

Sears

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Bel-Con Engineering of Belleville is handling the construction project. The office complex will also house about 80 full-time customer service personnel and another 15 to 20 full-time employees for its Internet operation handling e-mail orders and inquiries.

He noted Internet shopping tripled over the past year and one of the key reasons for that growth is that Sears does not charge any shipping or handling charges for its customers.

"The new facility will be large enough to accommodate for future growth and expansion within our sales and service operations," Scott said.

The Sears distribution centre currently employs more than 2,000 people at a facility that boasts two million square feet. It is one of the largest warehouse operations in North America.

The number of customers' catalogue orders leaving the distribution centre has been growing rapidly over the past five years.

In 1996, the centre handled 11 million orders involving 23 million

pieces of merchandise.

Last year, workers processed 16 million orders or 38 million individual items for all of eastern Canada. That was almost a 40 per cent growth in business in half a decade.

In fact, 1-800-26-SEARS is the most dialed phone number in Canada.

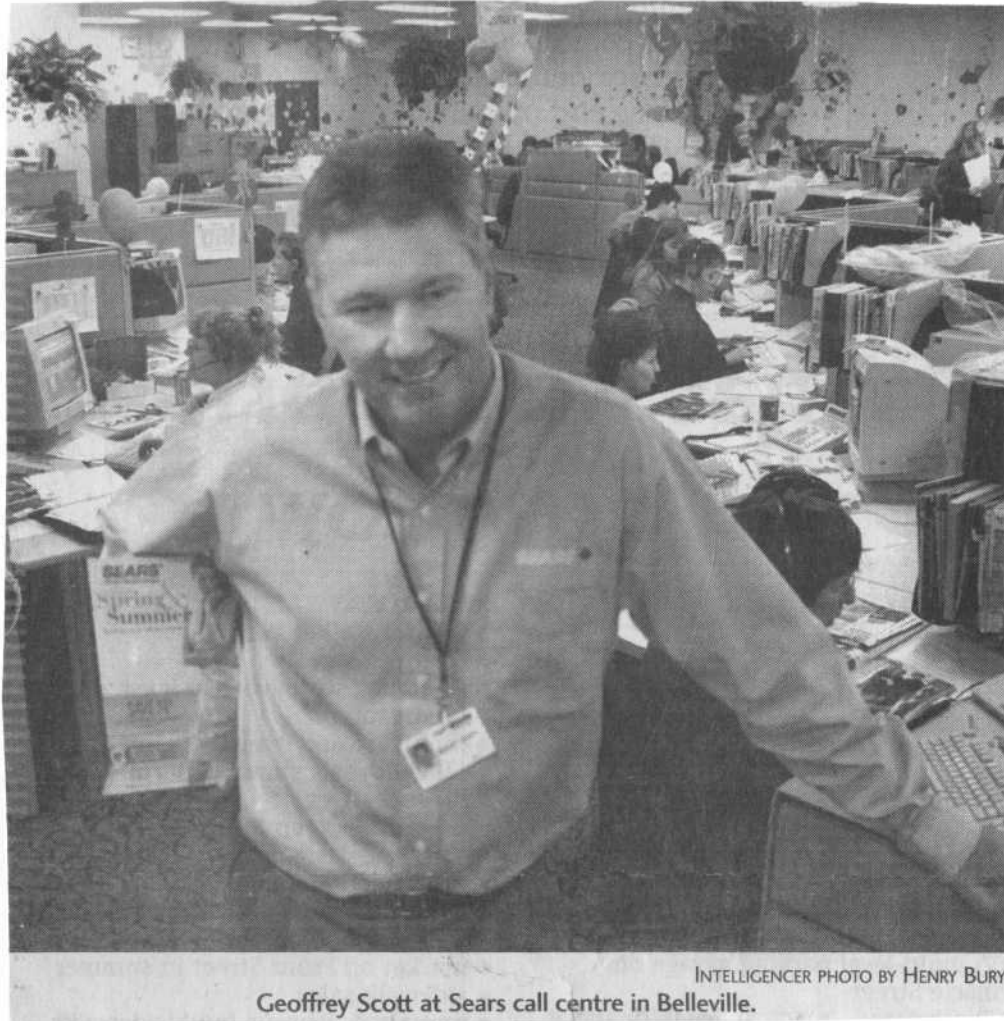
"We have been very pleased with customers' response to our catalogues in that period of time. Today, we're enjoying record sales and record profitability," Scott said.

Sears spent \$10 million on the College Street distribution centre last year to reconfigure some of its existing space in order to accommodate future growth and expansion.

The "state-of-the-art" distribution centre houses more than \$100 million worth of merchandise.

Last Christmas, it set a record by processing 310,000 items in a single day.

"We are incredibly proud of the contribution our associates have made to our business which has contributed significantly to our growth and improved efficiencies," said Scott.



INTELLIGENCER PHOTO BY HENRY BURY  
Geoffrey Scott at Sears call centre in Belleville.

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