



WALKER360
A world of possibilities

“Our investments have helped us speed up production even more, without the need to add more labor.”

– Taylor Blackwell, President and Owner

Walker360 reinvents its production platform and creates new bindery.

It's uncommon to hear about companies completely overhauling their production platforms, and it's even rarer to hear about companies that do so over a period of only 12 months. Walker360 is that rare company. The 75-year-old company, based in Montgomery, Alabama, employs about 50 people and generates \$13.5 million in annual revenues. Founded as, primarily, an offset-focused commercial printer, Walker360 is now a completely digital shop with a brand-new bindery producing a wide range of applications including newsletters, books, marketing mail, and more while also offering creative services, data analytics, and personalized communications.

President and Owner Taylor Blackwell began building the foundation for a complete production overhaul a few years ago as he did research and traveled to different industry events looking to bring in a new production inkjet press. He explains, “Based on my existing finishing equipment, I was thinking about a 40” inkjet press, but I just couldn't make the math work.”

That's when Blackwell decided to start with the finishing side in mind rather than the printing side. “While I understood that there would be efficiencies by switching from offset to inkjet, I also realized that if you can't automate the finishing, you are just moving the bottleneck there.”

He continued his research, attending the Inkjet Summit a couple of times and then

traveling to Hunkeler Innovationdays in 2019, where he says his eyes were really opened to the potential of automation. “I literally developed a plan on the plane ride home from the Hunkeler event,” he says. “It was perfect timing for us, too. Our presses were aging out, 15 or 16 years old, so I would have to make a change anyway within the next year. I couldn't have done it two or three years earlier; inkjet just wasn't where I needed it to be back then. Now inkjet presses can print on just about any substrate with very few limitations.”

This set off a flurry of activity at Walker360 over the next year. “We could have stepped into it a little more softly,” Blackwell allows. “We could have put in a sheetfed inkjet press and continued to use our existing bindery and our offset presses. But if you keep one offset press, you also have to keep everything else surrounding it – plate makers, plate and blanket chemistries, inks, the whole works, including a separate workflow for offset. I didn't want to do that. If we were going to embark on this transformation, I wanted to go full force. It has literally been the biggest change we've ever made in the history of our company. We changed every single piece of equipment in our shop over a 12-month period, with more to come. And it affected everything, 100%, across the board.”

He continues, “I don't know if I would have gotten to this point without seeing the full picture at the Hunkeler event.



Page 4, top to bottom

The Hunkeler UW8 Unwinder and RW8 Rewinder are paired with the Screen Truepress 520HD to print rolls in an offline configuration before moving to final finishing.

Tim Stobert sets up a job at the touchscreen of the Hunkeler Gen8 Roll-to-Cut/Stack line.

Eric King (L) and Mark Hornsby (R) review output coming off the Horizon RD-4055DMC Rotary Die Cutter.

Carla Green prepares the Horizon BQ-500 Perfect Binder to accept book blocks for binding.

Page 5, top to bottom

Printed rolls from the Hunkeler Roll-to-Roll system are transferred to either the Hunkeler Gen8 Roll-to-Cut/Stack line (top right) or the Hunkeler/Horizon Roll-to-Booklet line (top left) for final finishing.

Mike Stobert gathers finished booklets processed on the Hunkeler/Horizon Roll-to-Booklet line.

Finished books are produced with ease on Walker360's Horizon binders and trimmers.



Scan this code for an interview with Taylor Blackwell, President and Owner.



I also visited Standard Finishing's Boston demo center, which helped in the decision-making process, too. And both Hunkeler and Standard Finishing really stepped up, answering all my questions and helping me to work out whether to go inline or offline with my finishing. We ultimately ended up going offline, and I'm glad I did. It gives us a lot more flexibility.”

In their brand-new bindery, Walker360 now has Hunkeler Roll-to-Roll winders paired with Screen's Truepress 520HD press. Printed rolls are moved from that system to either the Hunkeler Gen8 Roll-to-Cut/Stack line or the Roll-to-Booklet line featuring the Hunkeler unwinder and cutter and the Horizon StitchLiner Mark V Saddlestitcher. “There were some refinements in process along the way. We started with a combination line that could produce booklets, book blocks, or stacks in one system, but recently separated that out into two workflows for Roll-to-Stack and Roll-to-Booklet. We found that if you are stitching a book, you couldn't run cut sheet at the same time and that was a bottleneck for us. The new configuration will solve that issue, and both Standard and Hunkeler were terrific partners in helping us sort this out.”

Blackwell reports that the new configuration gives them added capacity and capabilities which enable them to take on new work and acquire new customers. Citing an example of a new booklet job the company acquired as a result of the new configuration, Blackwell explains, “This is a 300,000-count personalized booklet for the gaming industry. Every person gets a booklet that has specific information in it for them. We could never have done this job traditionally – no one could. We also do a booklet job for the healthcare industry where each personalized booklet has a different number of pages and contains information specific to the recipient. With the new configuration, the stitcher simply reads a printed barcode and is able to process the variation in pages on the fly. Again, this is an application we could not have done before.”

In addition to the Hunkeler solutions, Walker360 also added a mix of Horizon equipment installed and maintained by their local Horizon dealer partner, Innovative Graphic Solutions. The bindery now includes the BQ-500 Perfect Binder with LBF-500 Automatic Book Block Feeder, the HT-1000V Trimmer, the RD-4055DMC Die Cutter, the SPF-200L Bookletmaker with VAC Collating Tower, the CRF-362 Creaser/Folder, and even the PF-40L Desktop Folder for very short-run folding work. All of this is supported by Horizon's iCE LiNK workflow, a subscription-based service which connects across multiple finishing devices and provides real-time access to information about work-in-progress and other critical production data. As part of their new digital footprint, the company also runs a Canon iX3200 sheet-fed inkjet press which prints cut sheet output processed on the Horizon systems.

Walker360's investments in Hunkeler and Horizon finishing mean faster time to market for their customers. Blackwell states, “Speed always wins, whether it is a 100-meter race or who can deliver the job the fastest. I tell my employees that speed is our friend; and our investments have helped us speed up production even more, without the need to add more labor. We have a perfect bound book job of about 100 pages that comes in every two weeks. We receive it between 8 and 10 in the evening; we run it on inkjet during the night; and it goes to the Hunkeler cut-and-stack line and then Horizon perfect binder that same night. By 8 AM, we are driving that job to Tennessee to deliver it. It is truly amazing what we can accomplish now!”

Blackwell affirms that, despite all their recent changes, Walker360 isn't done evolving. “We are continuously learning, and we will continue to refine our bindery operation to meet our evolving needs. We count on our partnership with Standard Finishing to ensure we are making the right decisions and the changes are implemented expeditiously!”