



Location Counts

by Erin Sund, *Managing Editor*

Able Auto & Truck Parts proves that a small distributor can thrive in a big city.

Traffic. High taxes. Expensive land. Tough competition. These are among the many challenges of doing business in an urban market. For some distributors, it just isn't a good fit. For others, finding the right niche equals success, regardless of the size of the market.

Such is the case with Able Auto & Truck Parts, owned by Steve Garcia. Based in Plano, Texas, a bustling northern suburb of Dallas, Able Auto & Truck Parts has taken advantage of its urban environment.

In fact, after 16 years in business, Garcia says he can't imagine being in any other location.

"People thought I was crazy for picking an area like [Plano]," says Garcia. "It costs a lot to be in the area, but it is a nucleus – it's where the work is. Sometimes you have to pay a lot to be where the action is, but you get what you pay for."

Despite the warnings of others, Garcia listened to his intuition and opened Able Auto & Truck Parts on May 1, 1993. "When I was 32, I put everything on the line to start my own company and I accomplished it. I did \$18 worth of business on the first day," he says. "I was scared to death, but I stayed open and took things day by day."

Prior to opening Able Auto & Truck Parts, which specializes

in A/C hoses and brakes, Garcia spent a decade learning the truck parts business under the valuable tutelage of his former boss. He is thankful that he was put into a situation where he was forced to learn about truck parts.

"I stumbled into selling truck parts," he says. "But I'm so happy that I learned truck parts and hose assemblies. I encountered and learned from a wide variety of people. Much of the learning was done by trial and error."

He reminds his staff now that they can gain a lot of knowledge from their customers if they listen to them carefully. He tells them that a strong handle on the truck parts market is a valuable thing to have since most people gravitate to the automotive side instead of heavy duty.

Able Auto & Truck Parts has a staff of five, but according to Garcia, he would be hard pressed to find a better group of employees. Everyone at the store is fluent in Spanish, which is beneficial given its location in Texas and proximity to the border of Mexico.

The staff's linguistic abilities brings new customers in the door and keeps them coming back, giving Able Auto & Truck Parts an edge in a highly competitive market.

Garcia has earned his staff's loyalty by treating them with

respect and always keeping his eyes open to observe what works for the staff and what doesn't. "It's so important to have good management practices," says Garcia. "For instance, never address an issue with an employee in front of others. Remember that respect grows slowly."

Garcia looks at his staff the way a coach assesses his football team, searching for individual strengths and weaknesses, as well as fostering a team dynamic. "It is hard to find people who are passionate about the business and willing to learn it," admits Garcia. "I try to identify with my people and with the tasks they do every day. I figure out what they're good at and assign them to those jobs."

He also tries to manage with an open mind while listening to his employees. "Sometimes you focus so closely on one [aspect of the business] that you don't see other things that are happening. Listen to what your employees say," says Garcia. "Nobody likes a know-it-all boss. If you think you do know it all, you're probably part of the problem."

Given Garcia's successful management practices and ability to surround himself with good people, it's easy to assume that he has his sights set on additional locations and vast expansion. This, however, couldn't be farther from the truth. Garcia plans to remain a one-location distributorship and wants to keep his business small and strong.

In the future, he would consider buying a service truck and staffing it with technicians, but he resists the idea that growth and expansion equate to success.

Fiercely independent, Garcia isn't interested in joining a marketing group and doesn't let himself be distracted by industry talk of mergers, acquisitions and the shrinking space for independent distributors in the aftermarket. He keeps his focus and energy devoted to his business.

"There are going to be mergers and acquisitions," he says. "It's going to happen. All I can do is live with it. Spending so much energy worrying about the competition is a waste. You have to live in the moment."

Garcia, however, isn't so in the moment that he can't see the bigger picture. He has several succession plan options in place for the future of his business. He also has his 14-year-old son learning the truck parts business in case he decides to pursue a career in the industry.

But in the meantime, he hopes the economy picks up so that his customers (about 90 percent of whom are in the construction industry) can stay busy and in business.

"The economy is a huge challenge for us. Fuel has come down in price, which helps, but our customers still are struggling. I need my customers' business to pick up before mine can," he notes.

A small distributor in a large urban area, Garcia is successful because he is focused and passionate about his company and employees. "I've been at this for such a long time. You're not going to hit home runs every day, but you do your best. The best advice I can offer to anyone is to pray each night, give thanks for what you have and stay in the moment." ■

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but you do your best.**

— Steve Garcia, owner of Able Auto & Truck Parts

