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## Opening Soon: The One-Stop Shop

*It's not whether print is still relevant, it's whether your business model is*

For the last two-and-a-half years, I have been meeting with elite print customers and creatives from brands and ad agencies across the United States through Project Peacock, a series of events that showcase new possibilities for print marketing. While the events have been super-positive and led to new print projects produced on new print technology in every city we have visited, the reviews about the industry — and more specifically about print service providers (PSPs) — haven't been five stars, to say the least.

Before I explain, we need to step back just a bit. Turn your mind back to 2008: The Great Recession. Fear is a strong motivation. And if you sell things (for example, print) and fear that your shop will close, or you will lose your job or your money will be messed with, I am willing to bet you — like I — would do whatever was needed to survive. And most printers did. They lowered their prices to get work, they took work from wherever it came, they focused on volume vs. value, and cast

very wide prospecting nets to capture as many dollars as possible. Some survived and some didn't, but the true causality was the connection with print customers.

With that in mind, here are five things I have learned from more than 1,000 print customers at Project Peacock events:

- **They don't like salespeople.** All the spray-and-pray I've just mentioned, for any job a printer could get their hands on, has left a wake of closed doors — and closed minds behind them.
- **They don't know you.** The world has shifted over the last 10 years, and unless you have been meticulously cultivating relationships with print-buying millennials over the past five (minimum), your email is categorized as spam and your voicemail is deleted.
- **They don't know what is out there.** The closed doors have left gaping holes in education, and the industry has been making some

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By Deborah Corn, Intergalactic Ambassador to The Printerverse, Print Media Centr

big changes. New technologies are underutilized because new application possibilities are unknown.

- **They don't know who to work with.** Legacy relationships, and the business that comes with them, only matter to those who are part of them. They cannot be counted on anymore. New buyers — who have nothing to do with those legacy relationships — trust Google, Yelp and your social media streams more than you.
- **They just want to get on with their lives.** We don't make it easy for them to do that.

Are you ready, willing and able to meet the demands of today's marketplace and marketers?

### We're Feeling the Amazon Effect

We have never lived in a more automated, 24/7/365, get-it-now world. It's dubbed the "Amazon Effect" and, in this case, the example couldn't be more suited. One company has changed the way we research products, shop and ship by making the experience easy to understand, fast and — most importantly — a one-stop process. With one quick login, shoppers are merely moments away from millions of products.

And it doesn't end there. The communication is swift, relevant and consistent until your delivery is made. You are given an opportunity to compare similar products. You are alerted to products that complement your purchase or enhance it. And most importantly, you can see pricing every step of the way.

It isn't going to stop, either. The Amazon Effect has opened the door for Alexa to come into our homes and our lives. Voice-first technology, artificial intelligence and connected devices comprise the "internet of things" (IoT) that will revolutionize the

way we interact with our stuff and each other. All this is happening — advanced automation, integration, communication — and it still can take three days to get an estimate for a print job.

This is why millennials think print is antiquated. It's not the medium — it's the process in more cases than not. I met a group of buyers and designers from an ad agency at the Project Peacock Print Fair in New York City who all had MOO cards. I have nothing against the company MOO and its cards, but an agency using them signals a significant shift in purchasing behavior.

Are you ready, willing and able to meet the demands of today's marketplace and marketers? This is the real question, not whether print is "still relevant." Your business model, on the other hand, is probably in need of an upgrade.

### Getting Started

Convergence sounds more like a medical disorder than the future of print, but it is the future of print. It's about creating an ecosystem of products and offerings that complement and enhance each other and provide exponential execution opportunities for customers. Convergence is about building the print shop you will need five years from now, and beyond. Convergence is about creating a one-stop print shop. It's time to channel your inner Jeff Bezos and build an empire of offerings under one roof.

Based on what I've seen during Project Peacock and the conversations I've had with print customers, the biggest reactions center around the advancements in wide-format printing. To many, wide-format printing is still equated with vinyl banners and rarely part of a creative or marketing conversation. They need a banner, they get one. From somewhere.

When the print customers we have met with (and some printers, too!) see the wide-format samples at Project Peacock, they literally light up with amazement. They see texture, white ink, and the possibilities of printing on fabric, metal and wood! They see wide format used for décor, signage and displays, or for packaging and day/night backlit posters. They see wide-format printing so advanced that it can be used for up-close printing. The customers are amazed how detailed and clean the samples are now that the ink drops that formulate the image have gone nano. There is opportunity here — for everyone.

Finishing is also an opportunity the print customers can't get enough of. When

it comes to grabbing attention, shiny will win every time. The industry has moved quite a bit beyond the simply shiny, and Peacock attendees have been quite dazzled and bedazzled by the new possibilities with digital finishing. It takes some a minute to understand that finishing can now be variable without an exorbitant cost attached, but once they get it, they are hooked on trying something new.

When it comes to digital printing, the customers are split on what they care about. For those who have been using it, new substrate and paper options are the most topical. Those who haven't are impressed with the quality of today's digital toner and are willing to reexamine the technology for projects, which is good news!

Inkjet stands alone as the new kid in town — a very misunderstood kid. I have watched more print customers try to rub off the ink from printed samples than I can count at this point. They think production inkjet printing is the same as desktop inkjet printing. There is a lot of explaining that goes on, and only a few of the bigger print customers get the overall value of the technology, but then again, that is who inkjet is for.

### Bringing It All Home

When I say bringing it all home, I kind of mean it literally. You can start on the road to the one-stop print shop by incorporating any of the technology I have mentioned that doesn't already exist in your shop, or by finding and securing partners to help you expand your offerings.

No matter which road you choose, I implore you to start planning your journey. PRINTING United is a great place to start ... I'll see you there!

*Deborah Corn is the Intergalactic Ambassador to The Printerverse at Print Media Centr, a Print Buyerologist™, integrated marketer, industry speaker and blogger, cultivator of the Print Production Professionals Group on LinkedIn, and host of the weekly industry #PrintChat on Twitter. As the founder of Project Peacock, she has more than 25 years of experience working in advertising and marketing print production, and currently works behind the scenes with printers helping them form meaningful relationships with customers and prospects across all channels. She also works with industry suppliers and organizations, helping them achieve success with their social media marketing endeavors.*