

BOTW PROFILE

Jon Denney
CEO

Avalon Document Services

■ **Age:** 41

■ **Education:**

Bachelor's degree in criminal justice from SUNY Brockport; U.S. Army Military Police Corps

■ **Residence:**

Chittenango

■ **Family:** Three sons, one daughter, two stepsons

■ **Year became CEO:** 2000

■ **Favorite part of the job:**

Developing leaders within the company.

■ **Favorite movie:** "The Shawshank Redemption"



BOTW FACTS

Avalon Document Services

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www.teamavalon.com

■ **Type of business:** A business-to-business digital-printing and document-production company.

■ **Products or services offered:**

Document scanning and digital printing.

■ **Year founded:** 2000

■ **Employees:** 78

■ **Employees in Syracuse:** 57

■ **Headquarters square footage:** 14,000

■ **Company officers:** Jon Denney, CEO and founder; Jon Willette, COO; Shawn Thrall, President; Carol Franklin, Controller

■ **Other Locations' Managing**

Partners: Dan Gerling (Utica); Michael Byrne (Rochester); JP Midgley (Buffalo)

■ **Annual revenue:** About \$5 million

Avalon expands range of services

By Maria Carbonaro

Journal Staff

SYRACUSE - Once known as Avalon Copy Centers, a growing Syracuse-based firm changed its name to Avalon Document Services, Inc. last year to more accurately represent all of the services it provides.

As technology evolved and became more important, what began as a copy center has now grown into a full-service business-to-business digital printing and document-production company. Avalon offers services such as document scanning and digital printing, and also more technical and specialized services such as legal technology expertise and electronic plan rooms for architects and engineers.

Jon Denney, company founder and CEO, first became a business owner in the mid-1990s as one of the founders of Camelot Legal Copy in Albany. But after a few years, Denney wanted to expand geographically. His two partners were looking at a different direction for the company; so Denney resigned and came to Syracuse to start Avalon in 2000. He hired two people to help get the new business going. One of those people was Jon Willette, the company's current COO.

Denney says that his business, which began with two employees and no revenue, now has 78 employees (57 in the Syracuse location) and annual revenue of about \$5 million.

Denney says that the current economic downturn has hurt his business.

"The biggest part is that we've lost a few clients, and one very large client, to bankruptcy. So not only did we get stuck holding the bag, but we [also] lost the recurring revenue that we had from their business," Denney said, declining to name the large client.

However, Denney says his company has also found opportunities for growth in this difficult business climate. When the economic problems were beginning, Avalon had just opened its Buffalo location. The Buffalo operation has "been steadily growing" and has helped

keep Avalon profitable overall, Denney explains.

The current economic environment necessitates that companies run lean more than ever.

"Business people have a responsibility to always make sure that they're running as efficiently as possible. I think we've always done that, but now we're talking about it more," Denney says. "We're continuing to do that, and we've always operated and focused on running as lean as practical, while maintaining the ability to provide excellence in service and providing very high quality work, which requires investment."

Avalon has boosted its investment in technology to help it and clients to run more efficiently.

"So we're investing in technology that will actually help our customers reduce their own overhead, increase their own efficiency, and increase their competitive advantage."

Denney says there's technology out there for architects, engineers, and law firms that is not well known in the Syracuse marketplace. Denney maintains that by becoming experts in this, coupled with the willingness of Avalon's client base to learn and embrace technology, Avalon can find new opportunities for growth.

"What we're always keeping a keen eye on is not growing beyond our ability to handle the growth from a location standpoint, from a personnel standpoint, from a technology standpoint," Denney says. "We don't want to just offer technology for technology sake - we want to be subject-matter experts ... So we're careful not to extend ourselves beyond our own capabilities because when we tell the client we can do it, we know we need to deliver and we know that's what's expected of Avalon," he adds.

Denney explains that in its early days, Avalon had to "bite the bullet" on some of the technology investments it made because it didn't have the business to be able to justify some of the technology expenses. He says those investments are paying off now.

Avalon, with its focus on business clients, is different from retail



ERIN ZEHR/CNYBJ

Lewis Airth, Avalon Document Services' director of graphics scores holiday cards at the company's headquarters in Syracuse.

copy centers in many ways. For example, it offers a locked, secure facility, requiring customers to buzz just to get in.

"It isn't a retail operation, it has no cash register, and no walk-ins," Denney says.

Avalon handles a lot of sensitive information and all of its employees, as a condition of employment, sign a non-disclosure confidentiality agreement. All waste copies are shredded on site. No one is allowed on Avalon's production floor unescorted. Everything is treated as if it is highly sensitive. Avalon's work with medical records, financial statements, patents, trademarks, and other confidential materials makes confidentiality a necessity.

Denney credits his employees with the success of the company. "The people here are the reason for our success, truly. This company was bigger than me, day one. And that's a fact." □

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