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News to know

Building envelope consultant goes nationwide

Q&A with Mark Baker, head of IBA Consultants

In 2004, building envelope consulting firm **IBA Consultants Inc.** of Boca Raton, Fla., operated three offices, all in Florida. Today, the company has seven locations, including offices in Las Vegas, Seattle and New York City.

The firm's rapid nationwide expansion is the result of a strategic plan that includes the launch of one office a year, with the most recent opening of the company's New York office in January.

In the Q&A below, Mark Baker, president of IBA Consultants, discusses the strategic plan, the challenges of rapid growth and what other glass industry companies can take from IBA's expansion.



Mark Baker, president of IBA Consultants Inc.

What prompted that decision to grow so rapidly across the country?

It's been the execution of a plan we put together in 2004. We hired a consultant, and he gave us three options. We could consolidate in south Florida, with our goal and identity to being a south Florida consulting firm; we could establish a national representation; or we could go international. We decided to become a national firm, opening one office a year so we would have locations in the Southeast, Southwest, Northwest and finally the Northeast.

What difficulties did you confront because of that rapid growth?

Actually, the biggest challenge was learning how to limit growth—how to not overextend and not over commit. Our goal was to grow in accordance with a plan and not try to eat every apple we found on the ground. Instead, we tried to find the best opportunities and to learn to strategically grow from them.

Briefly explain the process of opening an office.

First, we identify potential markets and evaluate it to make sure there's a need for us to be there. We look at construction projections, find out who the developers and architects are, and what their feelings are toward our type of firm. Once we decide a place is where we want to go, we actually go there and stay for a time. I'm not a fan of flying in and flying out. We rent an office, fly people in, seed it with trusted staff and watch it grow.

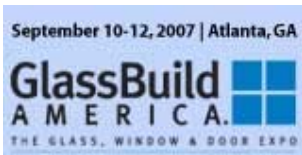
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The next stage is really focused on solidifying—tending to seeds and keeping things stable. New York is our 2007 office, so we'll focus on growing that, and maybe down the road start looking at whether we're going to open another in 2008. None of this is planned, but if I had to predict some major developments for us, it would be that our bigger offices would spin off satellites. We're looking pretty aggressively at southern California, which would be a satellite of the Vegas office. Out of New York, there are opportunities to go north to Boston to open a satellite or south to Washington, D.C.

What can other companies in the glass industry learn from IBA's expansion?

Companies need a business plan, a strategic plan, a roadmap for the company. It sounds text book, but it's the greatest thing we ever did. It really is what made us successful. Before we had the road map, we went all the way the wind blew us. To have a plan laid out helps daily in terms of decision making—you look at every opportunity and ask whether it takes you closer or further from the goal. The plan is the key. It really gives some sense of direction.

What has been the biggest challenge for you personally?

Really, 97 percent serious, the biggest challenge now is just keeping track of my keys. We have seven offices, I have apartments in New York, Seattle, Las Vegas, and two apartments in Florida. I got to Vegas two nights ago at 11 p.m. and I couldn't get into the apartment because I couldn't find the key.

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