

## Zehner raises Berry Door & Window sales 33 percent

By Christopher Tritto

When 33-year-old Matt Zehner bought Berry Door & Window in September, it was in need of rejuvenation. Six months later, the company is on track to boost revenue 33 percent to \$4 million within his first year of ownership.

After acquiring Berry Door & Window's assets and real estate for \$2.35 million, Zehner dumped \$100,000 worth of outdated and obsolete inventory that had been collecting dust in the company's Earth City warehouse. He now offers a fresh line of customized doors, garage doors, windows and awnings.

Zehner renewed the company's emphasis on customer service. While continuing to sell to custom home builders and individual retail customers, Berry Door & Window now welcomes more complex, customized order that previously had been turned away. For example, the company recently installed 25 doors in a 6,000-square-foot loft in Clayton.

"Every single door was customized, and each one was a different size," Zehner said.

Zehner also hired an in-house marketing director, Melissa Spagnoli, to create a consistent message for direct mail, television, radio and print advertising. The company has budgeted 6 percent of revenue for advertising and marketing.

"The company had basically been on cruise control for the past couple of years," said Zehner, who bought the business from 63-year-old John Skipton. "The company was losing money, but is now consistently profitable." Skipton joined Berry Door & Window as a partner in 1970 and became its sole owner in 1988. After 35 years with the company, Skipton said the timing of his sale felt right.

"My baby is grown up and needs a new lifestyle," Skipton said of the business. "I think Matt is going to take the company to the next level."

Most of Berry Door & Window's business comes from custom orders, usually for replacement residential doors and windows. The company serves homeowners and contractors within a 150-mile radius of St. Louis and installs all retail orders. Most of its 30 employees were already with Berry Door & Window before Zehner bought the business. Its primary competitors are Thomas-Bilt Wood Windows of Michigan, Dalco Home Remodeling of Bridgeton and Champion Window Manufacturing Co. of Cincinnati, which has a Maryland Heights branch.

Zehner spent the past two and a half years working for Erosion & Drainage Products, Inc. of Chesterfield. But the St. Louis native has had his sights set on running his own business since high school.

Over the past 10 years, Zehner and his wife, Debbie, have invested in six office buildings in Columbia, Missouri, and purchased apartment complexes in St. Louis and Highland, Illinois.

In December 2003, Zehner was introduced to **Kevin Short**, a managing director at **Clayton Capital Partners**. **Short** and his staff helped Zehner determine the type of business he was interested in owning and then contacted about 1,000 local privately held companies in search of a match.

"In this case, the company was not for sale, but the owner wanted to retire and did not have an exit plan," **Short** said.

Zehner's successful real estate investments helped him secure a loan from The Business Bank of St. Louis to purchase Berry Door & Window. **Short**

and **Brent Baxter**, **Clayton Capital's** other managing director, continue to advise Zehner as part of an informal board of directors. Larry Present of Schowalter & Jabouri PC is the company's accountant. Richard Tishler of Riezman Berger PC is Zehner's attorney.

"I've looked at everything I've done as preparation to run my own business," Zehner said. "I always had age 35 in mind, but things worked out a little bit sooner."