

# IDAHO BUSINESS REVIEW

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## Seidl Home Company an example of a small builder weathering uncertain times



John and Sarah Seidl enjoy working together. From the non-stops laughs to the siblings finishing each other's sentences during a conversation, these business partners are also passionate homebuilders, who have been building semi-custom and custom homes in the Treasure Valley for 18 years.

As owners of Seidl Home Company of Boise, John and Sarah have managed to successfully compete with larger firms in town, and navigate through disastrous housing downturn relatively unscathed, thanks in part to a successful business model they've crafted over the years.

*"In any business you work through issues," Sarah said. "I trust John emphatically and that is critical. We are here for one another."*

Besides trust, industry experts say the Seidl's are an example of a small company that has a proven track record through relationships they maintain with their clients, and without the overhead and other expenses bigger builders deal with.

*"Because business is all about relationships, they really have to create their commodity and market it accordingly,"* said Rick Vycital, Region 3 director of the Idaho Small Business Development Center.

The first step in creating that commodity is building upon strengths that are not dependent on a company's size, he said.

*"If you acknowledge that you are never going to have all the staff, but perhaps offer up other key selling points and talent, a small company can successfully compete,"* Vycital said.

In John and Sarah's case, both have distinct responsibilities that play off of each other's strengths in the workplace.

*"Basically, we don't like to do what the other does,"* John said. *"I like being out at the job site, working with my hands and managing building operations and quality control."*

Sarah, on the other hand works mainly in the office, meeting clients and handling design and cost details.

*"Our clients will interact with John or me. They have our cell phone numbers and we offer up a hands-on, personal approach that we take seriously,"* Sarah said.

William R. Mincks, Boise State Construction Management lecturer and certified professional constructor, said especially in the custom home business, with its targeted niche of clients, being customer-oriented is essential.

*"Because of their size, you have to be able to satisfy clients so they tell other people about you,"* Mincks said. *"Certainly, as an owner/operator, you have to wear many hats and have to know how to get things done right, which can be a challenge."*

Rick Lierz, president of Franklin Building Supply in Boise, has worked with the Seidls for years. He said because of the way John and Sarah work together, yet separately when it comes to handling day-to-day operations, they are able to meet their customers' needs with "gold star service."

*"Because they are passionate about what they do, they have proven that they can make adjustments in an uncertain housing market,"* Lierz said. *"It takes a team effort to build the kind of company Sarah and John operate."*

Being able to adapt to a changing economic environment has also been critical. In 2005 and 2006, the Seidl Home Company started 40 homes, Sarah said. Today the company is building between five to 10 homes a year, and has incorporated remodeling work into their business model.

*"We have always maintained a positive outlook, and certainly this downturn has been unprecedented,"* John said. *"We've managed to come through and do see positive signs that the economy is growing again."*

According to the Building Contractors Association of Southwest Idaho website, 2011 builder membership stands at 71. Between 2006 and 2010, that number was 250, signifying a decline coinciding with a market downturn.

However, Vycital said a small builder can benefit during turbulent economic times because of a minimal staff, which keeps costs down and offers flexibility for each job they take on.

*"A small builder can have more wherewithal to schedule projects a bit differently, and generally their finances aren't as tied up as they would be elsewhere,"* Vycital said.

Finances aside, Mincks said the Seidl's strategy is apparently working, considering they've built more than 200 homes locally and are still going strong, even if they are building fewer homes today than in years past.

*"Being a homebuilder is not an easy business,"* Mincks said. *"Certainly it takes a lot of skill and knowledge and entrepreneurial spirit."*