

David Hayes: The brand is the store

If you're looking for name-brand products from the leading flooring suppliers, you won't find it at Abbey Carpet & Floor of Knoxville, Tenn. For proprietor David Hayes, who also owns an Abbey store in Pigeon Forge, Tenn., the decision to go entirely with private label goods was a no-brainer.

"Private label is the way to make more money," said Hayes, who prior to coming to Abbey in 1997 was with "every mill program imaginable." He said converting to all private label is tremendously labor intensive, but worth it.

"We are independent as an Abbey dealer, so we get to pick and choose what product and programs we want," he said.

Hayes' two Abbey stores are 70 miles apart. The Knoxville location is 14,000 square feet while Pigeon Forge is 5,000 square feet. His son runs the Pigeon Forge store. "They are completely different markets," Hayes said. "And there's a lot of growth in both."

All seven of Hayes' employees once operated their own retail stores. For him, "that's the best employee you can have because usually when they get out of the business, they're gone. But we've had very little turnover at our place."

Hayes' philosophy is to hire the best people, give them the best product to sell and pay them well. As he put it, "I may not make as much money but in the long run, your business is better off."

Hayes considered joining other buying groups in 1997 when he first partnered with Abbey, but is happy with his choice. "This company has really grown in the last 10 years from more of a mom and pop to a very sophisticated operation," he said. "You keep your independence. They have helped us with claims, pricing, advertising and marketing concepts and to diversify our business in order to compete on every product level."

