVCS**

NOSE TO THE GRINDSTONE: WHAT'S IN STORE FOR PRINT AND MARKETING IN 2021?

Print and marketing in 2021 will have sectors that continue to thrive. From a print perspective, packaging, labels and anything related to overall healthcare will grow due to our current conditions. It is also expected that short-run, targeted digital print will thrive. General commercial print will also continue to rebound. Many of the larger commercial print customers are already extremely busy and we do not see this changing.

Regarding marketing, getting your message in front of those that either know your business or product will be key. From a marketing perspective, we will see more companies increase spending with new campaigns and targeted marketing. In doing so, they will make it a point to track the results of their spend. Marketers want to understand what does and does not work in this new economy.

Why is embracing an entrepreneurial mindset so crucial right now?

Entrepreneur: a person who organizes and operates a business or businesses, taking on greater than normal financial risks in order to do so.

That sums it up. Right now, more than ever, those that are forward-thinking and looking for new opportunities are running companies that are most likely growing. Operating a business in 2020 was tough. Uncertainty, lack of sales, and the overall worry of taking care of your employees was a real drain both mentally and financially.

Keeping the entrepreneurial mindset helped our company get through it. We acquired another company midyear. This set us up for explosive growth in Q4 and overall, over 2019. The results were spectacular—sales in Q4 were up 40% over last year and we had 14% growth in 2020. This did come with some growing pains, but we did a good job of taking care of the customer from a quality and delivery standpoint. We are looking at ways to streamline our processes and communication in early 2021.

WE BELIEVE KEEPING AN OPEN MIND AND BEING A TRUE PARTNER SETS US APART FROM OTHERS IN THE PRINT SERVICES INDUSTRY. WE PARTNER WITH THOSE THAT SHARE THAT SAME VISION.

What opportunities have you embraced during the pandemic?

We are always looking at new ways to grow our business through new capabilities and partnerships. We are all trying to do more with less right now. If our client needs a particular product or service, we will gladly help them. Our outsourcing continues to grow. We believe keeping an open mind and being a true partner sets us apart from others in the print services industry. We partner with those that share that same vision. Specifically, we are producing more packaging than in the past. We can manage the entire process from design to print, die cutting, folding, gluing and final shipment at an incredibly low cost because of our size and overhead. We see this as an area of real opportunity for 2021.

We are looking at partnerships that will offer our clients expanded services in this area.

How does keeping your nose to grindstone yield results?

This is just in our DNA. Our team is incredibly focused and talented. We all share the same work ethic. We do whatever it takes to meet our client's expectations. From a personal standpoint I have always worked hard to achieve success. That comes with some sacrifices like all successful entrepreneurs have made in their careers. Having purchased this business in July of 2019 and navigating some turbulent economic waters, work ethic has been very important to our success.

What is the most important piece of advice you can offer right now?

Stay focused on the customer. I really like the statement "nothing happens until something gets sold." We offer a 100% customer satisfaction guarantee. With this in mind, we are all only as good as the last job we deliver to the customer. Understand areas where your company needs to improve and stay focused on it. I believe we are on the road to recovery, but we will continue to face additional challenges in this new economy.



"OPERATING A BUSINESS IN 2020 WAS TOUGH. KEEPING THE ENTREPRENEURIAL MINDSET HELPED OUR COMPANY GET THROUGH IT."

In a continuing effort to move the print industry forward, APtech offers the highest standard of quality industry research within the new Business Intelligence series. In addition to our legacy research (PRIMIR) and our many commissioned projects, this outstanding new series leverages long-standing relationships with a number of industry sources to provide you with information that provide APtech members with a strategic advantage.

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The brief highlights three separate case studies in order to provide you with real world examples around lead generation. Each of the case study demonstrates how an organization achieves multimedia lead-generation objectives using well-crafted campaigns designed to engage a target audience, inspire engagement, and begin the journey from sales prospect to real live customers.

This project, authored by Paul Jaynes from Comprehensive Marketing Results, is a must read for anyone who aspires to build a robust community of clients. For more information contact Julie Shaffer at jshaffer@aptech.org today.

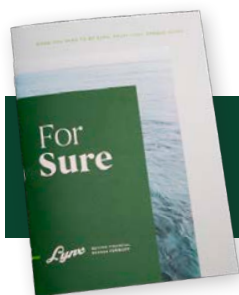
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