

## Dealer profile:

# Achieving firsts

POI Business Interiors has grown by being ahead

**F**urniture dealer **POI Business Interiors** has a number of firsts to its name.

It was the first in Canada to make its offices a working showroom, in 1968.

It was the first office furniture dealership to be named among Canada's 50 Best Managed Companies (jointly issued by Deloitte, CIBC Commercial Banking, National Post and Queen's School of Business) which it gained for four consecutive years, says chairman and CEO Gary Scholl.

It is the only Canadian dealer to achieve the Steelcase Exemplary Performance Award.

It has also been diversifying into a range of facility management services.

"In today's competitive economy, we're not going to differentiate on price," Mr. Scholl said during a recent tour of the company's head office in Markham, ON. "The difference has to be in the people and resources of the dealership. We have worked hard to differentiate ourselves with our service levels."

Among these services is interior design, provided as support to independent interior design firms for large projects. Design services provided directly to clients tend to be for projects that are too limited to be of interest to an interior design firm, or for projects where the client requires used furniture.

For nearly three years, POI has been performing relocation services, initially not in competition with major movers but concentrating on small to mid-sized jobs for which it performs all the planning and coordination. It supplies clients with a crate system made of heavy-duty plastic with dollies that eliminate the need for a client's staff to lift boxes. Increasingly it is providing relocation services for larger moves and recently completed two major corporate moves.

The company employs approximately



40 furniture installers with a fleet of trucks and service vehicles, plus up to 300 additional POI-trained installers. A team of technicians provides a 24-hour service for repair or replacement of furniture. In a "refreshing" service, POI refinishes, refurbishes, repaints, cleans and performs preventive maintenance on clients' furniture.

Using a proprietary bar-code asset-management system, the company tracks clients' furniture it holds in its warehouse, and provides clients with detailed reports of their inventories and photographs of each item.

"When requested, we refurbish clients' furniture proactively so that when they're ready for it, it has already been restored," Mr. Scholl said.

The company disposes of clients' unwanted items and buys clients' furniture to add to its stock of used product.

As a dealer, the firm handles products from ranging from furniture to flooring, ceilings, lighting, hardware, audio-visual systems, wayfinding and shades. It has been Canada's largest Steelcase dealer for many years.

Among latest additions is the Giorgetti high-end casegoods and seating line from Italy, exclusive to POI. Another exclusive new line is casegoods and seating, made of polymer with the appearance of wood, from Kwalu, South Carolina, for healthcare.

POI's premises continue the tradition of a working office showroom. The various departments demonstrate different ranges of furniture and office décor. The head office houses a library of manufacturers' literature, a staff lounge and a cafeteria. A theatre for client presentations and lunch-and-learn sessions illustrates POI's ability to supply audio-visual systems.

The 60,000 sq. ft premises is equally divided between warehouse and offices. A nearby building contains 60,000 sq.

*Gary Scholl and Julie Anne Smedley*

ft of retail space and storage of used furniture. Through acquisition of other dealers in recent years, POI has expanded with sales and operations locations in Barrie and London and will announce a further location shortly.

Founder Max Scholl started in 1952 with a stationery store. In 1957, he became one of Canada's first Steelcase dealers, sold the stationery store to Grand & Toy and, in 1958, launched Prestige Office Interiors with a store and design department on Toronto's Bay Street. The first major account was Canada Packers followed by Manulife. It was in the Manulife building that Max Scholl built out the first combined office and showroom. Today, the company has more than 140 employees.

It is the focus on services that is enabling POI to grow significantly since the recent period of slowdown in the office furniture industry.

"We now derive 15 per cent of our revenue from services," president Julie



*A Resource Centre of manufacturers' literature is open to independent interior designers.*

Anne Smedley said. "It is the fastest growing segment of our business."

The last two years have seen increases in overall sales, the most recent year by 22 per cent, Mr. Scholl said. Ms. Smedley forecasts growth of five to 10 per cent per year over the next five years. The most exciting future potential, she said, lies in healthcare and in opportunities for new services to support technology in offices.

# We Can Help.



At **POI Business Interiors** we see your office as more than just a physical space. It's a total environment that provides comfort and inspiration.

**That's why we offer more to our customers than just furniture.**

From planning to financing, installation and on-going maintenance, we use our knowledge and experience to help put your work and your space in perfect harmony.



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