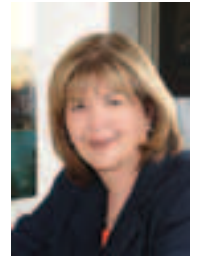


Thinking Outside the Box – It's the Creative Spirit®!



by Vera Haskins
President of Spirit® Petroleum

Here at Spirit®, we pride ourselves on our creative approach. This ability to think outside the box has helped our licensees realize a variety of independent opportunities and growth.

We don't settle for the first option that comes along, which has helped us negotiate the best deals across the board from credit card processing to signage to fleet programs and more. And that thinking has allowed us to work closely with licensees who require extra attention for one reason or another, helping them toward success.

Recently, we encountered a station in Wisconsin that needed a dose of creative thinking and a willingness to adapt on our part so they could meet their city's stringent zoning regulations. I had the chance to discuss the outcome of our efforts with Jim and Jon Crawford, the father-and-son team — president and vice president, respectively — of Crawford Oil and Petroleum in Portage, Wisconsin. Their company has been family-owned and -operated since 1935 and provides branded solutions to gas stations across the state. I decided to share our conversation here:

Jim Crawford was active in PMAA for years and had been looking for an opportunity to utilize the Spirit® brand. He struggles, along with other marketers, with the continued decline in the number of available brands and the ensuing brand conflicts.

He told me that his major suppliers have changed their requirements for working with new retail outlets, requiring the station owner to do an enormous minimum number of gallons annually, and many stations in his mostly rural state can't bring in the required amount.

When an owner of an independent site in Madison approached Crawford, Jon and Jim encouraged him to give Spirit® a try. The site was doing only about one-quarter of the business it had done in its heyday, but the previous owner had not kept the site up, and it had gotten a bad reputation. Nothing the new owner tried could increase business, even though, years before, it had been known for its good service and value.

Jon told me: "We told him about Spirit®, and he liked the striking red, white and blue image and the fact that it would be one

of the first Spirit® stations in Wisconsin. We all got excited and got the canopy layout and signs, figuring it would take two months to get the site up and running. Because of all the city codes, it took nearly seven."

Those codes regulated the colors, site illumination and lighting under the canopy, and Jon said that the specifications kept changing:

"I remember that he called me several times, and we hashed out possible redesigns of the canopy and price signs. We changed the canopy several times, and he and the owner were thrilled that we were able to make it all work. Much of the credit for this perseverance goes to Mark St. Amand, Spirit's graphic designer, and our vendors Federal Heath Signs and Mountain Commercial Graphics."

Jon continued: "The city is very strict, and there's no way, working with a major, that you'd get someone to spend that amount of time and dedication to get it to work. With the majors, it either works or it doesn't."

Jon sent me photos of the site and told me what they planned to do, and I was on board. The owner loved that we didn't have new rules and regulations coming out every month that stipulate every little detail of their operation. This is the kind of versatility that we offer our licensees. It doesn't matter that we're talking about one station rather than a chain; we provide the same deep level of service.

"Spirit® brings brand recognition with a freedom that you don't normally find. The majors are walking away from smaller towns and smaller stores, but Spirit® looks good in a town of 500 people or a big city," Jon continued.

"Spirit® allows everyone to do what they do best. Vera develops the image and keeps things stable; looks at suppliers for materials; negotiates credit card fees — all to give us the opportunity to grow our business and do what we do best — help rural Wisconsin sites be successful!"

He also told me there's a "buzz" about Spirit® in his area. The station owner is doing well, the Crawfords are excited about the Spirit® brand, and growth is on the horizon. That's what Spirit® is all about.

