



Brad Becker, left, and Geoffrey Dankers own Reno Paint Mart, which has served the Reno market for 60 years.

Bigger in Reno

LOCATED IN THE "BIGGEST LITTLE CITY IN THE WORLD," **RENO PAINT MART** COULD WELL BE NICKNAMED THE "BIGGEST LITTLE STORE IN THE WORLD"

You've heard it said that, "Everything is bigger in Texas," but residents of Reno, Nev., and customers of Reno Paint Mart might argue that point.

Nicknamed the "biggest little city in the world," Reno is famous for its casinos. But it also is a center for mining and has helped make Nevada the No. 1 gold-producing state. It also is a big player in geothermal energy production

and is the top U.S. city for both installed and untapped geothermal power.

Owned by Brad Becker and Geoff Dankers, Reno Paint Mart has been serving the Reno market for 60 years and could well be nicknamed the "biggest little store in the world."

The store was founded in 1952 by Jacob Becker and then passed to William Becker, Brad's father. Now in its third generation as a family-owned

and -operated venture, Reno Paint Mart has never lost its original mission of being "a painter's paint store," said Geoff, a long-time employee who bought into the store in 2007.

Still, Reno Paint Mart over the years has become an immense operation. The store has 14,000 square feet of space, including a mammoth warehouse located in a basement under the showroom. Reno Paint Mart also has one of the largest and most complete paint and sundry inventories in Northern Nevada, with approximately 7,000 different SKUs. This inventory draws customers from the Utah border all the way to Las Vegas and into California; however, the store daily handles a greater product volume, Geoff explained, since so much of it is custom-ordered and promptly delivered out the door.



Reno Paint Mart has one of the largest and most complete paint and sundry inventories in Northern Nevada, with approximately 7,000 different SKUs.

“WOW IS BOTH AN EXPRESSION AND A FEELING. IT’S SOMETHING WE’RE VERY PROUD TO PROVIDE HERE AT RENO PAINT MART.”

The operation also includes a branch store just over the border in Truckee, Calif. Opened in the year 2000, the Truckee Paint Mart has 5,000 square feet of space and an inventory similar in size and scope to the flagship store. Like the flagship store, the Truckee Paint Mart was established as a “painter’s paint store.” Though it draws customers of all types, contractors continue to be the mainstay of the business, accounting for 80 percent of sales.

Stocking Broadly and Deeply

At both stores, Brad and Geoff stock both broadly and deeply to have on hand just about anything a customer might need.

This is no small feat, particularly

at Reno Paint Mart, since the store’s customer base is so diverse. Professional painters still account for the lion’s share of sales (at 60 percent), but do-it-yourselfers also are a big part of business (25 percent of sales) followed by industrial clients, ranging from small auto body shops to the area’s mining companies and geothermal energy plants (15 percent).

Geothermal energy clients, in particular, have very specific needs that require technical products and expertise. Reno Paint Mart satisfies these needs with industrial coatings that have exacting performance and a limitless color palette while meeting strict environmental codes. Backing up these products are employees who

understand how the products should be specified and applied. A lot of retailers might not feel comfortable serving this highly specialized market, Geoff said, “but it’s second nature for us.”

However, even do-it-yourself customers can pose a challenge with inventory since the store draws customers from all income levels. They include those with tight budgets to those at the very high end. “So we have products that sell for \$60 a gallon, but we also have products that sell for \$7 a gallon,” Geoff said.

Geoff added that lower-priced paints have been in demand ever since the real estate market bottomed out. Last year, the store sold a lot of products at the lower price points for foreclosure fix-ups. “This was a huge part of our business,” Geoff said, noting that the store’s mix has adapted to changing market conditions.

Reno Paint Mart’s vast product mix currently includes architectural coating lines from three national paint companies in all price points; six brands of industrial coatings; eight brands of stain; a line of high-performance automotive paint; and sundries ranging from “Aprons to ZipWall kits,” as the store suggests on its website.

Within its paint lines, the store by necessity carries products with varying VOC content. Many of the store’s products come from California, which has stringent VOC regulations. But because Nevada has looser requirements, many of the store’s customers are used to paints with more solvents. As a result, “We have to be very broad because some customers want low- or no-VOC products, but others don’t care about that,” said Geoff.

Reno Paint Mart also has a dedicated spray shop that sells and rents power equipment of all kinds.

The store is an authorized service center for most brands of spray equipment and carries the largest selec-

tion of spray parts and accessories in Northern Nevada. It also is a full-service rental center for pressure washers, gas and electric airless sprayers, HVLP turbine units, square buff sanders and floor scarifiers. In helping customers select the equipment that is right for them, the store offers personal consultations as well as basic training and demonstrations on both purchases and rentals.

By having so much equipment on hand, Reno Paint Mart has captured the rental market in the Reno area. Where sprayers are concerned, for instance, "A lot of contractors either need gas or airless; we stock both, and none of our competitors do," Geoff said.

The service end also has proven lucrative since the store will service any unit, whether or not it's purchased at Reno Paint Mart. "We fix a lot of our competitors' equipment," he added, noting that it's not unusual for other retailers to refer customers for this service. The spray shop in general has been extremely good for business, Geoff reported, with sales that are "forever."

However, customers are drawn to Reno Paint Mart not only by what the store has on hand but by what it doesn't. The store has gained a reputation for locating hard-to-find products, and this reputation draws sales from around the region.

"If someone comes in and says, 'I'm looking for this product and can't find it,' we'll go directly to our suppliers, check out other distributors or do whatever it takes to get it," Geoff said. "We're known for this, and that's what has helped us to grow."

On the Softer Side

Reno Paint Mart additionally has a design center on premises, selling wallpaper, custom window treatments and blinds, fabrics and upholstered furnishings. The center is situated in



The design center offers in-store consultations as well as an in-home decorating service.



The staff at Reno Paint Mart offers knowledgeable advice and personalized service.

a separate area of the store and is elegantly put together with library shelving, which holds 1,000 sample books, plus a large table and chairs.

Geoff noted that the design center accounts for only about 5 percent of total store sales. Yet, it is an important part of business since it allows Reno Paint Mart to offer a total decorating package under one roof.

Staffed by two interior designers, the design center offers in-store consultations as well as an in-home decorating service. Assignments can range from supplying custom furnishings for an auto dealership to ordering a simple valance for a residential customer. Designers work with four different fabricators and a couple of installers for these projects. Maintaining a close relationship with

these workers has been a key to the design center's success, Geoff said, noting that, "This is a relationship business."

Of course, it's a business that also relies heavily on visuals. For that reason, the store maintains an impeccable appearance with an updated paint scheme, up-to-date fixtures and displays, clearly labeled departments, fresh end caps and tidy aisles. "To me, appearance is everything because first impressions count," said Geoff. Brad and Geoff revamped the store in recent years by themselves, believing that they knew best how to create the optimum buying experience for their customers.

Customers can get a good impression of Reno Paint Mart without ever visiting the premises—simply by visiting its website, www.renopaintmart.com. The site is professionally designed with easy-to-navigate pages, colorful graphics, a full listing of products and links to the store's suppliers.

The site plays up the store's "Wow!" advertising slogan. Rather than tightening up its ad budget in the current economy, Reno Paint Mart actually has spent more advertising dollars. In fact, "We've spent more on traditional forms of advertising in the last three years than we ever have," he said. One of those ad expenditures was to hire a professional to come up with a catchy slogan. Used in the store's print ads, television commercials and elsewhere, "Wow!" is summed up on the website like this:

"Reno Paint Mart is in the business of providing 'Wow' moments. Like when you step back from the wall you're painting and appreciate the perfect lines you've created where wall meets ceiling. Wow is the color you've chosen that complements perfectly those pillows you picked up in Madrid last summer. Wow is the envious sound out of your brother-in-law's throat as he appreciates the old wood deck you brought back from the dead. Wow is approaching your house at the



The branch store in Truckee, Calif., is 5,000 square feet.



Reno Paint Mart has a mammoth warehouse in the basement under its showroom floor.

end of a day and seeing the new color of trim the contractors promised would be finished today. And it was. And it's wow. Wow is both an expression and a feeling. It's something we're very proud to provide here at Reno Paint Mart."

With all of these measures in place, Reno Paint Mart experienced growth in 2011—even with extensive road work underway in front of the store and has been busy throughout the winter. Looking ahead, Brad and Geoff have

plans to open a third store by year's end, possibly south of Reno, to expand their market reach even further.

The pair's experience would suggest that the key to thriving in a recession is to serve customers at full throttle. Geoff himself believes that this mindset, which insists on satisfying the customer's every need, has made Reno Paint Mart a destination shopping place. How does he know? "Our customers tell us," he said, "and we hear it every day." ■