

A Trusted Production Partner

An Interview with Mark Calev, Founder and Chief Executive Officer, Calev Systems

EDITORS' NOTE *Mark Calev is the Founder and CEO of Calev Systems, a trailblazer in paper, print, and distribution solutions. Since launching the company in August 2000, he has propelled Calev Systems to the forefront of the industry, fueled by his deep passion and the legacy of his late father, Steven Calev, founder of KAR Printing, a prominent regional print provider in its time. His extensive knowledge of press capabilities and strategic approach to crafting custom-tailored print programs have enabled a dedicated team of over 50 professionals to achieve award-winning results in the field of print and distribution. He is an active member of YPO.*



Mark Calev

COMPANY BRIEF *With over 25 years of industry leadership, Calev Systems (calevsystems.com) delivers world-class, tailored marketing execution solutions across six continents. Its proven expertise and commitment to innovation make the company a trusted partner for businesses seeking scalable, quality-driven marketing solutions. In 2017, Calev relocated its headquarters to Miami Springs. This move expanded the company's facilities and introduced a range of new services. The expanded space facilitated the launch of Sprint Logistics, a comprehensive logistics division, and supported substantial growth in the sales and account management teams. Additionally, the company diversified its offerings with a factory-direct premiums and apparel division and enhanced its warehouse operations with a state-of-the-art storage and fulfillment center featuring an advanced warehouse management system.*

Will you highlight the history of Calev Systems and how you define its mission?

My early days in the family printing business started in Miami where my father, Steven Calev, built his printing business. I always admired my father and remember as a child being in his backyard with his koi pond and waterfalls thinking, "Someday, I want to build something special of my own, just like my dad." My father was hardworking, cared deeply about his customers, and always put people first. My mother was also a very hard working, tenacious, independent woman who had owned a recruiting firm and was a business owner in Connecticut. Both my mother and father instilled in me the values of hard work, perseverance, dedication, and resilience. That's the version of entrepreneurship that

first inspired me. By 19, I was knee-deep in the day-to-day operation of his printing plant. There was no formal training program, so I created my own. I spent time in each department – pre-press, estimating, running the presses, operating the binding equipment, and even loading trucks in shipping. I'd sketch out diagrams of how the machinery worked to help me memorize each component. People found it amusing, but I was on a mission. When I shifted to the sales side, I struggled at first because I wanted to explain every technical detail to clients. Most folks simply

wanted a great print job on time and on budget. Yet, the knowledge I was so eager to share turned into my strength. It allowed me to find the most efficient production paths and ensure our clients got top-notch results.

One day my father pulled me aside to teach a key business lesson. He explained that as manufacturers running 24/7 with multiple printing presses, our main priority is keeping our own equipment busy. I loved sourcing work beyond our in-house capabilities if it benefited our clients. My father's passing at 54 was a terrible tragedy, and right after I stepped away from print for a while to pursue finance. It took a short – and unsatisfying – stint in financial services to remind me that my true passion was in helping businesses execute their marketing and print projects, from start to finish, in a way that truly served their needs.

Calev Systems was born when I returned to the industry. I knew I wanted to take a different approach than the typical print broker who just chases the lowest price. From day one, I envisioned a "production partner" model where we would act as an extension of our clients' businesses. That meant handling not only the sourcing and financing, but also the heavy lifting of project management. If something went wrong, I took responsibility. If a better solution existed, I would find it. Over time, we expanded beyond printing and added more services in response to what our clients needed. We launched a freight brokerage arm so we could control logistics and costs more effectively. We offered warehousing and fulfillment services, began offering promotional premiums and apparel, and even expanded internationally to support our clients' needs around the world, partnering with plants in 12 different countries for global direct mail campaigns. All these additions were rooted in one idea: our clients should have a single point of contact who truly has their back.

From the beginning, I've been convinced that thoughtful technology investments can mean fewer touchpoints, tighter integration, and faster turnarounds. We built custom client portals, improved data-driven direct mail capabilities, and automated as many processes as we could. This focus on efficiency lets us deliver real value to our clients – not just in terms of price, but in time saved and peace of mind.

Our mission is to deliver more value for your marketing investments. "Value" is the key word in everything we do at Calev Systems. It goes beyond dollars and cents. It's about ensuring our clients feel heard, protected, and guided. We don't consider ourselves brokers; we're partners. That means taking full responsibility – if something goes off track, I see it as our job to make it right. In building relationships, we care more about long-term trust than one-off transactions. We obsess over quality and timeliness. A project done late or poorly just isn't acceptable. Calev Systems offers a full spectrum of services. We want to be the go-to source for any marketing-related needs, whether they are printing, logistics, promotional products, or international direct mail with in-country distribution. Finally, we foster a culture of expertise and ownership. I'm proud of the culture we've built. Each person on our team is a subject matter expert who embodies the "customer-first" mindset my father taught me. Together, we've created an environment where no one shies away from a problem; they dig in and fix it. Our supplier partners share that same commitment, investing in their people and equipment to help us exceed expectations.

When I look back on my journey – from sketching out press parts at 19, to stepping away from print after my father's passing, to coming back and forming Calev Systems – I see how these experiences shaped who I am as a leader. Everything I learned about integrity, quality, and taking care of people came from my father. I've done my best to instill those values in our team, our culture, and our work every single day. At Calev Systems, we have created a culture committed to our core values, which are our guiding principles that each one of us diligently stands for. Our core values are focused on integrity, ethics, execution, and a resilient passion for serving and prioritizing our valued clients and suppliers.

What have been the keys to Calev Systems' industry leadership and how do you describe the Calev difference?

First, it's our people and our expertise. We have an incredible team of subject matter experts

who understand every facet of the print and direct mail industry – logistics, postal regulations, paper, variable data, publishing, and more. For example, our COO spent 17 years as president of the country's largest freight consolidation and co-production operation, so his knowledge of USPS efficiencies and logistics is unmatched. Our CSO joined us after decades leading publishing sales for one of the largest printers in the world. We even have a dedicated postal expert on staff who sits on national USPS boards. But it's not just leadership; all across our team, you'll find individuals who have been groomed from the ground up, as well as seasoned professionals who came to Calev with their own deep skill sets. This breadth of experience is at the heart of what we do: we tackle complex challenges by putting the right people in the right places, ensuring our clients benefit from the best industry insights.

Second, it's filling the procurement gap in a changing industry. The print industry has seen massive changes, especially with more than half now backed by private equity. Plants get bought, sold, or consolidated, and it's tough for buyers and owners to know who's really the best fit for their specific needs. One day a plant might specialize in certain products; six months later, it might close or pivot. At Calev Systems, we've made it our job to stay on top of these changes. We help clients navigate everything from paper sourcing and printing capabilities to freight and distribution, ensuring they don't get blindsided by industry upheaval. Our model – serving as a trusted production partner rather than just a broker – is more relevant now than it ever was in our 25 years of business.

Our success also comes from a relentless focus on quality and on-time delivery. We handle thousands of jobs a year, and we maintain over a 98 percent on-time delivery metric. That's huge for us because it means we're consistently meeting and exceeding client expectations. But just as important as on-time metrics is the fact that many of our clients have been with us for over 20 years – a testament to the partnerships we've built and the quality we deliver. Knowing our work has allowed them to grow and evolve is one of the most rewarding parts of this journey.

Finally, the Calev difference is anchored on innovation, relationships, and results. I believe the key to staying ahead in any industry is innovation – whether that means trying new formats, improving technology and automation, or simply bringing fresh ideas to the table. Because we invest so much time and energy in understanding our clients' businesses, we can spot opportunities to simplify workflows, reduce costs, and enhance outcomes that others might miss.

At the end of the day, what truly differentiates us is our commitment to acting as a partner – not a middleman. Our clients know they can rely on us to handle the details, stand by our work, and constantly look out for their best interests. When people ask me why I'm so passionate about this industry, I tell them it's because every project we deliver reflects our values: expertise, innovation, and a laser focus on customer success. It's a philosophy I learned early on from my father, and it's what continues to guide every decision I make at Calev Systems.

Where do you see the most significant opportunities for growth for Calev?

Honestly, it's never been more exciting – or more challenging – to be in the direct mail and marketing space. With digital fatigue at an all-time high, there's a real chance to stand out by getting back to more tangible and thoughtfully targeted communication. As Jim Kwik mentions in his book, *Limitless*, we humans are bombarded with an incredible volume of information every single day – far more than our brains can effectively process. That's where direct mail can shine: by leveraging data to deliver the right message to the right audience at the right time, you can cut through the noise. For years, we've mastered the execution side – paper, print, and distribution are in our wheelhouse. But to truly unlock direct mail's potential, we have to collaborate even more deeply with creative teams, marketing analytics pros, and other digital channels. The game isn't about sending out more pieces; it's about sending out the right pieces. I see a lot of potential in producing fewer, more personalized mailings that resonate with prospects on an individual level.

Another growth area for us is the wide range of offerings we can integrate for our clients. We have customers who rely on us not only for direct mail, but also for premiums and apparel, and even freight solutions. We are teaming up with agencies that excel in data analytics and digital marketing so we can present an end-to-end solution – everything from creative ideation to final mile delivery. We're also making strong investments in AI, both to improve operational efficiencies and to ramp up our predictive analysis capabilities. This gives us a strategic advantage, helping our clients focus on what truly resonates with their audiences – whether that's a specific design tweak or a particular moment in the customer journey. Finally, we're expanding the idea of on-site or near-site staffing. We've found that embedding our people within a client's marketing or procurement team can dramatically streamline project planning, scope decisions, and real-time modifications. The goal is to act as an extension of our clients' operations – fully integrated, highly responsive, and committed to the same objectives.

In my view, all of these areas – smarter direct mail, deeper collaboration, diversified services, AI-driven insights, and integrated staffing – represent massive opportunities for Calev's continued growth. We're always asking, "How can we offer more value and be a better partner?" And that question continues to lead us toward new ways to help our clients thrive.

How important is it for Calev to build a diverse and inclusive workforce?

For me, diversity has never been just a corporate ideal; it's been a guiding principle ingrained in Calev's DNA from the very start. Growing up in South Florida, I saw how people of different cultures and backgrounds could unite to create something truly extraordinary, and I wanted to reflect that spirit in our company. Today, our team is made up of individuals from over 14 countries – a mix that influences the way we solve problems, serve clients, and innovate every day.

One of the ways we celebrate our diversity is through a weekly team lunch at our Miami office. Every Thursday, Chef Francis (a family friend and team member for more than 20 years), puts together an amazing variety of dishes from the Calev team. We encourage each other to share recipes from our home countries – whether it's a savory Peruvian ceviche dish or a vibrant rice recipe from Nigeria. This tradition goes beyond just sampling good food; it's a chance to understand each other's stories and customs. When I look around the table, I'm reminded that although we come from different places, we share the same drive to work hard and support one another. I firmly believe that being inclusive isn't just good for morale – it's essential for staying competitive. By drawing on a variety of experiences and viewpoints, we come up with creative solutions and handle challenges more effectively. It's a lesson my father taught me early on: treat people with respect and make sure everyone's voice is heard. That's the environment we strive to cultivate here at Calev, one where diversity is embraced, inclusivity is practiced, and every team member can make a meaningful impact.

What are the priorities for Calev as it looks to the future?

First and foremost, we're committed to maintaining a diverse range of services while never losing sight of our core. The print and direct mail world is evolving at lightning speed, so I'm focused on pushing forward with new ideas and technologies but always keeping the same high standards we're known for. We've built a reputation on quality – evidenced by the hundreds of industry awards we've received – and I want to ensure that holds true, no matter how much we grow or diversify.

A big part of that expansion comes from continually investing in our clients, our team, and our systems. Whether it's adding a new distribution capability, enhancing a fulfillment process, or upgrading our technology stack, every improvement we make is ultimately about creating value for those who rely on us. We also spend a lot of time looking at how to drive efficiencies within the supply chain – like speeding up delivery times or reducing costs – so our clients can hit the market faster and stay competitive. Another top priority is staying "fresh and relevant." We've been around long enough to see how quickly trends shift in this industry. I want Calev to be a leader in anticipating market changes, adapting our offerings, and collaborating with clients in new and exciting ways. That's a big reason why client retention is such a point of pride for us – we continue to grow alongside them. Finally, I'm a firm believer in financial responsibility. It's something my father ingrained in me early on, and I've carried that philosophy into Calev. We don't believe in overextending ourselves with debt. Instead, we reinvest earnings back into our team, into better equipment, and into new solutions. We all know there will be rainy days – this industry has its ups and downs. But when you're in it for the long haul, you focus on building a sustainable foundation. It's a marathon, not a sprint, and I'm determined to keep Calev strong for the road ahead. ●