



The team at Three Z Printing stands with their Horizon StitchLiner Mark IV Saddlestitcher, which expanded the company's capabilities into saddlestitched booklets. L to R: Neil Zerrusen, Chief Operating Officer; Bill Zerrusen, CEO/President; Sam Niebrugge, Manager of the Digital Department

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Three Z Printing evolves with digital inkjet printing and a new bindery operation

Founded in 1978 by James and Lorraine Zerrusen, Three Z Printing has always been a family-driven company. Named after their three sons — Dan, Bill, and Kurt — the company was built on small-town Illinois values of hard work, integrity, and faith.

“My brothers and I grew up in a small town and were raised in a family that prioritized work ethic and faith,” recalled Bill Zerrusen. “It’s these core values that we took forward into the second generation of Three Z leadership, and that propelled Three Z Printing to its position as one of the leading printers in the United States.”

When Bill’s brothers retired in 2015, he became sole owner and ushered in the third generation of leadership — his sons Matt, Neil, and Chad, and sons-in-law Derek Meinhart and Sam Niebrugge. Together, they are carrying the family’s legacy forward while embracing a rapidly changing printing landscape.

“I’m very excited about the future of Three Z — the transition to the next generation and the vision we have for our people, our community, and our customers,” said Bill. “My vision has always been to build a great company with great people producing great results. My family and I are as committed to that as ever.”

A Leap into Digital Inkjet

The next chapter in Three Z’s evolution began in early 2024 with the addition of two Canon ProStream inkjet web presses, expanding the company’s already impressive fleet of 15 offset web presses.

“Before we added digital printing and finishing capability, we were all static print,” explained Sam Niebrugge, Manager of the Digital Department. “The key driver for adding digital was growing customer demand for variable data printing and shorter runs.”

To support this new direction, Three Z also set out to modernize its bindery operation. Chief Operating Officer Neil Zerrusen noted that their partners at Standard Finishing played a pivotal role in that transformation.

“We were really digital novices,” Neil said. “Standard Finishing shared valuable advice on how to approach our digital operation and the steps we needed to take. Our offset operation will still be our bread and butter, but we knew we needed to get into the digital space.”

Building the Digital Bindery

Three Z ultimately invested in a suite of new finishing systems: a Horizon StitchLiner Mark IV Saddlestitcher with VAC Collating Towers, a Horizon AFV-566FKT Folder, a Horizon RD-N4055 Rotary Die Cutting System, and a Hunkeler Roll-to-Cut/Stack line operating nearline to its Canon presses.

“This was our first acquisition from Standard Finishing,” Niebrugge said. “We did our research, talked with peers in the industry, and they highly recommended working with Standard to add Horizon and Hunkeler equipment. We even visited their showroom in Boston — it was really cool. I left there wishing I could have one of everything!”

Neil added, “Standard has been a great partner in helping us get our nearline equipment in place to bring printed rolls to their final destination. We jumped in with both feet — told them what our budget was and what we wanted — and they stepped up with fast delivery and installation.”

Expanding Capabilities, Inspiring Growth

The new digital printing and bindery equipment has unlocked new capabilities for Three Z — shorter runs, faster turn times, and entirely new product lines.

“With digital, there’s less makeready and waste, and we can produce work faster and more cost-effectively,” Niebrugge noted.

The expanded capabilities now enable Three Z to fulfill customer requests they couldn’t previously accommodate — saddlestitched booklets, variable-data print pieces, book blocks, postcards, and die-cut products.

“One of our new projects involves producing personalized cards for a company’s employees,” Niebrugge shared. “Each card has a QR code that lets employees select their birthday gift. We use the rotary die cutter for that project — something we couldn’t have done before.”

Three Z is also now producing book blocks for other companies, printing rolls on the Canon press and then using the Hunkeler line for cutting and stacking.

A Fresh Chapter for the Team

The digital expansion has not only broadened production capabilities — it’s also reinvigorated the team.

“We’ve been doing a lot of the same things for a long time, and the work wasn’t that challenging,” said Neil. “Now, many employees have stepped up and embraced new skills, and we’ve brought on new team members. It’s like a breath of fresh air.”

Niebrugge added, “We’ve also cross-trained employees. They might run the stitcher one day, the die cutter the next. Day shift handles most of the printing, and second shift finishes what’s on the floor. There’s more variety now, and that’s made their jobs more interesting.”

Looking Ahead

“Sam has taken on overseeing the digital area with this new equipment,” said Neil. “We even built a dedicated room with controlled airflow, temperature, and moisture. It’s been a fun journey. We’re still learning how to get the most out of our current equipment and exploring what’s next. We’re building a new company within — and it’s exciting to see where it leads.”

He added, “We’re delighted to have a solid partner like Standard Finishing to help guide us down that path.”



Stacked cards are unloaded from the Horizon RD-N4055 Rotary Die Cutting System, which has allowed Three Z to expand their business with new die-cut projects.



Three Z Bindery Operator sets up the Hunkeler Roll-to-Cut/Stack Solution, which produces book blocks from rolls printed on the company’s Canon ProStream inkjet web presses.



The Mark IV features two VAC-L1000 Collating Towers which provide flawless feeding on virtually any stock, at speeds up to 9,900 sets per hour. Above, sheets are loaded into one of the bins on the 10-station tower.



The new AFV-566FKT Folder features 44 fully-automated settings for improved efficiency, more operator-friendly production, and reduced waste and make-ready.

