

# Walker 360 Benefits from New Direction Partners Expertise in Starkey Printing Acquisition



Taylor Blackwell, founder and CEO of Walker 360, has known the folks at New Direction Partners for many years. Blackwell has acquired a half dozen companies over the years, including one eight years ago where he worked with New Direction Partners as the buyer.

“I have mostly worked with Tom Williams and Paul Reilly over the years,” he says, “and they have brought a few deals my way since we acquired EBSCO eight years ago. In this case with Starkey Printing, Tom was representing the seller, but brought the deal to my attention since he knew we wanted to expand our geographical footprint.” Blackwell was particularly interested in Chattanooga, saying, “It’s a great market. It’s strategically located at literally almost the same distance from Atlanta, Nashville, Knoxville and South Carolina, making it easy to serve all of those markets.”

Walker 360 has annual revenues of about \$13 million, while Starkey has revenues of about \$5.7 million.

Walker 360 is headquartered in Montgomery, Alabama. Starkey Printing is located in Chattanooga, Tennessee, and was founded in 1934. “We converted our business to all inkjet over the last couple of years with a digitally-enabled bindery operation,” Blackwell notes. “Starkey Printing is all offset with a 15-year-old 40” Komori press and a traditional bindery, although they do have a few toner devices. Blackwell comments, “I don’t really see myself buying another offset press, and there can be quite a learning curve going from offset to digital, especially with an older workforce like that at Starkey. But as folks retire, we probably have an opportunity to eventually do a clean-sheet redesign of the business like we did in Montgomery. Meanwhile, there are definitely synergies between the companies at this point.”

He continues, “While I think inkjet is the way to go, offset is still viable, and we have already been sharing work back and forth. For example, they outsourced all their mailing, and we have been able to redirect all that work to Montgomery. In addition, they didn’t have perfect binding, while we have a very automated perfect binding system in Montgomery, so most book printing is going to Montgomery as well.”

While Blackwell comments that since Williams was representing the buyer, there wasn’t a lot they could discuss in detail prior to the close of the transaction. “Tom did a good job of putting us together and helping us move the process along, as well as being a good sounding board for me,” he says. “There were a few times it got bogged down, including the need to educate their accounting firm on what is important in valuation of a printing company, and he did a good job there. In fact, when he brought me the deal, I indicated that I didn’t want to get into it if the owner’s valuation was too high. I explained where I thought it should be valued, and their valuation was pretty much right on target. Tom did a great job of setting expectations in that regard. Sometimes in deals, it is better for both sides to talk to an intermediary, and Tom did an excellent job at managing that.”

When asked whether he was looking for additional acquisitions, Blackwell said, “This one is going to take a little bit of time to swallow; there are a lot of things we need to do. But when I am ready, I will definitely look forward to the opportunity to work with New Direction Partners again.

New Direction Partners is an investment banking and financial advisory services formed by Peter Schaefer, Paul Reilly, Jim Russell and Tom Williams to serve the printing and related industries. Services include merger advisory services through the representation of selling shareholders as well as buy side representation, valuation services, financing and refinancing efforts, turnaround and restructuring services, and temporary/interim management consulting. To learn more about New Direction Partners, visit New Direction Partners’ website at [www.newdirectionpartners.com](http://www.newdirectionpartners.com).