

Pop-A-Lock Las Vegas

Entrepreneur uses franchise model
to build successful locksmith business.

By Don Sadler



As a kid, Jeff Maltz used to tag along with his parents, who were both real estate agents, as they went from house to house with buyers and sellers. One thing that always fascinated him was all the different kinds of locks and lockboxes that his parents had to navigate.

Fast-forward to 2005, when Maltz, who was a successful high-tech software salesperson, was presented with the opportunity to buy into the Pop-A-Lock national locksmith franchise. “Given all the security dangers in the world and the growing complexity of locks and security technologies, I saw a huge business opportunity,” he says. “So I decided to jump on it.”

Today, Pop-A-Lock Las Vegas is one of the top locksmith franchise operations in the country. His business provides residential, automotive and commercial locksmith work in Las Vegas and Henderson, Nev., and throughout the entire Las Vegas Valley.

“While our focus getting started was on 24-hour emergency automobile lockout and emergency roadside services, it has now expanded so that most of our business is full-service locksmith work. Roadside services are a smaller percentage of the business although still a key element,” says Maltz. Sixteen employees operate 12 vans and man the company’s storefront on South Valley View Drive in Las Vegas.

AWARD-WINNING VANS

Speaking of vans, Pop-A-Lock Las Vegas was the winner of the Best Van in the World contest at the 2010 ALOA Convention & Security Expo. “Our vans are fully outfitted and equipped to handle most complex locksmith jobs,” Maltz says. “And they are

Opposite page: “We worked very closely with our franchisor to design a custom wrap for Las Vegas that would match the flash typical of Las Vegas business vehicles,” says owner Jeff Maltz.

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custom wrapped in a style that can catch the attention of even the most finicky Las Vegas residents. We worked very closely with our franchisor to design a custom wrap for Las Vegas that would match the flash typical of Las Vegas business vehicles.”

The low-profile 2005 Chevy Astro is outfitted with an HPC 1200 Blitz Code Machine, duplicator machine, transponder programmers and high-security key machine. It is primarily set up for automotive purposes, but is also equipped to handle residential jobs and light commercial work. It also has a Ben Payne

Sr. specially designed center console for storage, and a laptop stand on a 120-degree swivel.

Maltz believes that being part of a well-recognized national franchise organization provides his business with the best of both worlds: a tremendous support system of other locksmiths with whom he can share experiences and best practices, along with the flexibility to adapt his business to local nuances when it’s called for, like the custom design and wrap created for their vans.

“There are other locksmiths in the Pop-A-Lock system going through the same things we are, so we benefit from knowledge sharing and best practices with each other,” he says. “At the same time, the world is moving local, so you have to get close to your local customers. As a Pop-A-Lock franchisee, we reap the benefits of the national system without losing any of the advantages of being a local player.”

Maltz points to four primary keys to his company’s success:

Effective branding. “This translates to giving people the feeling that we’re trustwor-



Pop-A-Lock’s low-profile 2005 Chevy Astro is outfitted with an HPC 1200 Blitz Code Machine, duplicator machine, transponder programmers and high-security key machine. Locksmith Bobby Colbert calls the van the “most organized locksmith vehicle in the USA.”

thy, safe, and competent,” he says. “That’s a big differentiator these days in our business. All our vehicles are marked and all employees wear bright uniforms, so there’s no questioning whether the person who shows up is with Pop-A-Lock.”

Fast response time and reliability. Pop-A-Lock Las Vegas started out working with consumers, where response time is crucial. “As we’ve grown, we’ve continued to focus on providing outstanding customer service,” says Maltz. “We always show up for appointments on time, and for emergency situations like lockouts, we’re the fastest locksmith in town. We are well-resourced with highly trained and experienced staff.”

Strong capabilities. This is where being part of a larger franchise system really pays off, providing Pop-A-Lock Las Vegas with access to the latest technology, training and best practices in the industry. “This helps us provide lower costs due to our scale, and we can finish jobs faster than most other locksmiths due to our training and available resources,” Maltz explains.

Licensing and work with ALOA. Locally, Pop-A-Lock Las Vegas is one of the few locksmiths licensed in all the major Las Vegas jurisdictions, says Maltz. “And nationally, our company has worked closely with ALOA to help spread not only best practices in locksmith techniques, but also to help identify the phony locksmiths who are tarnishing our industry.”

In addition, Pop-A-Lock offers an innovative program called Emergency Door Unlock in which it will unlock a car or home

Fast Facts

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for free if a child or senior is locked inside. This program was launched by the franchise founders, who were both law enforcement officers, in 1991 after they witnessed numerous situations like this. “We’ve helped more than 10,000 people in this situation in Las Vegas alone,” Maltz says.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Maltz says the down economy has presented both challenges and opportunities for his business. On the one hand, Las Vegas has one of the nation’s highest unemployment rates at 15 percent, which Maltz says has affected the ability of some clients to pay for locksmith services. “This has definitely impacted our business.”

But on the positive side, Pop-A-Lock Las Vegas has picked up a lot of new business rekeying foreclosed homes. “This has helped to stabilize what could have been a big downward trend for us,” says Maltz. “We also partner with major large national organizations in areas like roadside assistance, which has also helped stabilize our business.”

As lock technologies grow more complex and security threats continue to increase, Maltz believes there will be more

opportunities for growth for his business and the locksmith industry as a whole. Sophisticated bump-resistant locks, for example, are much more expensive than normal locks, and their margins are higher. “I predict that AUPs will go up as technologies get more complex, which should also improve our margins.”

Maltz is concerned, however, about the proliferation of phony locksmiths, as well as locksmiths that advertise cheap rates through subsidiary companies that don’t use their name. “Licensed locksmiths have started subsidiaries that are not properly licensed to win contracts from national providers for lower rates,” he says. “It’s a big problem with one of the larger locksmiths here in Las Vegas. I understand the authorities are investigating, so hopefully action will be taken against them soon.”

Problems like these make Maltz especially grateful for the support of ALOA and everything ALOA is doing to help fight against phony locksmiths. “We became ALOA certified the day we opened our doors, and have been active participants in the organization ever since,” he says.

“Working with ALOA, we have been able to create more awareness around the scammer locksmiths out there, and more proac-



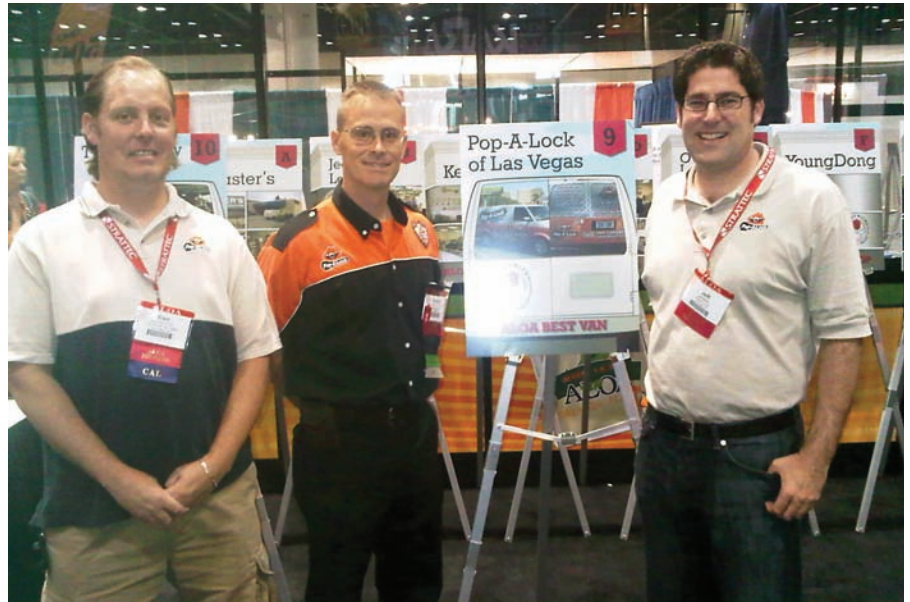
Pop-A-Lock Las Vegas has picked up new business rekeying foreclosed homes, and by offering roadside assistance.

tively, to emphasize to customers the benefits of using a properly licensed locksmith. If I were a consumer, the first thing I'd ask a locksmith is if they are ALOA-certified. I would be greatly concerned about using any locksmith that isn't.

"The ALOA locksmith shows are also beneficial, particularly the classes offered," he adds. "We regularly send members of our team to get trained by ALOA, and our locksmiths possess both CAL and CRL certifications." ☺



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