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Despite the recession, Brake King aims to expand

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NEWPORT NEWS — Since Brake King opened in 1966, the company has gone from having two auto bays to 21.

And customer demand continues to grow despite the recession. Now the Hutchisons are expanding the family business by franchising.

"We knew we had to expand for our customers," said company vice president Bubba Hutchison, who said Brake King currently serves more than 35,000 people. "In the past month we've had customers come from Richmond, [Woodbridge](#) and Dale City (near [Manassas](#)). It's almost like we felt obligated to expand."

The company has received about 60 inquiries since January from people considering buying a store, Hutchison said. Current plans call for the company to license four franchises, located between Richmond and the Outer Banks, by the end of the year.

Each franchise is being sold for \$50,000. Brake King will receive 5 percent of the gross sales of each store. Hutchison said the franchises will range from 4,000 to 10,000 square feet. The Jefferson Avenue shop is 15,000 square feet.

The company originally wanted to award eight franchises by the end of this year, but the recession caused Brake King to scale the number down to four. In five years the company plans to have 50 stores operating, Hutchison said.

The strain that the economy has put on banks has made it difficult for people to secure loans or get credit, a challenge that Brake King faces while trying to sell franchises.

"We're in the worst recession in years. There is such volatility in the market that a lot of people have the money, but they're just sitting on it," he said.

Brake King expanding in the recession may seem risky to some, but is not uncommon.

"It's either expand or perish, that's the American way," said Patrick Callaway, president of Francorp, a franchise consulting company based in [Illinois](#).

"There are businesses that are operating in spite of this recession. After all, we all have cars and need to replace our brakes, recession or no recession."

Hutchison did not want to grow the family business by opening other shops locally and hiring managers.

"We realized we wanted owners, not managers," he said. "We wanted people that have real skin in the game. People who are vested in the business."

Hutchison said it's also about putting the family business into the right hands.

"Just because someone has the money doesn't mean they have a franchise The

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