

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

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Best-in-Class Innovator Spotlight: For Duggal Visual Solutions, Crisis Reveals Character



Now being installed at Duggal Visual Solutions is an HD Landa S10 Nanographic printing press. From the left, are: Lenery Ike Smith, sheetfed operations manager; Paul Rosenblit, VP of procurement; and Michael Duggal, CEO.



By **Patrick Henry**

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What a year. No one in the industry could have foretold it. Now we're all doing our best just to come to the end of it in safety.

2020 will be remembered for many things. One of them should be that it was the year in which innovation often came to mean the same thing as business survival.

done in response to it has obliged them to improvise, to rethink, to come up with new ways of protecting their employees, to pivot to completely different methods of interacting with customers. In short, to innovate.

As we've done the past several years in [Printing Impressions](#), we profiled six companies that remain alive and well in the printing industry. This year, we're presenting these portraits of Innovators in tribute, not just to the companies themselves, but to every printing business that has survived the trials of 2020 by being innovative. Here is a profile of one of our Best-in-Class Innovators.

Duggal Visual Solutions

Crisis reveals character. It also tests the limits of business ingenuity. Confronting the upheaval of COVID-19, Duggal Visual Solutions has set itself far apart on both counts.

The New York City imaging services provider took the same body blows as every other graphics business in the metro area during the worst months of the pandemic. But its response was extraordinary: an almost complete repurposing of its capabilities to the manufacture of sorely-needed personal protective equipment (PPE) for fellow New Yorkers.

"We used every aspect of our company, from the design team, to the fabrication team, to the graphic production team," Mike Duggal, CEO, says. This included transforming one of its properties, the "Greenhouse" event space in the Brooklyn Navy Yard, into a PPE factory where up to 160 people, including Duggal, worked daily during the height of the crisis to assemble the safety gear that the city's first responders and other front-line personnel were then so desperate to get their hands on.

The scale of production matched the intensity of New York City's war against the virus: more than 2.6 million face shields delivered to date, along with 115,000 classroom desk shields, 500,000 medical aprons, and large quantities of intubation boxes, hand-sanitizer stations, and office partitions for end users in the five boroughs and elsewhere.

"We were constantly trying to figure out what people would need, and be there," Duggal adds. "The goal was to develop solutions for our customers and communities before they realized they needed them."

Roots in the Photo Trade

That kind of inventiveness has been the hallmark of Duggal Visual Solutions ever since Baldev Duggal, father of the present CEO, started the business as a photo processing lab in Manhattan's Chelsea district 60 years ago. Today, the company is one of the country's most multi-capable providers of printing and graphics services, employing virtually every technology that can be used to translate visual imagery into physical or digital form.

One way Mike Duggal and his team of innovators have accomplished this is by being pioneer adopters of new production solutions: for example, the HP Indigo 12000 B2-format digital press they installed in 2016, making it the first such device to appear in the U.S. The company was also the first to upgrade the press with the HD imaging system, doubling its print resolution.

With that press, a fleet of 27 wide-format printers, and other high-end equipment concentrated mainly in its Brooklyn and Manhattan plants, the company has established itself as a boutique yet powerhouse provider of visual services to retailers, fashion and cosmetics brands, museums, agencies, and corporate clients. Sixteen of Interbrand's 25 Best Global Brands are among its customers, according to Duggal.

In projects for demanding clients like these, creativity and technical prowess have to go hand-in-hand. "Instead of just throwing a screen on a wall, we'll build an entire environment for it," Duggal points out, noting the company's additional strengths in fabrication and set design.

For a recent multimedia install, the team built a system of classic window mullions designed to make the digital background display resemble a view from a French farmhouse onto a backdrop of "beautiful gardens in Provence," as Duggal describes the job. The mullions also enabled the team to hide the bezels of the LCD screens and the seams between them.

Duggal expects rapid growth over the next few years from the company's investment in a different form of visual rendering: computer-generated imagery (CGI). He predicts that as the technique becomes more photorealistic in both static and animated applications, it will be in greater demand for product promotion. CGI could also be attractive as an alternative to live shoots curtailed by social-distancing concerns, he adds.

"Things are going to be different" in the wake of COVID-19, Duggal acknowledges. "There is never a roadmap for what 'new' is." And he admits that while he's proud of the team's dramatic pivot from being visual specialists to reinventing themselves as suppliers of PPE, "I can't wait for the day when I don't have to produce it anymore, as that will mean this devastating virus will be largely behind us."

Mike Duggal is looking beyond the current calamity to better times when he says Duggal Visual Solutions will continue "to lead our industry in terms of quality, innovation, and investment." The strategy includes expansion into packaging, possibly through the acquisition of a packaging business.

Pandemic or no pandemic, it's safe to say that further announcements of innovation can be expected from the company in the near future. One of them is that an HD Landa S10 Nanographic printing press has just joined the Duggal Visual Solutions fleet of specialty and industrial printers. This represents the first installation of the HD Landa S10 anywhere in the world, according to Duggal.

"We're restless. We want to do what's next. We want to be first with things," he declares. "It's what gets me up in the morning."

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