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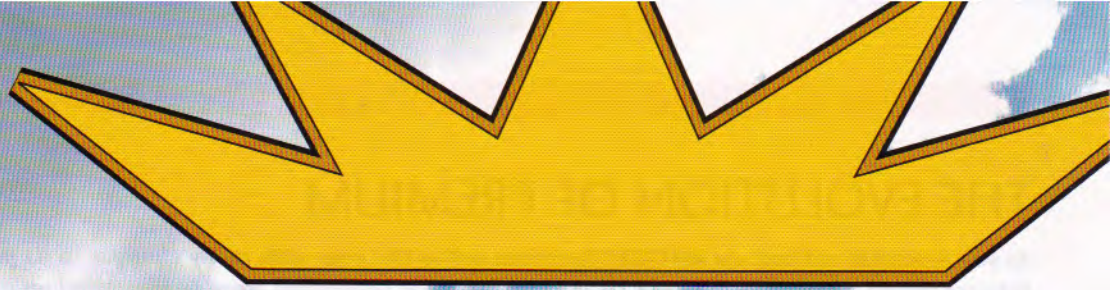
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Eye candy

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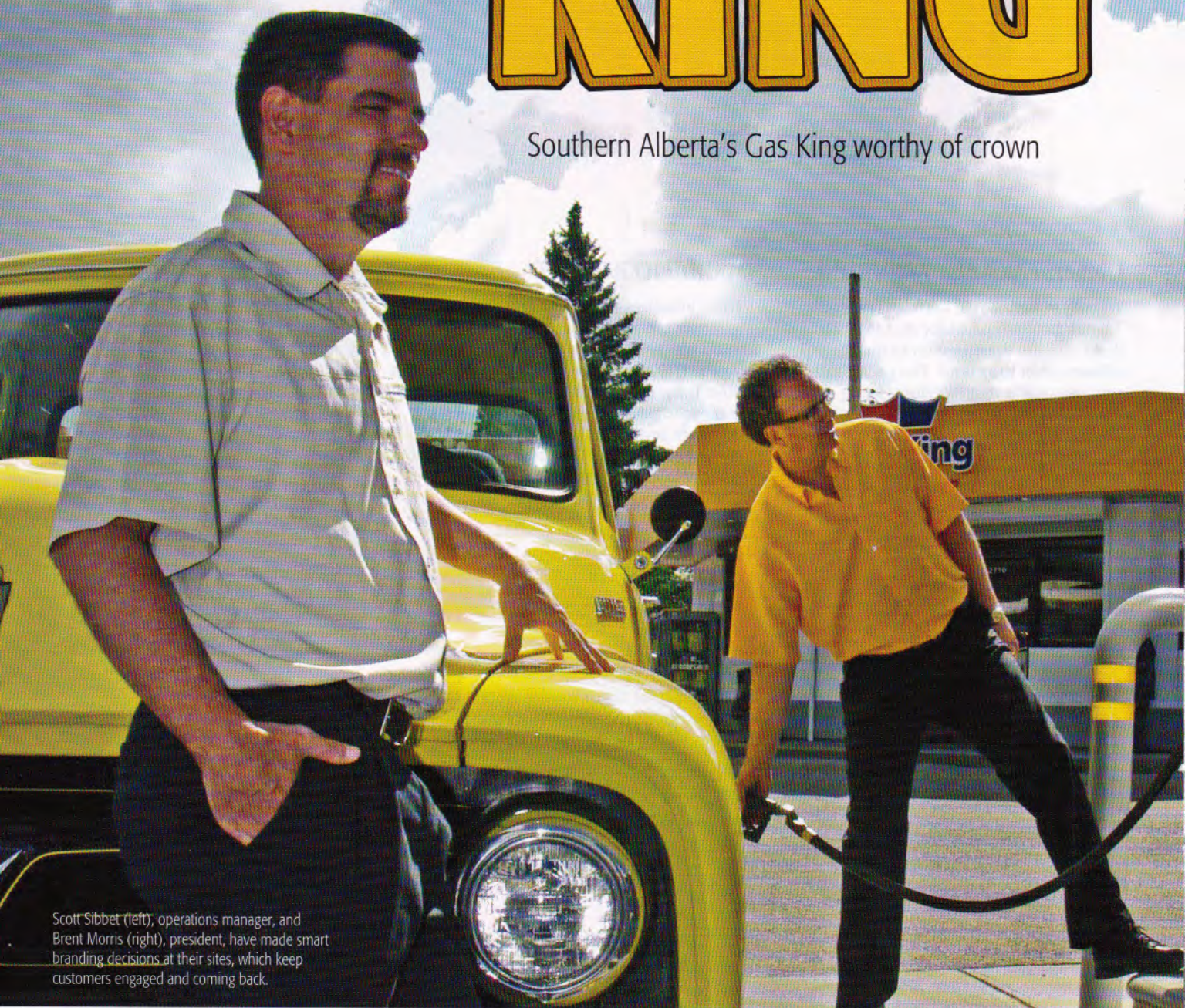
Gas King earns its crown

Scott Sibbet (left), Gas King's operations manager and Brent Morris (right), president of Gas King



All hail the KING

Southern Alberta's Gas King worthy of crown



Scott Sibbet (left), operations manager, and Brent Morris (right), president, have made smart branding decisions at their sites, which keep customers engaged and coming back.



By Jeremy Dickson

Brent Morris doesn't sit on a throne or live in a castle, but he knows a thing or two about loyalty. For 25 years, retail gas customers have been coming to his company's sites in southern Alberta because they know Gas King is a name synonymous with integrity, honesty and respect.

As a small independent chain in Alberta's highly competitive c-gas market, Gas King has managed to maintain a loyal following by being heavily involved in the communities it serves, through effective advertising, charity work and keeping up with industry trends, such as foodservice and loyalty programs.

Gas King operates six c-gas sites in southern Alberta, with four stations in Lethbridge, and one each in Medicine Hat and Picture Butte. Four of the sites are equipped self-branded Crown car washes and two of the locations have self-branded SnackKing

of the shares of Gas King Oil Co. Ltd. from his mother and became its third president.

"We've done well for the last 25 years," says Morris. "Our sites are bright, clean, and colourful, plus the signage and service is professional. We look like a national chain, but with a local feel."

Tapping into their customers' immediate needs is something Morris and his team of 100 employees work at daily to keep up with the competition.

Morris and Gas King's operations manager, Scott Sibbet, are never at a loss for ideas that will keep the company thriving.

"We look like a national chain, but with a local feel."

convenience stores.

Owning triple-threat sites, or sites with gas, convenience and car wash, was always the Morris family's long-term vision. Their roots in the gas industry date back to the 1960s when Don and Georgia Morris, Brent's parents, started Eldorado Petroleum Service Ltd., a bulk fuel business for farms in Shaughnessy, Alberta. In 1985, Brent and Don Morris diversified by creating an independently-owned chain of gas stations known as Gas King Oil Co. Ltd.

Brent Morris continued evolving the business in 1992 after his father passed away. He carried on his belief in hard work and treating customers, employees and suppliers with respect. In 2000, Brent Morris purchased all



Fresh additions

The total amount spent on foodservice in c-gas stores increased 6% in total dollar volume over 2008 (Source: NPD Group/CREST, year ending August 2008 - Total Canada). The trend in c-gas has continued and Gas King is taking advantage.

"We've always had the basics like coffee and muffins, and we will continue to have these," says Sibbet, "but we've actually been working with our full-service distributor to offer more items from their fresh program, which includes salads, sandwiches, cut fruit,



about KickBack we pursued it," says Morris.

As Gas King expands its offerings, the company's technological capabilities have also advanced.

Sibbet explains that their loyalty and gift card programs are integrated with their point of sale (POS) system, which is interfaced to their pumps.

"C-store Commander is a great product and I think we use our POS to the fullest with great help from our system provider, InfoNet Technology Corp. Sales reports are run regularly to see

"Customers do have more options with Walmart and Shoppers, but we still offer the convenience and service that you can't get from those stores."

veggies, dip and healthy chilled snacks like yogurt and parfaits."

While Gas King has been very successful with its own proprietary brands, Morris and Sibbet both agree that partnering with a major brand like Taco Time or Dairy Queen could also benefit the business.

"I think that type of co-branding is something we would look at doing in the future," says Sibbet.

Gas King's proprietary brands, balanced with its core categories, are the company's current focus. To mark its 25th anniversary, Morris re-branded Slush, a Slurpee-like drink which they have sold for 25 years, to Williwa. The new name, which is of unknown origin, means a sudden violent squall blowing offshore from a mountainous coast.

"To launch the Williwa beverage, we gave them away for free during the long weekend in May and more than 14,000 were handed out. The drink has its own cup with the Williwa logo, we launched a website and we've given Williwa t-shirts and coupons to the local radio stations to give away," Morris says.

It's been a success, but maintaining close community ties in other ways has raised Gas King's credibility even more.

For the people

Giving back is something Gas King is known for, especially in Lethbridge where its head office is located.

"People always say that we're involved in everything, which can only help the business grow," says Morris.

"We support the local hospital, college, university, the Lethbridge Bulls baseball team and the local WHL hockey team, the Lethbridge Hurricanes, plus we supply gas to the Alberta International Air Show and during Whoop-Up Days we sponsor free entertainment on the Gas King Stage at Exhibition Park." Since 2002, Gas King has had a yellow 1954 Ford pick-up truck make appearances at



Gas King has launched an extensive promotional campaign for their proprietary beverage, the Williwa, encompassing a website, t-shirts, and radio ads.

parades, car shows and other local events.

One of Gas King's strongest programs is its Charity Care Wash. Groups can apply to Gas King to have their charity car wash fundraiser held at a Gas King location with a car wash.

These types of events have brought more attention to Gas King, but keeping customers and staff engaged is a two-way street and Morris knows this well. It's a big reason why they started a loyalty and gift card program.

Keep 'em loyal

Gas King became a member of the KickBack Loyalty Points Network three years ago and Morris says it's been a big success.

"We learn from the competition especially when it comes to loyalty. All the majors have their own programs so when we heard

what's moving and what's not to determine the products we keep in our stores," says Sibbet.

They've also added a DVD rental machine at one of their sites, an in-store digital advertising screen, and they intend to install card readers in their car wash bays that can accept credit, debit, gift and loyalty cards.

One of the biggest technological challenges right now for smaller chains and independents is investing in EMV-capable hardware.

"All of our ATMs are capable and our POS system should be compliant by summer's end, but I know we'll have to change all of our PIN pads. The costs are extensive," says Sibbet.

As Gas King plans for the future, Morris and Sibbet keep their staff happy by providing quality training and offering incentives for outstanding work.

Success secrets

Much of Gas King's winning strategy really comes down to location and execution.

"Customers do have more options with Walmart and Shoppers, but we still offer the convenience and service that you can't get from those stores," explains Sibbet.

Morris is happy with the business and if all goes according to plan, Gas King will open more locations in the near future. When they do, there's a chance some new family members might step up to the plate. "My eight-year-old son seems quite interested in the business and my six-year-old daughter says she is interested too, but wants to open a ballet studio as well," laughs Morris.

"I would never force them into it, but if they take over the business once they grow up, there is always room for them if they're interested." **YCM**

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