

More than a paint job

HOME IMPROVEMENT CHAIN Réno-dépôt launches a renovation of itself

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The makeover of Rona Inc. is starting at Réno-Dépôt. The 16 big-box homeimprovement stores under that banner, all in Quebec, are getting a thorough freshening this year.



“After 21 years, it was time,” said David Giguère, executive director of marketing for Réno-Dépôt, during the unveiling Tuesday of the first remodelled store on Cousineau Blvd. in St-Hubert.

Five stores on the island of Montreal will be remodelled next month.

Giguère said the objective is to improve the customer experience by improving signage, changing merchandise and organizing it more simply. About one-third of the 30,000 products in stock are new additions, he said. Even the weekly advertising flyer has been revamped.

“It was time to make a decision. Is big box here to stay or not? Status quo is not a solution, not with the economy the way it is now. We still believe in big box, but the brand needed to be clearly positioned. It’s time to stand out again,” Giguère said.

Réno-Dépôt’s core clientele is and always has been professional renovators and contractors as well as do-it-yourselfers, Giguère said.

They want name-brand merchandise, in job-lot quantities, at good prices, and “they don’t want to have to ask an associate or wait for a forklift to get it for them.”

Under the new format, for example, people will be able to try out a bathtub for size on the floor and put an adjacent one on their cart if it meets their criteria, Giguère said.

The company’s goal is to never run out of the 1,600 items that represent 40 per cent of sales,

And if you can find an identical item for less somewhere else, Réno-Dépôt will match the price and offer you an additional 15-per-cent discount, up from 10 per cent previously.

There should be plenty of employees available to share expertise when needed, Giguère said, because they won’t be spending as much time simply guiding people to the merchandise.

“We are confident that the concept we have developed will keep our existing customers, draw in those who have gone elsewhere and attract new ones,” said Rona president Robert Sawyer.

The restyling of Réno-Dépôt is part of a concerted effort by Rona management to shake up its retail network, which has seen lethargic sales since the financial crisis of 2008-09.

Investors have grown increasingly impatient with the company, especially after management flatly rejected an overture from U.S.-based home-improvement chain Lowe’s in 2012. Rona shares still are trading below the \$14.50 that Lowe’s reportedly was prepared to offer.

Rona has more than 500 corporate or affiliated hardware and home-renovation stores across the country. Annual sales are about \$4.2 billion.