

Printer presses his luck in L.I.C.

BY Leigh Remizowski

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TOUGH ECONOMIC times like these may not seem like the ideal time for a small business to take a big risk.

But K.Y. Chow decided to take a leap of faith, moving his printing business in May to Queens from SoHo - where many of his clients were also his neighbors.

"My major worry when I moved to Long Island City was, 'Will the customer come with me?'" Chow said.

Grand Meridian Printing's new 15,000- square-foot warehouse gives him space to store supplies in bulk and to house what Chow calls "the mother of all printing presses" - an eight-color Heidelberg Perfector.

Chow gave the Daily News a peek inside the new facility last week after undertaking the bold move, made possible in part by a \$1.5 million loan underwritten by the U.S. Small Business Administration and \$1.7 million in incentives from the city Industrial Development Agency.

If it wasn't the new frills that enticed customers to stick with him, it was Chow's track record.

"It's a little farther than I used to go, but the facility is so much bigger and nicer," said Heidi Fener, an independent graphic designer who has worked with Chow for 10 years.

"I find myself very loyal to [Grand Meridian] because I know that they'll go out of their way for me, too," she said.

Even though business is tough these days, Chow said he still finds new customers. He has made several business contacts in Queens, including die cutters and bookbinders - many of whom have referred their customers to him.

"Houston St. used to be where the printing business was," Chow said. "Now, it's Long Island City."

After moving to the U.S. from Hong Kong in 1987 and working as a consultant on a hotel development project, Chow was offered the chance to buy a small printing business in Chinatown.

"At the time, I didn't have any interest," Chow said. "Printing is a very complicated business."

He spent several months doing his own market research on printing houses in Chinatown. He also took an unpaid internship at a now-defunct Manhattan printing house and spent months learning the ropes.

He launched his own shop with just five employees, printing takeout menus. Chow grew the business and eventually moved it to SoHo. There, G.M. Printing secured contracts with the Lower Manhattan Development Corp., New York City Transit and the City Council.

"I saw an opportunity in government procurement," he said.

It's contracts like these that have kept business going during a recession, he said. "We try to make every job reliable," Chow said. "That's our strategy."

Yann LeFlem, senior project director at another printing company, Aldine Inc., has worked with Chow since 2001. He uses G.M. Printing facilities when he has a job that requires a four-color printer or large paper.

"We have very, very high standards," LeFlem said. "K.Y. [Chow] fits our requirements because he also has very, very high standards."