

Net-based computer products retailer eyes Sunrise



Tiger Direct opened its first South Florida store five years ago and is looking for more local sites.

by Deborah España

Computer products retailer Tiger Direct has decided to expand its brick and mortar business and is looking for more locations in South Florida, where it first crossed over into traditional retailing.

The computer component and electronics retailer was grounded in Internet and catalog sales until it opened its first store in Miami five years ago. Tiger Direct is now doing some shopping of its own for new locations in Broward and Palm Beach counties.

The move follows its South Florida launch five years ago in a 3,000-square-foot corner at the Mall of the Americas in Miami. Since then it also opened a store in Kendall at The Falls.

Tiger Direct, a subsidiary of Port Washington, N.Y.-based Systemax, is not new to the expansion business. It has five other stores in Illinois, North Carolina and Ontario, Canada.

The plan for 2006 is to penetrate readily available markets and expand further, said Tony Jones, vice president of retail operations.

Tiger Direct is not trying to imitate Gateway, which retrenched from operating its own name-brand stores to marketing through big-box retailers.

Tiger Direct is targeting high-density markets with easy-access locations and wants to open two South Florida stores a year. Each store comes with about 40 new employees.

The company is looking for locations with 15,000 to 18,000 square feet of space, said commercial broker Ed Schmidt of NAI Miami.

Tiger Direct carries name brands and an assortment of components. Its strategy is to beat competitors on their turf by offering expanded inventory at competitive prices, said Richard Wallet, executive vice president.

"We are pretty confident that we know what we are doing," said Tony Jones, vice president of retail sales. "Not many competitors offer everything that we do from computer components to plasma televisions."

The company is negotiating a 15,000-square-foot lease at an undisclosed location in Sunrise near Sawgrass Mills, Jones and Schmidt said. The location would put Tiger Direct up against BrandsMart, Best Buy and Circuit City.

The new guy on the block has big ambitions and doesn't want to be treated like small fry.

The company settled a patent infringement suit filed last year against Apple Computer over the use of the name Tiger in Apple's marketing of its new Mac operating system software. Apple is still using the Tiger name.

"We are still willing to protect our trademark when it pertains to anything that has to do with any of our products," Wallet said. ♦

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Daily Business REVIEW

LAW ♦ REAL ESTATE ♦ FINANCE

MIAMI • FRIDAY, APRIL 21, 2006 — \$2.00

VOL. 80, NO. 219

ALM