



Bobby Jennings — Owner
Accent Blinds

“I would never go back to a regular van.”

If anyone knows the business of installing custom blinds it's Bobby Jennings.

Bobby, a Freightliner Sprinter owner, has been in the trade for over 20 years now, along with his wife, Pam. Like many self-made entrepreneurs, Bobby got his start working out of his home garage. He laughs as he recalls the early days: “Back then I installed all kinds of window treatments — draperies, blinds, you name it. But that changed in 1999 when we began fabricating two-inch blinds ourselves. Since

then, the focus of our business has been strictly on blinds.” With a new mission for Accent Blinds, Bobby set up shop in a centrally located manufacturing plant in Columbia, SC. “I’m just 25 minutes from anywhere in the Columbia metropolitan area,” he says.

The company currently employs between eight and ten workers at any given time to help out both at the plant and in

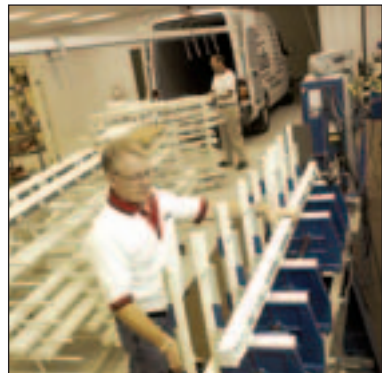
the field with installations. Bobby says this year he is expanding the business further and will begin fabricating shutters as well as blinds. He also plans to open a showroom.



Freightliner
SPRINTER
FORWARD MOTION

ACCENT BLINDS
COLUMBIA, SOUTH CAROLINA

Residential customers account for 80% of his installations, according to Bobby, and business is split 50/50 between retail sales and installation, and sales to local builders.



“Although most of our business is in central South Carolina,” Bobby says, “as some of our builders have begun branching out into other cities, we have too. We’re now going as far as Charlotte and Charleston. The great thing about our plant being located right in the middle of the state is that it’s so easy for us to get around.”

Getting around has become even easier for Bobby and his crew since he began using Freightliner Sprinter vans. He says the Sprinter originally got his attention two years ago when he spotted one in town being driven by a local dry cleaning outfit. (At that time the Sprinter van was still relatively new and only two companies in Irmo were using them.)

The first thing to catch Bobby’s eye was the height of the van. “You can actually stand up inside the SHC 2500 (super high cab) model,” he points out.

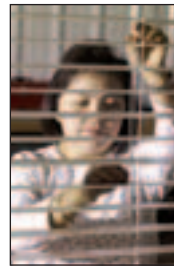
Naturally, Bobby was curious to learn more about the Sprinter van. So, he made it a point to stop by and test drive one of the trucks while picking up building materials one day.

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At the time he was using a Chevy Astro and another full-sized Chevrolet van — both older models — in his business.



“We got our first Sprinter around Christmas of 2002, and bought a second one six months later,” he reports.



“We ordered both vans with a 158-inch wheelbase, the longest version available. This gives us almost

14 feet from partition to back, which makes a big difference to us. Now instead of being able to put just two houses worth of blinds in the van per trip, we can put four deliveries worth on board, four installations being a typical days’ work.

“The bigger vans allow us to walk right down the middle to retrieve the correct blinds for a job,” he explains. “This means we don’t need to

be concerned about layering them in any particular order, and if delivery schedules get changed around during the day it’s not a problem — we don’t have to remove blinds

from the van in order to get to those that are stacked underneath like we used to.”

Besides increasing load-carrying capacity and productivity, Bobby says the vans have proved



beneficial in other ways as well. Fuel economy, for example, has been a consistent 22-MPG. The new trucks — which typically travel 150 miles during the course of a day — can go 500 miles on a tank of diesel, meaning stops for fuel are needed only every third day compared to every other day with the older trucks. The new vans can also go 10,000 miles between oil changes so downtime is minimized.

“People were telling us all the time how they kept seeing our ‘vans’ all over town — that’s how highly visible they are.”

By far the biggest payback for Bobby has come in the form of increased public awareness of his company through on-vehicle advertising, which he reports has driven business up substantially. “These vans are so tall,” he says, “that people

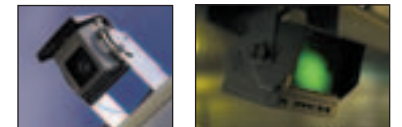
notice our logo immediately. We spec’d the vans with no windows to maximize use of the space for advertising. We also have our name on the front of the cab, above the windshield. It can be seen from three blocks away. You couldn’t do that on a regular van.”

Bobby’s a man who knows what he wants, and he designed how the graphics would be laid out. Sign*A*Rama, located in his home town of Irmo, SC, did the installation work. The decals are approximately 30 inches high, since Bobby wanted the lettering to be as big as possible.

There’s no mistaking his vans on the road. “When we still had just one of the trucks,” he remembers, “people were telling us all the time how they kept seeing our ‘vans’ all over town — that’s



which gives us the partition and paneled walls in the back.



“Also, since we’re always backing into driveways in our business, we decided to have backup cameras installed in both trucks,” Bobby adds. “There’s plenty of room in the cabs for these cameras. They allow us to see exactly what’s behind us as we’re backing up, which is a big advantage since we’re in residential neighborhoods all the time.”

The 2002 Sprinter van currently has 40,000 miles on it; the 2003 model, 15,000 miles. Bobby reports that both vehicles have been totally reliable, and unlike his older Chevy trucks, he has not seen a drop of oil spill out. “I would never go back to a regular van,” he says. As far as life cycle, Bobby expects to get 300,000 miles out of each of his Sprinter trucks before retiring them.





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