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Interstate All Battery Center sees rapid growth

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BY SCOTT PASKE
The Wichita Eagle

WICHITA - Gadget-crazed, recession-dazed customers are fueling rapid growth for the Dallas-based Interstate All Battery Center.

They've also helped the company's Wichita store, 5530 E. Central, surpass \$1 million in sales each of the past two years.

"Business is very good right now because people are trying to make what they've got last longer," said Mike Primm, the store's operations manager. "They're repairing and making things last instead of upgrading to newer products."

Either way, it points to a good decision by locals Rocky McWilliams and Jim Wilson a decade ago. The longtime owners of Interstate Batteries of Central Kansas -- an automotive and marine battery distributor -- became franchisees when Interstate created the division focusing on all-purpose power supply in 1999.

IABC stores offer not only vehicle batteries but also more than 16,000 products that power everything from wrist watches to medical equipment.

Primm said the Wichita store's customer base is almost evenly split between retail and commercial shoppers.

"We do a lot with hospitals, electrical contractors, home security contractors," Primm said. "Basically every business out there uses some form or fashion of the products we offer."

So do individuals. The company's Web site cites research that households average 21 battery-operated devices. The All Battery Centers stock products for mobile phones, laptop computers, iPods, power tools and other devices.

IABC has a mix of franchisees and company-owned stores across the country and in Puerto Rico and Canada. The company added 43 stores in 2008 and hopes to have locations in all 50 states by the end of the year.

Interstate Batteries vice president Mickey Elam told USA Today in a February article that October and December were the two best months for revenue and profits in the company's 56-year history. The Wichita store's recent sales figures have also generated optimism.

"That (\$1 million) is just a milestone that every store wants to achieve," said Primm, who has worked at the store for 3 1/2 years. "The growth has been exciting. We're just looking forward to the next goal of \$2 million."



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