

Wichita Chamber Business Accelerator

Episode 113

Ashley Martin

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Don Sherman: [00:00:00] welcome to another exciting edition at the WCBA Powered, of course by Evergy. First, thank you for listening. Don't forget to like us. Love us share us. We truly appreciate you checking us out In the house. Today we [00:01:00] have Valley Print

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Logistics. That's right. We have Ashley Martin in the house. Hi Ashley.

having

me. Of course. Welcome, welcome. So tell us a little bit about who you are and what you do.

Ashley Martin: So, I work with Valley Print Logistics. It's my family's business. Over the last year and a half I've transitioned to vice president to help my dad run the business. Moved away from sales and marketing. I've been there 15 years this year.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Wow.

15 years. So did you this, it always intrigues me to learn a little bit about family business. Well, first let's step back a little bit. So what does your company do?

Ashley Martin: We do all sorts of printing. We're commercial printers, so we do brochures, folders, we do all the newspapers around town. So print mail. We also do promo and apparel.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Oh, wow. Quite a bit. So over the past 15 years. So, you've been in sales the entire time until now.

Ashley Martin: I started as a customer service rep in 2008 and around 2009 the [00:02:00] recession kind of hit. So we're like, well, we've never really had a salesperson. So my dad's like, you're good at talking with people, so, why don't you go try sales?

So in 2009 I transitioned to sales and kind of marketing. Started doing a ton with the chamber. The chamber was a great tool for me to use to learn how to get out there and talk to people.



And, and yeah. And then about the last year and a half, Made kind of the transition out of that role.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: So your father started this

Ashley Martin: So my grandpa. Your grandpa? Yeah. My grandpa and my dad started the company back in 1988. They had been working for the Augusta Gazette out in Augusta for several years and wanted to start their own thing. So they started looking for some land and found a nice spot in Valley Center and moved my family from Augusta to Valley.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Oh, very nice. Yeah. From Augusta to Valley and. Did they, I'm curious because Don says when he was a kid, like they used to make him work at family businesses and things like that. So for you, did they make you work as a kid to learn the business and

Ashley Martin: They didn't [00:03:00] make me, no. I actually would go ride my bike up after school and I'd go and do some hand inserting, and I would do filing for some people.

working is in my blood, so you wanted I wanted to do

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: do it. That's

Ashley Martin: awesome.

Yeah. And right outta high school, I actually went into the hotel industry for a while. And

Don Sherman: What? High school? I have to ask

Ashley Martin: Center.

Don Sherman: That's okay. Is that a Hornet?

Ashley Martin: No. Mm-hmm. ? Yep. Hornets.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: That's alright. A hornet. She's representing the Hornets today.

Okay.

Ashley Martin: We moved there when I was one, so that was like where I was raised my whole

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Excellent.

Don Sherman: What elementary.

Ashley Martin: I went to Abilene.

Don Sherman: I did too.

Ashley Martin: Yay. Yay.

Don Sherman: For three years.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Well, now I question a few things. anytime someone went to a school that Don went to, it's, and I know it's not the same year, but

Don Sherman: see, welcome to the show,

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: So, okay, so over the years from 1988 to now which in fact. You guys just got done celebrating [00:04:00] 35 years, right? 35 years. Whoa. Yeah. That's huge. Yeah. So from that time until now, did you kind of recognize the growth? So when you were, do you know how many employees they started with back in the day?

Ashley Martin: don't know how many we started with, but we're up to 50

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: 50 now.

Yeah. Wow. That's huge.

Ashley Martin: Yeah. Yeah, it's been a lot of growth. I've seen the industry just evolve and all that. It's been kind of, it's been fun to see. back in the day, I would go there and they were still doing film and they would put together like things in the dark room and stuff like that.

And now it's moved to more digital and aluminum plates and stuff like that. So it's been cool to see, and you can kind of tell when you tour a facility, all the different add-ons that we've done, we have just under 42,000 square foot.

Oh

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: wow. That's, that's actually pretty big.

Ashley Martin: It's big. When you see it from the street, it doesn't look big, but it goes far back.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Wow. Okay. So question. Do you guys still have a dark room?

Ashley Martin: It is now a kitchen.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: [00:05:00] Okay. I wondered if those were still around.

Ashley Martin: Yeah. We don't really use those anymore. It's evolved to a kitchen.

Okay.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: I mean, I'd like a kitchen better. , clearly don.

Ashley Martin: Excellent.

Don Sherman: Excellent. Help. Where is Val? Where's your business located?

Where in valley is it

Ashley Martin: located?

We're right at. Maine and Sheridan. Maine and Sheridan.

Don Sherman: Okay. Sheridan goes north and south Maine goes

Ashley Martin: west, so we're right behind Barton Sullivan's

Don Sherman: actually. Gotcha. Okay.

Ashley Martin: Actually, what, 10 years ago when it blew up, it actually damaged some of our building.

Don Sherman: up. Yeah, I remember that too.

Ashley Martin: That was interesting.

Don Sherman: Yeah, I bet. Did your folks. Pop and grandpa ever talk about why they chose to leave the Augusta Gazette and hang their shingle up and do their own thing. Why?

Ashley Martin: I think they were just wanting to spread their wings a little bit and have more control over what they were doing.

My grandpa's passion was always like [00:06:00] newspapers, so the web press is the newspaper. That was my grandpa's passion and I think he wanted to have more control and have his own thing.

Don Sherman: Okay. And you've been there 15 years?

Ashley Martin: Yep.

Don Sherman: And you're VP of sales? No,

Ashley Martin: just vice president. Just vice

Don Sherman: Just I do it all. She

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: said just vice president. I know. Yeah. Of everything. Of everything.

Ashley Martin: That would

Don Sherman: pretty cool business card.

Ashley Martin: Everything. Of everything.

Don Sherman: So, since you, you are in charge, what kind of culture are you trying to create?

upgrade over there

Ashley Martin: it's actually kind of stuff we're going through right now. We went from, you know, small family business to last year, like a 60% growth.

So it's time to kind of pivot a little bit and

and operate

as a more bigger business as so, let me think here, . No, that's fine.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: 60% growth.

Ashley Martin: Yeah. Last

year. [00:07:00] Last year.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: What

Ashley Martin: spurred that? Like?

A big part of that was it was a political year so

sorry,

Don Sherman: yeah, yeah.

Ashley Martin: In advance for all the the mailers that made it to your your mailbox, but

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: that was you, huh? No.

Don Sherman: Yeah. We're never gonna have a conversation. One of them

Ashley Martin: excellent. So,

Don Sherman: did you, I. You did it mostly mailers. Did you do the signs you put in the yard,

Ashley Martin: yard signs and all that? Yeah, we do yard signs, door hangers of course all the mailers palm cards the like rack cards that they just hand out. Mm-hmm. , almost everything they, we need, we can do for 'em.

Don Sherman: I'm glad you brought up the 60% growth because since the last 10, 20, 30 years, I feel.

I'm not trying to downgrade this, I'm trying to say this the best I can, but I feel anybody with desktop publishing and everybody got a PC and everything, everybody think they're a printer.

How [00:08:00] do you combat

compete

against that?

Apparently successfully. But how do you do that when everybody think they can print whatever they want and mail whatever they want and put a steak. A yard, whatever. How do you compete against that and get

Ashley Martin: We just like to show them the value of like, our expertise. Like we're, we are, we do call ourselves like the political experts or mail experts.

We try to educate them and be more of a partner than just their printer. And that growth for that happens for them just naturally happens for us. Okay. To just let them know that we are passionate about your success. Here's how we can help you and give them ideas so that we can both grow together.

Don Sherman: Now, do you do, I know you do all these printed

materials. Do you do anything like direct mail or

Ashley Martin: anything?

Tons of direct mail? Yeah. We've actually mailed since day one because they kind of started with the newspaper world. So of course you have to have the ability to do the ink jetting, the mailing part. Mm-hmm. , work with their data process, their list keep all their data updated.

So yeah, [00:09:00] we, I would probably last year with the mail room, that was probably our department that had the biggest growth. Yeah. Aside from just politic.

Don Sherman: Besides political, so help me understand. So somebody wants to send out a bunch of mail instead of going to the post office and putting a stamp on, well, no.

Back it up. Instead of creating it on their computer, oh, I got something I wanna send out to a bunch of folks. Going to the post office, putting it, putting a stamp on it, putting it in an envelope lick.

Appeal the envelope or whatever and send it. How much of that can you

Ashley Martin: We do it all. So what.

what our value is the relationship we have with the post office and getting bulk mail rates.

So you're gonna pay less than a stamp when you mail with us, as long as it's over a certain quantity so we can purchase the list. You know, sometimes people reach out and just say, Hey, you know, I wanna do a mailer. This is my business, this is my target market. We'll help them gather that data, purchase the list, and then [00:10:00] help them mail it.

Or some people just say, Hey, here's my database I need. Get this out, like newsletters just go to their database and stuff.

Wow. Most our customers that do direct mail are on a scale that they would need a mail house versus where some, like, you know, some of our smaller customers will just print everything and they want to put it all together and mail it themselves.

But for the most part, most of our people have you know, some type of a plan in place with that mailing and need an expert to get.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Excellent. Hey, so who actually, you mentioned that you have smaller customers. Mm-hmm. , like what size business?

Who, what's the right customer for you?

Ashley Martin: you? The beautiful thing about us is everybody we have all the equipment to

accommodate a hundred business cards or 10,000 mailers or 50,000 magazines.

So we have digital equipment for small stuff. We have our large press for big stuff. And then we have our new J Press, which is kind of a beautiful in between the two. So really there's not [00:11:00] anything we would ever turn down.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Oh, wow. Okay. That's good to know. Yeah. And so you, I presume w work with non-profits and things like that as well

Ashley Martin: too.

Mm-hmm. non-profits. Yeah. And we do like non-profit rates just to kind of give them, you know, the most bang for their buck to help them get out what they need. So yeah. Non-profits, banks I don't know. Lawn care people. I mean, we have customers all across the board.

Can I

Don Sherman: jump in real quick? Yeah. Back on this mailer, are you a, somebody has a business, can they, I think you said you're the mail house where all I gotta do is call you up and say, a.

A thousand pieces to 67,202.

car dealers. And you can do that.

Ashley Martin: Mm-hmm.

it,

targeted. Yeah. That's it. Yeah.

Don Sherman: our businesses are listening to, I mean, this

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: is huge. Yes.

Ashley Martin: Yeah, direct mail. I mean, we're busy. My mail room is busy. Like there's more direct mail out there than people think. And it's[00:12:00] you know, a great tool that a lot of people are using. And we also have kind of on the backside of our mailing end, the way we also show our value is we have several tools that, like, we have a, it's called Snail Works.

What it does is it tracks your piece, so it the, when. Address the postcards, there's a barcode, and these barcodes are specific to the post office. They're scanned and read, and we can find out the day that I got my postcard.

Hmm.

we, and we can kind of see like when we're mailing for people in Texas, we can say, Hey, Texas post Office taking is taking about seven to 10 days to get in homes so we can plan their schedule from there.

So that's just an added value that we like to include with our mailers so that they have that data to go back to. Cuz most of our people who are mailing love data mm-hmm. and we just wanna make sure that we have hopefully stand out from the other mail houses with all the tools that we bring to the.

Don Sherman: This is

very interesting because, I mean, if you look at the way technology is, I think some people [00:13:00] think email direct marketing is better than post office. Direct me. What's your thoughts on that? I mean, I know what business you're in, but what, how does it makes it sound like you folks have revolutionized, won't say snail mail,

but

Revolution revolutionized.

To make it more sexy, if you will, and easily to be done for, especially for the small business owner.

Ashley Martin: Right, right. Well, and I know I think direct mail actually increased during Covid because you weren't having as much contact with people. But what I also see is, when you open your email, how many emails do you have?

Like exactly. 50, you know, first thing in the morning. But a lot of our people have like a marketing plan behind it where they're probably gonna tie in some type of email with their mail piece. And we have another tool that we use that's called Informed Delivery, which you may have that, it's through the post.

And what that is, is you sign up for informed delivery and you get an email every morning with scans of what's in your email or what's in [00:14:00] your, what's gonna be in your mailbox, sorry. Wow. And if you do an informed delivery campaign, we can do some color images and a call to action click through.

And the day that they get that, the day that, that they're supposed to get the mailer, they'll also get that email. So you'll have the color ad where everything else is black and white, and then you'll also be at the top of the email. And so,

You get the digital touch with the physical piece. So say like, you're a nonprofit and you're saying, you know, click here to donate.

Now that person went check their email and might click there and donate there now, but maybe they'll see it and then get home and forget about it and they'll see the piece in their mailbox and be like, oh, I forgot to donate. And then

this, they

Don Sherman: really,

really enlightening. Very cool.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: No, you're good. I appreciate that. It's this I see your wheels are turning, you're like, very much so

Ashley Martin: Yeah. We try to do what we could do to make people see the value in print and kind of the stuff that we can do. So I think just being the expert, being on top of everything and trying to stand out from all the other mail houses, I think is kind of [00:15:00] what we do and how we have been so successful.

Well,

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Yeah. Well, congratulations. 60% growth.

Yeah, I think you're good. That's pretty successful. . Well, France, it's time to hear a word from our sponsor. We'll be back to hear more from Valley Print Logistics and Ashley Martin.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: watch him. All right, friends, welcome back. We're here with Ashley Martin and Valley Print Logistics. We have just been really talking about the number of successes that they've had over the years, and I believe you guys have, you know, kind of rebranded and let's talk about.

Some of the things that's [00:16:00] gone on over the years that's helped you rebrand or the reason why you've done

Ashley Martin: so?

Yeah. So over like the last six, seven years, there was a handful of small print shops here around town that were ready to kind of retire and be done. They didn't really have a succession plan and they, you know, most of the people that work there, they're all just ready to retire. Mm-hmm. . So we bought quality printing and CSS graphics back in 2016.

And then, W The beautiful thing about that was those were print companies that did stuff that we didn't. That's where we brought on promotional. CSS was also known for like their forms, Okay. And stuff like that. So with those acquisitions, we started doing promo and apparel and Valley Offset printing.

Our former name was offset Printing's, a very specific type of printing. Mm-hmm. . And we wanted to kind of open people's mind to. All that we do, because we had customers for years that were like, oh, you do promo. You know, so we just didn't do a great job letting them know all that we do. So we thought Valley Print Logistics, we kind of let you know that we can logistically handle all your print, your promo, and we also do like warehouse and fulfillment and of course the [00:17:00] mail.

So we were kind of hoping that that term would kind of broaden. People's perception of us. And we didn't change our V too much because over 35 years, everyone knew us as the V, the black and blue. So we didn't tweak our V too much in our logo. We just mainly wanted to call out kind of a new name.

But there's so many people like, you're always gonna be valley offset printing to too. I'm like, that's fine, but we'll be able to, that's fine. Capture, capture some more

audience, I think.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: No, that's, that's pretty cool. And so where can people go to find you? Are you on social

Ashley Martin: or

or Yep. Yep. We're on Facebook.

LinkedIn. We have our new website launched, it's valley pl.com. Okay. Or just come out for a tour to the shop in Valley Center.

So you guys

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: give tours.

Ashley Martin: I love giving tours. It's so fun. I can make it five minutes, I can make it 30 minutes. I love to show people around and you know, talk about all the growth, the add-ons and it really kind of opens your eyes to all that we do.

Like people will see our presses and. . I just didn't think that's what it take. That mm-hmm. it would be that big. Or a lot of people like our web presses because they, with those are on a [00:18:00] roll and it just, there's this crazy little wine for the paper and it's just really neat.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: I can tell. You know, you get really excited you. Your face just sound like you

Don Sherman: sound like you've been on

Ashley Martin: been on TikTok,

Don Sherman: Have you

Ashley Martin: been on, we haven't done the TikTok yet.

I know.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: have to do it. And when you do invite, Don, I'm telling you that's what's up, Maybe you can do it when he comes to the tour. Yeah, I'm just saying. I'm giving you great

ideas.

Ashley Martin: Yeah.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: So you use social media, you have a new website that's launched. What other tools that you do you use for your business?

I, earlier you kind of mentioned the chamber. Obviously this podcast is one way, right? But what other tools helped you and your business really tell your story through the

Ashley Martin: Chamber?

I mean, yeah, mainly it was the chamber I was talking with with a friend and he's like, well, the Chamber really helped me out. So I kind, I reached out to Crest at the time and started going, I was a chamber champion. I went to all the lunches, the scramblers were my favorite cuz I love breakfast. So those, that was kind of really what really launched my career in sales. [00:19:00] Mm-hmm. . But we also do, like, we would do like weebea. We brought on a sales manager over the last like three or four years. She's done amazing at helping our growth.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: So with all of that work and you were on the grind, how do you find work-life balance?

Ashley Martin: When I was sales and marketing, that was pretty tough, because you know, you wanna check your emails 24 7. And I do have two little ones. They're six and eight now. So, they kind of helped me stay grounded. I mean, I remembered how hard my dad worked. Growing the business and wanted to make sure I kept an eye on my work life balance cuz I know I've got

that workaholic blood in me.

Yeah. So, it's a constant struggle. I am checking my emails all the time and trying to make sure I'm there for my people, but I also know when to say when and focus on my family and my husband and friends and activities. But

definitely. still working. Yes.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: work in progress. Work in progress. True

Ashley Martin: entrepreneurs working on that.

Don Sherman: Done.

Ashley Martin: [00:20:00] Excellent.

Don Sherman: Lot of growth.

been acquiring companies.

what

can you share that

is

Ashley Martin: your company that

Don Sherman: that

Ashley Martin: Okay. Well, with our new website, we are working on an online, Yeah. So eventually people are gonna be able to go online and order whatever promo items they need.

Business cards, all our paper products. I would say most of our customers like that personal touch with our customer service reps, but there's a there's a huge chunk of people that we're not capturing cuz they just wanna go to Vistaprint and order something real quick. So we're trying. to gear our website to where they're actually shopping on our store and that they can order online and get that, what I call quick fix, um mm-hmm.

and order their stuff just in the middle of the night or whatever. So we are working on that. And then we're also working on another side of the bus, the, of the online store where businesses could have an online portal and say you have 200 employees all over the us. They can go online and order their own business cards and stuff like that.

I just, we've, [00:21:00] we learned over the years that between HR and marketing, they hate ordering business cards when they have that many employees. So we're also working towards that. Excellent. Yeah. So,

Don Sherman: you've been around, I

forgot, when did you start?

Ashley Martin: 1988.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: 35 years.

Quick math. Don.

You know what?

Ashley Martin: I went. Maybe Abilene Elementary didn't teach all.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Wow.

Don Sherman: Welcome to my world. See, you know, way. Okay, Hold on, I

gotta regroup

from that. That was

pretty

good.

That was pretty good.

What

can

Wichita area, since you're based in Valley, what can the Wichita

Ashley Martin: Print local you're not gonna get taken care of as well. Just going to Vistaprint or for Imprint, you know, if there's an issue, you're gonna have a human contact and you're not gonna have to sit on hold and press 1, 2, 4 to get to the proper person to fix your [00:22:00] issue.

We're there to fix any issues and we care. So. Excellent,

Don Sherman: excellent.

And one last question,

before we get to

the fun stuff, unless you

have to

Ashley Martin: deal

with it?

Don Sherman: again.

Another 10 years, 20 years

already doing early

retirement.

what's your, what's gonna be your your

Ashley Martin: Oh, it's a wonderful question.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Hmm. Yeah, that's a good one.

Ashley Martin: That, that's a great question. I mean, a, you can take your time , slice and dice, right?

Don Sherman: Accomplished it a lot, so I mean, you're doing great things

over there. I just,

Ashley Martin: yeah. Curious I mean, I'd

probably

be she made her family. .

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Boom.

That's a good

one. She made her family proud.

That's a good.

Don Sherman: excellent.

E,

You got [00:23:00] anything?

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: I don't. It's time. It's

Don Sherman: time. You

dealt with Ebony long enough. I know you can.

Ashley Martin: You guys are great.

Don Sherman: You heard that?

exhale,

folks. . That's what happens when you deal with Ebony. 30 minutes. Oh wow.

We're

gonna have some fun. Gonna do some word association. I give you one word to gimme one word back.

That's not wrong cuz it's your word. Are you ready? Dun

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Dun.

Ashley Martin: Okay.

Don Sherman: Leader

Ashley Martin: support, success,

growth,

Don Sherman: college,

Ashley Martin: important,

Don Sherman: Entrepreneur,

Ashley Martin: hardworking

Don Sherman: failure.

Ashley Martin: Lessons

learned.

Don Sherman: doing really good Wichita, or you can say Wichita

Ashley Martin: Passion. disconnect.

Don Sherman: Hero.

Ashley Martin: My dad,

Don Sherman: Mm-hmm. . [00:24:00] Wichita Chamber.

Ashley Martin: Amazing

Don Sherman: family.

Ashley Martin: Important

Don Sherman: fun.

Ashley Martin: family . Nice.

Don Sherman: Last

but not the least, and you have to tell the

truth

and we'll do

some

digging.

Ashley Martin: Yes, please.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: That's

Don Sherman: awesome. Nice.

Excellent. Thank you

for coming through,

Ashley Martin: Ashley.

We appreciate here. Thank you for having me.

Ebony Clemons-Ajibolade: Well,

this was fun, Ashley. I am so, extremely proud of you guys' Success. Thank you for sharing your story, and thank you for, keeping the business here and growing it in the greater Wichita area and supporting all the other small

you.

All

right, friends. Thanks for joining us. If you would, please make certain that you like us and share us and let us know who you wanna hear from next Till next time,

peace.

[00:25:00]