

Try to contain yourself

Green alternative lets movers pack, transport and unpack the contents of a home without the hassle of folding, taping and unfolding cumbersome cardboard boxes

BY PAUL DELEAN, THE GAZETTE JUNE 22, 2011



Shai Schwartz, the owner of GoBac, at his warehouse in Montreal. Schwartz began GoBac a year ago; the company rents plastic boxes to movers as an eco-friendly alternative to cardboard boxes.

Photograph by: Bryanna Bradley, THE GAZETTE

MONTREAL - It's nobody's favourite sport, but box hunting is a summer ritual in Quebec, where thousands of people change apartments every July 1.

Supplies, however, are growing more scarce. Stores that used to give away unneeded boxes have adopted green policies and significantly reduced the numbers in recent years; others are directing their reusable boxes to recyclers who pay them.

If and when you come up with sufficient boxes and pack, tape and move them to the new address, disposal becomes an issue. Most can't be recycled unless they're flattened and fit in a bin.

"It's just a lot of hassle for nothing," says Shai Schwartz, who believes he has a better way.

Last fall, Schwartz founded GoBac, a St. Laurent-based company that rents out sturdy plastic bins by

the week to residential and commercial customers.

Rates depend on the number of containers (GoBac makes an estimate based on the number of bedrooms) and whether optional extras such as plastic wardrobe boxes, recycled packing paper and dollies are included.

A one-week rental of 25 bins - GoBac's calculation for a typical one-bedroom dwelling - is \$79. Three bedrooms' worth is \$149.

As part of the fee, GoBac delivers the containers - which are lightweight and about the size of portable recycling bins, but stackable, and with covers - and also picks them up. Its drivers are on the road as far as Blainville every day but Saturday, "because that's the day when most moves happen. They don't need bins at that point."

Schwartz, a 43-year-old native of Israel who moved to Canada in 1993, worked 10 years in the moving industry, which is how he came up with the idea for GoBac.

"I did six months of research before starting. I wanted something eco-friendly - no cardboard, no tape. The general public wants to be green. I also wanted something inexpensive."

The bins he buys are overstocks from a Quebec manufacturer. He has 6,000, with another 1,500 due in time for Quebec's traditional July 1 moving day.

GoBac currently has four employees, two of them drivers.

Schwartz said business so far has exceeded projections, with revenue in the six figures. Demand has been strongest in the Plateau Mont Royal and downtown Montreal.

"I thought the first year would be tough, but it's been good."

Not only are people renting the bins for moves, some - such as a library in the Laurentians and a law firm in downtown Montreal - did it for storage during renovations.

Schwartz is encouraged enough by the initial response that he's already planning to set up divisions in other cities, starting with Quebec City this fall. "I want this business to be a brand name all over Quebec," he said.

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