



AlphaGraphics supports diverse job mix with full Standard Horizon bindery.



Mike Sparaco first joined AlphaGraphics in 1980 as a staff member at the University Store in Tucson when he was a student. The University Store then became Store Number One when AlphaGraphics became a franchise. Sparaco soon opened his own AlphaGraphics store in Tempe, Arizona, and for many years it has been one of the top earning shops in the AlphaGraphics network. The 20,000 square foot facility produces offset, digital, and wide-format printing on presses from Heidelberg, HP, Ricoh, Xerox, and Canon, and the acquisition of Brand X Custom T-Shirts also added embroidery, screen and digital printing of textiles to AlphaGraphics Tempe's offerings.

Output from the sheet-fed presses, both offset and digital, is processed in the near-line bindery. "Because we produce a wide variety of work and for more effective use of our space," Sparaco stated, "a near-line bindery makes the most sense for us. We are a very automated shop, and that carries right through to the bindery." A large majority of the equipment in the bindery was sourced from Standard Finishing through its local Horizon dealer, Print & Finishing Solutions. Over the years, the bindery has grown to include Horizon solutions for creasing, folding, slitting, bookletmaking, perfect binding, and most recently, die cutting.

Sparaco credits Horizon's consistent user interface and cross-trainability as one factor in his continued investment in their equipment. Using the SmartSlitter as an example, Sparaco explains that it is simple to train a new team member and finishing business cards is easily accomplished with the equipment, even for less experienced operators. "On the majority of the Horizon equipment," he says, "you can train someone quickly to get up and running. They make equipment that holds up well and just lasts."

He also appreciates that with Standard Horizon, there are always improvements and upgrades that can be integrated over time to increase efficiency. Sparaco highlights the SPF-200A Bookletmaker with 20 bins, saying, "We acquired that as an upgrade to an older Horizon bookletmaker some time



ago, and it is doing more tasks for us. That machine also has similar interfaces, and it just keeps on producing. It still runs every day in this building."

The shop also upgraded from EVA to PUR perfect binding with the Horizon BQ-280 and is now one of the few shops running PUR in town. "It's a much better bind than our previous equipment, and I don't have to worry about pages falling out."

Sparaco's most recent addition to the bindery is an RD-N4055 Die Cutting System which was up and running as of February 2022. According to Sparaco, the new machine has allowed them more control over the time to delivery, allowing them to develop additional in-demand core products that created hassles before acquiring the die cutter.

One such hassle was a monthly recurring order for die cut label sheets. Before the RD-N4055, Sparaco explained that they were buying 5,000, 12" x 18" pre-cut die labels and running variable on them. On top of that expense, they were running into issues with the labels coming off inside the digital press and gumming up the machine with the glue. With the new RD-N4055, Sparaco can buy less expensive uncut sheets that are processed and then kiss-cut on the die cutter. Says Sparaco, "Kiss cutting is very fast to set up, and we are just knocking those out."

The RD-N4055 also helped Sparaco bring an important labor-intensive job requiring die cut vouchers in nine different shapes back in-house. Originally, Sparaco had to send the job, a run of about 10,000 pieces, to a trade partner. It would take four or five days to turnaround, and then Sparaco's team had to spend up to eight man hours manually stripping the vouchers, counting them, and bagging them in stacks of 50.

With the RD-N4055, the entire job only takes two hours – using a single operator. "That job alone justifies the acquisition," says Sparaco. "The operators have set up the die cutter to stack the vouchers in stacks of 48, and the additional two are added manually. The efficiencies are exciting. We are cutting about 80,000 to 100,000 of these a month, and the labor and time reduction is amazing."

"Both PFS and Standard Finishing have provided spectacular service and have been longtime partners," Sparaco concludes. "These machines don't break very often, so it's rare I am calling them in. When needed, they are quick to take care of us, routinely servicing us next day if not same day."



- 1: A finished booklet is collected off of the high-production, 20 bin SPF-200A Bookletmaker
- 2,3: Perfect bound books fresh from the Horizon BQ-280 PUR Perfect Binder
- 4: Daniel High quickly sets up a job on the touchscreen of the Horizon AFC-564 Cross-Folder
- 5: The new RD-N4055 Die Cutting System was added to AlphaGraphic's bindery in early 2022
- 6: Charles Goffnett and Michael Sinkula meet to review finished output at the shop in Tempe, AZ

Opposite page:

Top left: Daniel High stands with Trevis Becker and Tom Veesaert at the RD-N4055 Die Cutting System

Bottom: Finished booklets are stacked out of the high-production SPF-200A Bookletmaker with 20 bins

Top right: High and Becker wait at the delivery section of the Horizon AFC-564 Cross-Folder

