



**American Litho Continues
to Lead the Industry with
Investments in High-Speed
Inkjet and MBO Finishing Lines**



AMERICAN LITHO CONTINUES TO LEAD THE INDUSTRY WITH INVESTMENTS IN HIGH-SPEED INKJET AND MBO FINISHING LINES

Investing in a high-speed inkjet press without high-speed finishing is like buying a Ford F-150 without a towing package. You have all the firepower, but without the ability to get the most out of it. That's why American Litho (ALitho) in Carol Stream, Ill., paired its investment in HP's PageWide Web Press T240 HD with a high-speed MBO finishing line.

ALitho is an award-winning company that produces full-scale direct mail campaigns, catalogs (it is a "top five" producer), marketing materials, magazines, inserts/circulars, publications, retail and trade show signage/displays, packaging, and more. It serves many of the largest retailers, manufacturers, food producers, financial and insurance firms, travel and leisure companies, and nonprofit organizations in the world.

Yet ALitho is more than a full-service print service provider. It is a brand building partner with marketing integration tools (branded Amerilytics) that enhance the value of print campaigns. This includes digital strategy, addressable geo-locating, trigger response, retargeting, web-to-print, email appending, banner ads, and conversion zones.

To support these services, ALitho's 320,000-sq.-ft. production facility offers production capabilities that are second to none. It operates four digital presses (the recently installed HP T240 PageWide HD, as well as an HP 12000), nine high-speed web presses, two high-speed sheetfed presses with UV capabilities, and two wide-format presses. In addition to its high-speed inkjet capabilities, ALitho operates sheetfed and offset devices (with finishing) and the fastest, most agile digital production suite anywhere. It is a recognized expert in color management, meeting G7 Master standards, the highest in the industry.

As if world-class production weren't enough, ALitho has one of the largest bindery, lettershop, and finishing departments in the country. Its finishing capabilities include in-line and offline imaging, stitching, folding, perforating, die cutting, and gluing, which it brings together with collation, insertion, kitting, and other finishing to create a seamless direct mail and specialty manufacturing operation. It also offers world-class postal logistics services that include direct entry, co-palletization, and co-mingling, all of which allow ALitho to facilitate optimal mail strategies for its clients. The company also has a USPS representative on-site for quick confirmation.

ALitho is committed to helping its clients maximize every marketing dollar. This means looking beyond the production process. Whether a client needs to redesign a direct mail piece with sensory appeal to help it stand out in the mailbox, achieve maximum postal discounts with format and coding additions, boost its response rates by applying the big-data power of its Amerilytics service, or integrate direct mail with web, mobile, and social media, ALitho is there. Everything the company does is geared toward delivering exceptional results by helping customers cut cycle time, maximize appeal, reduce postage, and deliver greater return on investment.

From this perspective, ALitho's production process must be streamlined front to back. (After all, it prints and ships nearly a billion mail pieces every year.) This is why it analyzes its internal

efficiency with an unrelenting eye, from the data processing to drive the most complex variable-data projects, to automated, high-productivity finishing.

But this zeal for excellence is not just about growing the company's own profitability. It is also about serving its customers. "We are customer-driven, and when it comes to investments, we are always trying to stay a couple steps ahead of where our customers are," notes Mike Fontana President/CEO of ALitho. "That way, we are prepared and ready when they move in new directions."

RAPID PROPULSION

ALitho has been on a meteoric rise since it opened its doors in 1994. Fontana and his business partner, Chris Joyaux (EVP), founded the company with modest press equipment, including a used coldest Didde press and MBO folder. Today, ALitho ranks among the top 35 printers in the U.S. and Canada. Its state-of-the-art production facility operates in Carol Stream, with offices in other major cities on the East and West Coasts. Joyaux remains in a senior leadership role as executive VP. In 2019, Mike Fontana was inducted into the Printing Industry Hall of Fame.

Just as its production capabilities are world-class, so are its clients. ALitho also handles the most complex and full-scale variable-data direct mail trigger campaigns for some of the world's biggest and most prestigious brands. For these projects, it taps into the power of predictive modeling through its Amerilytics service to reach thousands, even millions, of new households with targeted offers. Amerilytics also enables the company to use GEO-Analytics, IP acquisition strategies, and more.

Notes Fontana, "We are able to predict and enhance direct mail response rates, expand mailing lists, and work with advanced techniques such as IP capture, addressable geofencing, and custom conversion zones—all with measurable results."

For example, Fontana points to an online clothing retailer that was looking to accelerate sales and subscriber sign-ups. The Amerilytics team crafted a predictive model using hundreds of data points, then tapped into the nationwide mailing database to construct all-new lists of potential customers. "A test mailing to 1.1 million prospects produced a 17% lift in response rates," Fontana recalls. "A second mailing to 2.2 million prospects, tightly focused on those who most closely matched our predictive model, produced an amazing 82% lift. In addition, our client's per acquisition dropped 75%, and with the average sale per new subscriber tripled, its sales potential for the second mailing alone more than doubled."

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GROUND-ROOTS SUCCESS

Despite ALitho's formidable stature in the industry, in many respects, the company's culture is more like a family business. "Many of our employees have been here since day one," says Fontana. "Chris and I have known many of them for over thirty years."

By hiring the most hardworking employees around, ALitho is able to churn out some of the best work in the industry. It has dozens of quality awards to its credit, including top honors in the Premier Print Awards. "We have always printed to the highest standards, but it's not just due to the equipment we run," says Fontana. "It's our employees. We take the team approach. I am really proud of the work we do."

Not surprisingly, ALitho has been named by "The Chicago Tribune" as a Top Employer for two years running. The honor is bestowed based on surveys of employees on everything from company leadership to workplace culture.

TAKING HIGH-SPEED INKJET BY STORM

Over the years, ALitho has continued to expand its production capacity in both the digital and offset worlds. In the past two years, it has made major leaps in technology and rapidly expanded its short-run and long-run digital capabilities. This includes adding HP's PageWide T240 HD roll-to-roll press with custom Harris & Bruno coater and MBO Direct Mail and Letter Fold Production System. It also operates an HP 12000, a system that delivers exceptional print quality at amazing speeds.

The Harris & Bruno coater can handle a wide range of coatings (including UV) inline. However, it was the purchase of its HP T240 press, along with MBO's world-class finishing equipment, that the company is particularly excited about. ALitho purchased the press at the Inkjet Summit in March of 2019 to meet the exploding need for variable imaging. To complement the press, it purchased the MBO line to keep up with the production speed. "I'd been watching high-speed inkjet technology for five years," says Fontana. "At first, these presses were not producing great quality—it just wasn't there—but once I started to see the technology greatly improve, it was time to make the investment."



American Litho's facility in Carol Stream, Ill.



American Litho paired its investment in an HP PageWide T240HD with a high-speed MBO finishing line. A second MBO finishing system, pictured here, was installed in May 2020.

ALitho's HP T240 system is now running the highest number of impressions of any other print startup in the country. Volumes are so high, in fact, that ALitho is purchasing a second HP T240 and MBO finishing line to be delivered in 2020.

ALitho has always been a fan of MBO equipment, but after seeing the MBO line in action at the Inkjet Summit, Fontana was sold. "We already had 35 MBOs before this one," he explains. "But that equipment was not designed for rollfed capabilities.

When we saw that the speeds and web widths of MBO's rollfed equipment all lined up perfectly with the HP T240, we knew that this would be a perfect fit."

In particular, the MBO SVC variable cut length sheeter, UW-52 Unwinder and DFT Buckle Folder are critical to ALitho's consolidated, efficient workflow.

"Our new unit has cross-web scoring and perforating for more speed and efficiencies," says Truman Pope, director of finishing at ALitho. "We also anticipated (and ultimately achieved) paper savings since the line create less waste, and potentially no waste at all. This benefits the natural environment and reduces costs all the way around."

But it was ultimately seeing the line in action that sealed the decision. Notes Joyaux, "We went down to another facility using MBO solutions and saw this line in action," he says. "We're always skeptical until we see any new system running live jobs, but we immediately said to each other, 'Oh, yeah!' Plus, we wanted something that would pair well with the T240, and this was definitely it."

As a near-line solution, all of ALitho's other units can seamlessly back up to this new equipment, as well.

WHY CHOOSE MBO?

With other vendors offering high-speed finishing lines, why MBO? It's simple, says Fontana. MBO is the best in the market. "We are always looking for ways to save time, paper, energy and labor," Pope explains. "The rotary cutter and other efficiencies of the system have more than doubled our volume from 20,000 pieces per hour to 60,000 per hour."

The longevity of the equipment is impressive, as well. "It won't need to be replaced for very a long time," Fontana says. "MBO America makes great equipment that lasts for years and years."

That's why, when ALitho signed on to purchase a second HP T240 high-speed inkjet press, it purchased a second MBO high-speed finishing line to go along with it. "With the strength of the digital and variable-data marketing, the investment in a second press was necessity . . . but so is the additional MBO line," says Fontana. "I wouldn't buy another press without additional finishing. For us, they go hand in hand."

One could say that the bindery line and the relationship with MBO was beyond expectations, but the relationship was exactly what ALitho thought it would be—outstanding. Installation was easy, and the high level of efficiency of the MBO workflow has been a huge benefit for ALitho's team. "We are able to produce more printed pieces every hour with the flexibility to draw labor from our other departments to complete the largest jobs," says Fontana.

MBO provides "fantastic" support, as well. "We can call them up anytime, day or night, and have access to a service tech who will provide phone or in-person support," says Pope. "They are great with troubleshooting and exchanging ideas on how to make equipment work well with the capabilities we have."

With the growing demand from ALitho's customers for data-driven print campaigns, having finishing equipment that keeps up with the variable printing capabilities of its high-speed inkjet press gives ALitho unparalleled flexibility going into the future. "Clients are presenting new challenges every single day, and MBO America is helping us do things better, faster, and with superior quality," says Fontana. "Instead of plugging in multiple finishers one after the other, we have speed and quality in one solid solution. With web finishing proliferating across the web press environment, we gain speed efficiencies without compromising quality."

For Fontana, the combination couldn't be better. "Not only does this equipment make us and our clients happy but it gives us more open time to manage growth," he concludes. "Our clients benefit from shorter cycle times, faster times to market, with greater data relevance, all of which add up to higher response rates and deeper customer engagement. It's a win-win, no matter how you look at it."