

Bandago van rental expanding to Columbus in 2018 - Columbus - Columbus Business First

Bandago

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Bandago vans are high-end and filled with tech.

By [Dan Eaton](#) Staff reporter, Columbus Business First

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A California-based upscale van rental business says it wants to be awesome everywhere.

But first it has to be able to get everywhere and Central Ohio is part of that plan.

Bandago will open in the spring at 1125 S. Hamilton Road in Whitehall. The 15-year-old business from San Francisco

has 10 sites across the United States and is adding six, including the Columbus market, in 2018 in a bid to better connect its national network.

[Dan Sheeran Jr.](#), an agent with NAI Ohio Equities, helped the company secure that space and is assisting with its expansion into other new markets, too.

Founder and CEO [Sharky Laguana](#) told me the reason for the big expansion after more than a decade of rolling out slowly is two-fold.

First, the technology, such as its reservation system, now is in place and robust enough to support a nationwide network. Second, there are operational advantages to a bigger geographic spread.

“When someone rents from us, it’s nice to have a location near them to swap vehicles,” he said. “Our vehicles are special. They’re not easily replaced and if something goes wrong, the burden is on us to make it right. We need to be as widely distributed as possible.”

When he looked at a U.S. map for where to go, Columbus made for a nice site. Chicago, Nashville and New York are the closest existing Bandago locations.

Laguana said he is confident that Central Ohio market will support the service.

“We think there’s enough business there,” he said. “We know there won’t be a ton out of the gate, but you wait for word-of-mouth to spread and it’ll ramp up.”

Laguana described Bandago as the “Virgin America (airlines) of van rentals” with its fleet of Mercedes-Benz Sprinters, [Ford](#) Transits and Ford E-series outfitted with comfortable seating and storage, televisions, Wi-Fi, game systems and other bells and whistles.

The interior of a Bandago rental van.

Bandago locations will add campers to the mix as well in the spring.

It was a [more than \\$10 million business](#) last year and Laguana said it hasn't taken on any additional investment since he and his partner started it.

"This is really a niche within a niche," he said. "You can't really talk someone into renting a van. It's not an impulse buy. The customers come to us needing the service.

"They have to get where they're going. It's not an option."

He knows first hand. Laguana's previous life was a musician. His band, Creeper Lagoon, [had a song](#) on the soundtrack to the 2002 movie "Orange County" and in an episode of "The Sopranos."

Around 2001, his band had issues with a rental van on tour. It died in Elko, Nevada, and stranded the group there for 10 days. Sure, there was reimbursement for hotels as the band waited, but it lost gigs in the meantime.

"What we really wanted was to be back out on the road," he said.

That gave him the idea for a better van rental service. He hooked up with a silent partner who had the funds and Bandago was born.

"The original premise was to target touring musicians," he said.

The roster of [past clients](#) would make for quite the musical festival. "As time went by, it became clear a lot of others are interested in what we do. ... Sports teams, family vacations, businesses, military, first responders."

The Columbus operation will open with a handful of vans and a single employee. It will expand its on-site inventory and staffing as needed, but Bandago is a lean operation.

There is no on-site maintenance, for instance. Any repairs are outsourced to factory dealers. The average rental is two weeks, so there isn't a constant turnover as there is with traditional car rental.

"We're here to provide a great vehicle that it would never make sense for you to buy," Laguana said.

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