

**Singer Kitchens** has been making innovative changes and doing something in a new way...  
for the past 90 years.

*A History of Singer Kitchens*

A published newspaper article reads: "...two things happened that transformed the building materials business." As the article continues there is a mention of a hurricane "...which did such wholesale damage to the New Orleans area that it overwhelmed the local home construction industry. Many people, upon hearing how long it would take for repairs to be made to their homes, took matters into their own hands."

As the 14th anniversary of Hurricane Katrina approaches, this statement would likely provoke rebuild-weary New Orleanians to shrug their shoulders and little else. Surprisingly though, the above mentioned story is not about Katrina. It's about another miserable home-wrecker – Hurricane Betsy of 1965. Back then, Singer was faced with decisions in order to maintain its business and rebuild after what was at that time, the worst hurricane to hit the New Orleans area. But hurricanes are not Singer's only challenges. After 90 years in business, Singer Kitchens has risen above much adversity and excelled on the principle that one idea can go a long way.

Scour the record books. Rare are four generations-old New Orleans-based family owned and operated businesses. Singer Kitchens is one such business and it all started with Max Singer.

Max immigrated to the United States in the 1920s from Austryn, Poland (now known as Lithuania). He settled in New Orleans and, at first, peddled various items on the street to scrape by. But Max also had other ideas. He learned the building trade and accumulated property, eventually owning a large portion of land on Washington Avenue near what is today Xavier University.

He opened Singer Lumber Company in 1928 and enjoyed success until the stock market crash of 1929, followed by the Great Depression. With the U.S. economy was in total collapse, Max got through 1929 even though he found himself holding a substantial amount of lumber. Undeterred, Max turned his lumber and building company into a wholesale lumberyard in 1930 and started selling directly to builders. By eliminating the middleman, Max could sell his lumber at wholesale prices, saving his company and builders a considerable amount of money. In

addition to lumber, Max offered custom millwork and the company survived the Great Depression.

Max's son, Saul, joined his father in the business as it continued to grow through the 40s and 50s. Saul was always on the watch for the next building phase or fad, and in 1952 he unveiled a business model based on the observation that people wanted more control in their own home repairs and remodeling. In a way, Saul was the first to approach what is now referred to as a "big box" business. In 1952 he built a 3,000 sq. foot warehouse on Washington Ave. that became known as Singer Lumbermart. This retail lumber and building supply company flourished as homeowners flocked to purchase building materials, hardware and paint directly from a wholesaler. It didn't matter how much or how little knowledge one had, Singer Lumbermart always had sales people on the floor to assist everyone with their needs. When wood paneling became a huge home decorating fad in the late 60s and into the 70s, Singer was there with expert advice.

Max retired in the early 1960s and Saul took over. Hurricane Betsy hit in 1965. Saul, like his son and grandson today, had to find a way to keep the business going after most of the New Orleans area was devastated by the disaster. Saul's innovative business model of 1952 was the key to keeping his family business afloat. Residents needed supplies, quickly and reasonably priced, and Singer was able to fulfill their needs.

Saul's son Alan joined the business in the 1970s, just as wood paneling was falling out of fashion and a new craze was taking hold – elaborate kitchen renovations. Kitchens were becoming more than functional spaces. They were becoming the centers of social gatherings in the home. Saul and Alan took note. In 1979, they opened their first full-fledged kitchen store at 4900 Washington Avenue in New Orleans, the same location where it all began.

In 2002, Saul passed away, leaving Singer Kitchens in the hands of his son Alan and grandson Michael. Hurricane Katrina hit in 2005 flooding one Singer showroom while destroying another. Family and employee homes met the same fate, but just as in 1965, Alan and Michael were determined to reopen and start selling what people desperately needed – kitchen and bathroom cabinets.

Today, the Singer family owns and operates its showroom locations in three parishes throughout southeast Louisiana. What started out as a lumber company with one store has evolved into a multi-million dollar corporation in Orleans, Jefferson and St. Tammany Parishes.

Singer Kitchens carries a full line of cabinets for kitchen and bath, as well as customized organizational systems for closets and garages. It started with Max, was handed down to Saul, who passed it on to Alan and now Michael. Ask any member of the Singer family why this business has been so successful and they will cite innovation and personal service.

Singer Kitchens has evolved with the times to meet the needs of the New Orleans area community it serves. In many instances, innovation didn't mean finding a new product or a new installation method. It meant developing a new business model and pursuing ideas that were untested. A builder became a lumber wholesaler in the midst of the Great Depression. A wholesaler became a retailer. Redesigning kitchens took off as another fad diminished. Homeowners became contractors and renovators. Through it all, Singer Lumber Company, which became Singer Lumbermart and then Singer Kitchens, has been there guiding generations of loyal customers.