



Jamaica Blueprint upgrades UV print system and capitalizes on new revenue streams

Background

Located in Jamaica, which is in the borough of Queens, one of 5 that make up NYC., Jamaica Blueprint and Central Blueprint are 50+ year-old family businesses owned and operated by Corky, Michael and Peter Shaw. We interviewed Michael about his collective knowledge of printing large format color images for the AEC market and their experiences with their CET Q5 UV printer. The following article is in Michael's own words. – Rich Gigl, National / AZON

Managing the Technology Gap

We consider Jamaica Blue / Central Blueprint to be a small to midsize operation, and like many similar firms, not with unlimited resources. We mainly focus on the print needs of our customers within the AEC marketplace(s). Having said that, we are very cautious about expanding our print capacity/offerings, as we are print centric rather than equipment centric. We are not able to make many missteps, in part because we do not have the cushion of equipment and supply sales to fall back upon. We have expanded cautiously, not always at the beginning or middle, but before the tail end of the curve in supplementing what we do in those core markets. Jamaica Blueprint is very much reactionary, we don't create the demand. Many of our friends in the PSP industry are very good at creating demand for their products or services, not always us. We wait for the demand to reach us. We don't have expansive sales teams and telemarketers. We don't use social media. Maybe we have been too cautious at times not generating the additional revenue flow because we are so cautious.



We concentrate on the base of the demand pyramid where our business is, we are heavy in the base of the pyramid.

A Meaningful Ruling...

In 2013, New York City modified a 2007 building department ruling about job signage from a simple display of permits, to more of an informational signage supplemented with different project data. New York City also mandated that OSHA training signage be printed in each language of the resident workforce. We have printed construction signage in Chinese, Spanish, Mandarin, and Arabic amongst others. On many sites, we print signs in multiple languages.

Our Initial Investment- First Blood

In 2013 we purchased HP latex roll to roll technology. Cost of investment was not substantial, and we wanted to see if there was something to it. It opened this market opportunity for us.

Our plan was to stay within our existing customer base and grow our services. We found that a lot of our customers needed & required this service. We did it with adhesive backed vinyl initially. Many of our customers job sites had rigid fencing and they simply applied the vinyl print.

But more and more we were asked to mount the vinyl to coroplast, and it could be labor-intensive two-step process. The larger the latex print, the greater the chance of misapplication. Sometimes, but infrequently, you could "save the effort". When you could not, time and material was wasted.

None the less, this gave us our start. Our initial goal was exceptionally low, to produce at least one job site sign per week or four per month from our latex printer.

Something that many of us struggle with in the beginning, is the graphic art setup component. Very necessary but it can be simple or complex depending on the nature of the work you are producing. When to farm that work out to a freelancer, or train existing staff or simply hire new talent can be a tough call.

95-10 218th Street
Jamaica, NY 11429

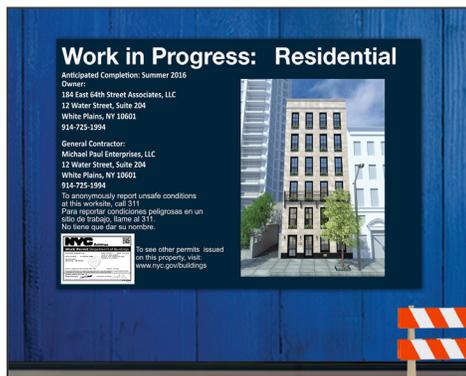
Sandhu Builders 1 Inc.

For more information, please visit www.nyc.gov/buildings

We began to realize that we could leverage what we already knew, and we then created four standard templates (following the NYC guidelines) that we use to plug in project variables. By taking this approach, we eliminated the need for dedicated graphic art services. The other benefit was that this market need was not driven by the “graphics creativity” components and just simply complying with construction job site requirements. The nature of the work is just one pantone color with white lettering, pretty simple.

We got to the point that our customers demanded construction signage on a rigid substrate.

Once the templates were created, we use them repeatedly. That is one reason why we have not stepped out of this market segment. Four basic templates made us operational, each one reflecting a different aspect of a construction site: demo, residential, commercial, and mixed use. Sidewalk shed signs became the fourth.



One area that we are more proactive than others is monitoring which of our customers are getting building permits.

We research which construction applications have been approved so we know they have just received a building permit. We contact them since this is where our relationship is. Many of them rely on us to do their legwork. Once we have access to the drawings, we also have access to elevations and renderings, we crop out components and make signs, we are driving the bus and they can't make a switch. We are their home office.

Direct to Rigid Substrate - a Breakthrough

It was now 2015 and we realized that we needed to print directly to rigid substrates. So, our investigation began, and we quickly realized that the new equipment marketplace was beyond our budget. It was also dominated by the traditional flatbed printer, which presented dimensions larger than our doorways would allow to get the equipment into the production area. We researched hybrid printers which would eliminate the doorway size issues and came at a lower price point compared to the flatbed. We began to look at the used marketplace to see if we could benefit from somebody upgrading and would give us a low entry level price point. We ended up finding an old & tired, used HP Colorspan hybrid printer and brought it in to Jamaica Blue. We had the printer, but had to deal with few if any support or service options, antiquated communications protocol and believe it or not, at the speed we could operate, it took in *excess of 1 hour* to produce a single 4' x 8' board. But looking back, the HP Colorspan taught us a lot about UV technology. We learned what made these units different than the aqueous or pigmented ink technology we already had in place.

CET Hybrid -The Right Printer at the Right Time

Our experience with the Colorspan gave us a great leg up when we made the decision to go with a refurbished

CET 250h printer from National /AZON. This was the right printer just at the right time. We took our training wheels off and hit the ground running. The CET printer increased our board printing speed by a factor of 6+, it now took *under 9 minutes* per board. When National /AZON first installed the printer, we would think something was wrong when it stopped printing. Only after turning to face the printer did we realize it was just done printing the board, we were not used to that level of production speed.

The CET uses less ink, is very reliable and has faster turnaround time, so we can now capitalize on *walk in / walk out* customer work. This is the key to the newer technology. Building upon what we started.



**We don't have to
worry about support,
replacement parts, or inks.
Pick up the phone and
call National / AZON**

It cannot be stressed enough how much of a time savings printing direct to substrate is, in addition to labor costs.

We have even transitioned some of our traditional print & mount business to the CET. Some of the output is still laminated and we are finding no issues with the laminating process.

On busy days we run about 5 hours of printing time. Finishing is very time consuming, so ultimately automation will become the key. Now we spend more time cutting than printing. Our growing volume dictates that a digital flatbed cutter will be our next investment. Digital cutting is an automated way of saving money plus

it will give us the ability to do complex cutting, rather than our simple straight cuts of today.*

***Editor's Note:** National / AZON represents iECHO - the World's #1 Selling Flatbed Digital Cutter <https://azon.com/iecho/>

We take great care of our CET printer as it is a money maker for us. We generally keep three complete sets of inks on the shelves. We do a lot of our own user maintenance work, saving us money and time.

The Pandemic has Created New Opportunities

This moment in time has been a shot in the arm for us. Our advancement in printing capacity with the CET 250h has allowed us to react better and faster in an on-demand way. The construction job site because of the pandemic is required to have signage related to worker protection and COVID-19 prevention. Much of the signage in the pandemic era is impulse purchases. Being very much a brick & mortar business, I want our customers to find it and walk out of our store with it. Many of them are overly cautious, so they purchase more than they need. As worker safety and now, COVID-19 safety precautions, construction sites in this area are increasingly scrutinized by OSHA and the DOB. Construction stop-work orders cost thousands of dollars so spending a few hundred dollars on signs vs thousands on a stop-work order is worth the risk.



There are no standards for pandemic signage. The choices are immense. This gives us many more sales opportunities, and we now have equipment that can create signs very fast and cost effectively *and it works!!!*

We keep all the customer files on hand and can recreate signs quickly and there is a lot of work. The clients have gone overboard in their buying habits. The virus has made this niche better as we have added virus signage to existing construction documents, informational signs and OSHA signs. These signs used to *supplement* the construction documents and now the signs have *superseded* the construction documents.

These are all windows of opportunity. I believe that many of these informational signs will become blended into the construction job site requirement even after the pandemic.



If we are doing this in a reactionary way and successful, I can't imagine how someone who is actually shaking the trees can't be doing even better with this UV technology.

We quickly moved from printing four boards a month to twenty-five boards per month. That does not include any of the COVID-19 signs or OSHA signs. Then we went to fifty boards and on to one hundred boards per month. And in July we ordered a total of two hundred boards. One hundred boards at a pop - that gets our vendors attention. This has been a long time coming.

Investments Pay Off - The Shake-out

It is a boring story, we just follow the steps. Color AEC work has become the norm and we prepare a great amount of construction documents

in color. Well beyond what we used to do with the occasional rendering. Do we expand into other markets? For us, our customer base controls that. COVID-19 signage – our customers are our own sales force. They look at our wall and point to the sign and take it. Then they send in their friends!



The business is out there waiting for you! COVID-19 signage will be blended into the new printing for construction sites. This story is our collective story in reprographics. We pass along these methods and tips year after year hoping to help each other. Much of our success is owed to many of our friends who got their start before us and guided us along our path as we will in turn for those behind us.



One foot in front of the other, just follow the steps. You will get there. It is fun and scary at the same time. When things start to click, its very cool.

I wish we started this journey earlier, but we didn't have the capacity or the foresight to begin earlier, we waited for the demand to build. This is a great money maker for us.