

Helping New Orleans Grow After Katrina

In August of 2005, Jim Roland's Window World franchise in New Orleans, Louisiana, was the second-largest in the U.S. While his franchise covered all the territory between New Orleans and Baton Rouge west into Houston, Texas, 85% of his business was in New Orleans.



Meanwhile, back at the store . . .

In the weeks ahead, Jim's New Orleans operation would be hit hard – not by the storm, but by the fact that many of the city's property owners couldn't return to start rebuilding.

"For about a month we had no business whatsoever," Jim says. Most of the area's residents had evacuated and couldn't return until officials declared it safe. Most highways along the Gulf were impassable in places; minor roads near the shore were still underwater or covered in debris. Drinking water was scarce, there was no electric power, and no one knew when either might be restored. Doing business was all but impossible.

"Our cash evaporated," Jim says. "All our customers [had] left town, and we had no idea what would happen to the business. It was a pretty scary time."

"We got a lot of support from our vendors. And it was nice being part of the Window World family. They helped us out a lot."

500% growth or more in 30 days

"Our business went from installing 1,000 to 2,000 windows a month to 7,000 to 10,000 a month," he says. "We instantly became by far the largest single window outlet in the

country. No one, to this day, is doing anywhere near that amount of work."

Going from no business at all to five or more times his pre-disaster volume was no easy task. Everything – computerized systems, warehouse space, salespeople, installers, transportation and more – had to be supported or purchased or recruited or doubled or tripled and put into operation immediately – simultaneously.

"It required a lot more in terms of new levels of management. It's okay when you've got a few salespeople and 3-5

tightest labor market in the country."

With all these challenges – not to mention the added costs that come with them – Jim had to make one decision that would impact the entire process: how much would he charge the Katrina survivors for their replacement windows?

Regardless of what some vendors saw as an opportunity to charge whatever the market would bear, Jim Roland's Window World didn't charge a penny more than the regular price. Some people were willing to pay two to three

as soon as possible.

Of course, keeping his prices the same meant that Jim had to keep his costs the same, too.

"The labor market was very tight, so we recruited window installation crews in the Midwest – Wisconsin, Ohio, Minnesota, Indiana," Jim says.

All the work installers could want

Today, Jim says his business is still going like Mardi Gras revelers. His crews installed 80,000 windows in 2006, 75,000 in 2007, and they're still contracting to install 6,000 to 7,000 a month. "We believe we'll continue to do that for the foreseeable future." And, in light of the fact that 50% of his business comes from referrals, Jim Roland will probably be able to do that without tooting his own horn. ■

“We kept our prices exactly the same.

We made a strategic decision, we have not changed our prices. That's the Window World way, and we followed that program to the T.”

– Jim Roland

crews out installing, but when you've got 50 crews, you have to have a level of middle management to handle that kind of volume.

"All this was happening at one time. We had to know which windows were coming in at what time and where they were going, so we had to have a larger customer service group. We had three or four inside and five or six outside. We had to buy more trucks to get the windows out there and installed. And we needed another level of management in the production department to supervise the crews out there."

Competing for scarce labor

But finding workers to supervise the crews wasn't half as tough as finding enough installers.

"What's critical is that we were doing this in the midst of overwhelming pressure on the available pool of skilled construction labor. We were competing for available labor with the right skills sets in the

times more than the regular price, he says, just to get their windows installed

Baton Rouge Company of the Year WINDOW WORLD

Window World is experiencing unprecedented growth by delivering quality and value in a post-Katrina market.

Owner/CEO: Jim Roland

Total Employees: 50 full-time and 40 subcontracted

Year Opened: 2002

Annual Payroll: \$5.9 Million

Accomplishments: Grew Window World from startup sales of \$1.2 Million to \$28.2 Million a year, expanded New Orleans and Baton Rouge territory by building a mid-level management team and control systems to improve business efficiency and customer service; utilized business model and volume purchasing and volume sales to deliver quality products at low standardized prices to homeowners of the greater New Orleans and Baton Rouge markets. Named Company of the Year on April 24, 2008.