



**Design Distributors Tag Teams  
New High-Speed Inkjet Press  
with High-Speed MBO Finishing**



# DESIGN DISTRIBUTORS TAG TEAMS NEW HIGH-SPEED INKJET PRESS WITH HIGH-SPEED MBO FINISHING

When your name recognition is so great that you can build a successful commercial printing and mailing business on the name of an interior design shop from the 1960s, you know you've done something right — really right.

Design Distributors, a commercial print and mail house in Deer Park, N.Y., was formed as a small envelope shop in 1966 by David and Stuart Avrck. Today, with Stuart's son Adam at the helm, it employs 125 people, fills 130,000 square feet and pumps out more than 100 million pieces per year.

It may not be the largest shop in the Northeast, but Design Distributors claims to be the most diverse. This claim is backed up with an impressive equipment list, including perfecting and non-perfecting Halm Jet presses (black-and-white and four-color), one 40" 6-color Mitsubishi with a coater, sheetfed Xerox machines (black-and-white and 4-color), Ricoh Pro C9100/9220 Series full-color machines and Muller Martini 8- and 10-color presses with UV drying and in-line diecutting. Most recently, Design Distributors invested in an HP PageWide Web Press T240 HD for its high-volume variable data jobs. The company now holds enough roll-fed paper to extend from New York to Los Angeles.

To coincide with its high-level variable data capabilities, Design Distributors offers mail tracking with its IMb Mail-Trax system. Its facility is also HIPPA-compliant and provides the highest levels of data security for all of its clients, whether they require HIPPA compliance or not.



**Adam Avrck**

## FROM FAMILY SQUABBLE TO TOP TIER

When you look at the operation today, it's hard to imagine where it came from. It's truly a story of New York ingenuity. Originally, the Avrck brothers had been in the family envelope business, but after a dispute, the family members decided to go their own ways. That's how Design Distributors ended up with its unusual name.

"My father and uncle decided to leave the family business and start their own shop, but they needed a company name," recalls Adam Avrck, president and owner of Design Distributors. "In 1966, you couldn't go on the Internet and start a business for \$250, but my uncle had a friend who owned an interior decorating company, Design Distributors. He bought the company and launched the new envelope business the next day. Fifty years later, the name has stuck."

Has Avrck thought about renaming the company to better reflect its state-of-the-art printing and mailing operation? Sure, he says, but the idea has always gotten shot down. "But it doesn't matter," he says. "People know who we are."

It is this kind of New York chutzpah that has powered Design Distributors over the years. Avrck has refused to accept anything less than total success.

Today, the company is an anomaly in the printing market. Located on Long Island, the geography is hardly ideal for high-volume distribution. So why doesn't the company move? Avrck is unequivocal — it's the people. "At our shop, age 50 is the new 30," he jokes.

But joking aside, his team has the kind of rich, hard-earned experience that is very difficult to replace. "We do bring in younger talent in the areas of digital production, data and programming," Avrck explains, "but 65% of our business is still web offset. You don't hear younger people saying, 'Ooh, I can't wait to work for a printing company,' so when you have a team as experienced as ours, you hold onto it."

Most of the company's business is in the Northeast, from Connecticut to Pennsylvania and into Maryland and Washington, D.C., with New York City as the hub.

In a market in which printers are developing deep social media presences and trading on SEO, Design Distributors focuses on relationships. "The larger consumers of our product don't Google 'direct mail,'" says Avrck. "They are ad agencies and larger companies with corporate sourcing and procurement systems that rely on our expertise and experience. As young buyers replace the older, more experienced buyers, face-to-face relationships become even more important."

## PATH OF CONTINUAL IMPROVEMENT

In terms of technology, Avrck describes Design Distributors' goal as to stay in the center of the action, taking advantage of proven technologies at the right time. He doesn't want to be on the bleeding edge. Rather, his company stays in the sweet spot, investing as soon as the technology is mature.

Design Distributors invested in high-speed monochrome printers, both sheetfed and continuous form laser printers, back in the 1980s. "We were into personalization decades ago," Avrck says. "On the inkjet side, we watched the technology go from 150 dpi to 300 dpi to 600 dpi to UV systems. As the equipment changed and the resolutions got better, we followed the path of continual improvement."

In November 2018, Design Distributors made its next major leap forward. It purchased a T240 Digital Inkjet Web Press, which enables it to provide the highest quality at the production speeds of 500 fpm in performance mode and 250 fpm in quality mode.

What was its impetus for the change? There was no "ah, ha!" moment, Avrck says. It was just time. "The prices had come down, and I finally saw quality that I liked," he says. "I sat down with the press vendors and started talking about price, and the combination of price and quality finally worked. God bless spreadsheets."

Avrck calls the T240 industrial press a "true game changer." While there are design benefits, such knockout color variable printing, the biggest change for clients is the ability to transition from hybrid to true white paper workflow. Since the press was installed eight months ago, the company has migrated 30-35% of its former offset business to the press.

“Our intent was never to cut into our offset work, but the efficiencies in transitioning hybrid workflows have been too great to ignore,” says Mike Glanzman, VP of operations for Design Distributors. “Three months ago, 85% of our work was still offset. Three months from now, it will be 45%. In some cases, we no longer preprint forms at all.”

Growth in volume on the press results from more than the shift from offset. It’s also from new business brought in by a larger volume of variable digital work. “As more and more people become aware that we can do one million pieces digitally, more and more requests are pouring in,” Glanzman says. “I’m working on a proposal for one of our big accounts right now. Historically, they run 1½ million per month in 10-12 versions. Turnaround is three weeks. With the new press, we can turn it around in two weeks. Plus, they can put it all into a single mail stream, which saves them a boatload in postage.”

Another contributor to Design Distributors’ growth is outsource work from other printers. “We have some very sibling-like relationships with a couple of firms,” Glanzman says. “Why should they spend \$2 million on a press when we have one?”



**Design Distributors** invested in an HP PageWide Web Press T240 HD to meet demand for its high-volume variable data jobs.

## IT'S ALL ABOUT THE DATA

Regardless of the production technology used, whether toner, continuous monochrome laser, hybrid or now high-speed inkjet, the overwhelming majority of Design Distributors' jobs are personalized.

"We understand data, crunching data, merge-purge, tables and personalized elements," Glanzman says. "Now, with the efficiencies and flexibilities provided by our HP press, our customers have so many new doors open to them."

In particular, financial institutions are no longer limited to printing offset shells overprinted with monochrome laser. "In the old workflow, clients had been largely segmenting, adding limited personalization in the letter itself," Glanzman explains. "Here are all of the people we are offering a \$35,000 loan to. Here are all the people [we're offering a] \$1 million loan to.' Now they can produce offers with detailed loan offers for each recipient down to the penny."

It's no wonder the company's clients are rapidly switching over to digital. In fact, one of the company's largest customers has put 70% of its print lettershop budget into digital. "They don't have to worry about, 'I'm running a deal with Google, so I have all this inventory stored, and in three months, the promotion is over. Then we have to throw the rest of the material out,'" Glanzman says. "It's 100% print on demand."



**In July 2018,** Design Distributors installed a new roll fed 30" high-speed finishing system, including multiple buckle folders for single and double stream work.

The new white paper workflow makes variable color cost-effective, as well. Since installing the press, Design Distributors is seeing more variable color images. “We have clients who create entire libraries of imagery based on all of the data points,” Glanzman says. “In retail, they will maintain a library of images to target people based on past purchases and to whom they want to upsell. In telecom, for example, we know all the specs of your phone. If you have an iPhone, we’ll show you an [upgrade]. If you have a Galaxy S7, we’ll try to sell you to a Galaxy S8.”

In the past, Design Distributors’ customers may have produced a half-dozen varieties of letters. Now there could be thousands. “Each data point can reflect a paragraph or a sentence,” Glanzman says.

This doesn’t mean that offset is obsolete. The company still has clients producing high-volume versioned pieces for which offset remains the most cost-effective. All of its jobs are run through an estimating tool that identifies which production option is the best choice.

## INKJET CHANGES EVERYTHING . . . INCLUDING FINISHING

At Design Distributors, it would be safe to say that installing high-speed inkjet has changed everything. That includes the production floor. Even in 70,000 square feet of production space, adding a new press was a challenge in a facility already packed to the gills with equipment and people.

“In order to fit it in, we had to bust into our warehouse and push out the data processing area,” Avrck says. “At some point, our plans are to add a second high-speed inkjet press and reduce our offset and monochrome continuous laser equipment. This will give our team even more breathing room.”

But it wasn’t just the press and paper that it had to make room for. With the HP running at speeds of up to 500 fpm, Design Distributors needed to upgrade its finishing to keep up. “The existing finishing lines just weren’t fast enough,” Glanzman notes. “We had to have the absolute fastest finishing equipment available. That meant MBO.”

In July 2018, Design Distributors installed its new high-speed web fed MBO finishing line. The line included an unwinder, sheeter, two buckle folders, and delivery all capable of running single or multiple up products. “It was a huge investment,” Glanzman says, “but the ROI has been incredible.”

In part, this is because the MBO line was able to replace three of the older finishing lines. Before, it was running eight lines of Bowe and Spedo cutters going into MBO and Stahl folders. Three of these lines were replaced with one MBO line. “With the MBO equipment, we were able to do a 3:1 replacement,” Glanzman says. “That’s an exponential reduction.”

Labor was reduced, too. The older line was run by a single operator. The new high-speed line pushes out three times the volume, but requires two operators. “This gave us 3:2 labor reduction,” he adds.

The new line also facilitates higher volumes by increasing format flexibility. It fits 30" rolls, which offers significant capacity increases over its older lines, which were limited to 18".

## MAKING A (BIG) STATEMENT

Design Distributors' heavy investment in its production and finishing capabilities clearly has hard productivity benefits. However, there are soft benefits as well.

### **1. It makes a statement.**

With so many printing companies cutting back or going out of business, the decision to make such a significant capital investment in production and finishing sends a strong message to both the employees at the company and to the larger marketplace.

"With companies closing right and left, this investment has been a huge morale boost for our employees," Glanzman adds. "They feel that we are making an investment in them and their future. It also makes a strong statement in the marketplace. I've walked into client meetings and had people say, 'I heard you did some serious acquiring in the past year!'"

### **2. It expands the number of formats clients can use.**

With so many new cost-effective options, clients can broaden the number of formats they use for their mailings. This gives them the freedom to test new approaches and drive even better results. "In the past, our clients might have wanted to test different styles of forms, but it was too cost prohibitive," Glanzman says. "Now, we have given them an inexpensive tool to test any format they want without them having to pay through the nose."

### **3. They can put a lot more pieces through the facility.**

Design Distributors has gone from being able to run 150,000 per day on a single finishing line to 350,000 to 450,000. "We are putting three times more pieces in the mail than in the past," Glanzman says.

### **4. It has increased response rates for its clients.**

Although Design Distributors' clients are hesitant to share their metrics, the company is hearing anecdotally that the added flexibility from the full white paper workflow is increasing response and conversion rates.

"All of the data that is out there with respect to the DMA, USPS and others shows a significant boost to metrics based on color and color variability," Avricks says. "Our clients are really able to take advantage of that now, and what we are hearing is in line with that data."

### **5. It has increased the flexibility of the line in terms of format sizes.**

In the previous workflow, the finishing line could handle sizes no larger than 18" wide. The new line can handle up to 30". "In the old workflow, for every 11" inches, I could cut and fold

two forms across,” Glanzman explains. “Now, I can do three across. That’s a 50% increase in throughput.”

## GETTING UP TO SPEED

Was it tough making the transition to the new line? Avrick says no. Overall, the process is the same. It’s just the speeds that take getting used to. That’s where his outstanding print and finishing team comes in.

“We have some good people who are very talented and easily trained. This allowed them to start running the equipment right away,” Avrick says. “MBO allotted us a week to get up to speed and start binding sheets. By the time our trainer arrived, we had already been up and running for two days. After watching us for two more days, he left.”

The productivity benefits from these investments go beyond speed, however. With the automatic presets, operators can set up previously run jobs instantly. “For repeat work, set-up time is nonexistent,” Glanzman says. “Not just on the finishing line, but the inkjet, too. Even the color and the paper profiles are locked in.”

These presets also enable efficiencies you might not necessarily think about, such as the ability to stop and start the press to optimize the schedule or fit in rush jobs. “If I have a run of two million pieces, on offset, I have to run all two million at once,” Glanzman says. “But on the HP, I can run half a million, stop and run three other jobs, then run the rest of first job later. The operators don’t have two to three hours of tweaking the color each time.”

The benefits of this flexibility are felt almost every day. “On a Friday, I might run half a million pieces for one client, stop the press, put on a rush or short-run job on Saturday, then finish up the original job on Monday,” Glanzman says. “Once you establish the settings on both the press and the bindery, everything comes back up instantly.”

Not only does this make Design Distributors more efficient with its existing jobs, but it can take on additional work since it doesn’t have to turn work down. “I don’t have to say, ‘I can’t get you on press for two weeks,’ then hear the client say, ‘I can’t wait two weeks. I’ll find another vendor,’” Glanzman says. “Now I can say, ‘I can get you on press tomorrow.’”

### OLD FINISHING SET-UP VS. MBO SET-UP

- **100 FPM to 400-500 FPM**
- **3:1 Equipment Replacement**
- **3:2 Finishing Operator Replacement**
- **50% Increase in Binding Throughput**



Speaking of efficiency, Avrnick tells a funny story. Both departments are so efficient that it has created a friendly competition between the two. “If I have an issue in setup on the HP, when they run the forms to the bindery, they walk in, and the bindery operators are there, making it obvious that they are waiting,” Avrnick says. “In meetings, there are comments made from one to the other: ‘If you actually got the material off the machine, it could bind it.’”

Of course, Design Distributors still has four older smaller format lines it uses for smaller jobs. “It’s great having so many options,” Glanzman says.

## MEETING (NOT SO) MODEST GOALS

With these investments, Avrnick feels that he has succeeded in creating the most complete facility in the Northeast. “There is very little we don’t do here,” he says. “When you compare our equipment to our competitors, we are head and shoulders above the rest. Our productivity is so high that I don’t need to have 20 pieces of certain types of equipment. All I need is two.”

Glanzman agrees. “Diversity is key for us,” he concludes. “We don’t want to be the largest or the most mass producer. We just want to be able to produce any direct mail package that our clients can create. I would say that we have succeeded in that. There isn’t a package that someone can come up with that we can’t do on our equipment.”