Business finds success with one-product focus

BY CINDY KENT
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Before “hands-free” was a common term, Alan Brill could see the value of one application in particular: a device to automatically change toilet seat covers, sanitarily and without the use of hands. That was more than 25 years ago, when the company started working from a storage unit in Boca Raton. Business continues to grow for Brill Hygienic Products Inc. of Delray Beach, Brill said.

Now, more than 6 million people per month sit on the company's hygienic seats, and business has more than doubled in the past 10 years, cousin and business partner David Jablow said.

The Brill Hands-Free Electronic Seats are installed at a variety of businesses in high-use women's bathrooms. Only about 10 percent of the units are in men's restrooms. When a hand is waved in front of its sensor or a button is pressed, a fresh toilet seat cover slides into place for the next user.

"That saves a woman at least 15 seconds," Brill said. "And that adds up when there's a line of waiting guests.

"High-end South Florida businesses such as the Joe's Stone Crab restaurant on Miami Beach, the Boca West Country Club and Anthony's Runway 84 restaurant in Fort Lauderdale feature the amenity in their men's and women's bathrooms. A McDonald's restaurant in Orlando also uses the devices.

Patricia Barone, owner of Moda Salon at Addison Place in Delray Beach has been a client for 11 years.

"It keeps the environment clean and guests feel comfortable," said Barone. "We get comments, and compliments, about the restrooms all the time."

After the company moved into its 7,000-square-foot Delray Beach headquarters in 2003, production grew from about 10,000 rolls of seat covers a month to about 60,000 a month now. Each roll holds 100 covers. Work flows in two shifts for its 18 employees. There is no middleman, and the company buys American-made materials.

"Over the years, we've developed proprietary equipment to manufacture and assemble our product," Jablow said. Brill said he has dozens of casino clients in the United States and Canada, and about 2,000 accounts total in the Americas including airports, Radio City Music Hall in New York City and all the women's restrooms in restaurants at Yankee Stadium.

With annual revenue at about $5 million, his one-product focus has paid off, Brill said. Installation ranges from about $150 to $195 per unit, he said. Paper seat covers typically cost a penny each, but Brill's seat covers cost about 4 cents each.

"Though not everyone sees the need to prioritize their spending on bathrooms, installations serve as a showcase for the seats," said Brill. "We're getting approached more and more about our product."