

Supply King depends on DDi System's Distribution Management Software

We're living in a world where franchise fever has swept through practically every niche of American business. In the Jan/San industry, the trend of consolidation under one, big, corporate name has also had an impact. However, many distributors have rejected the notion that "national" is better and found their own independent means to grow their business while keeping their autonomy.

Shelly Kawut, president of Supply King, in Neptune City, New Jersey, has depended on his company staying robust by remaining independent. And, in turn, his customers depend on his company's ability to meet their needs with skill and swiftness. Today, Supply King is the largest independent distributor in New Jersey, according to Kawut.

Depend on experience

It's not just a position ... it's a career for the professionals at Supply King. Kawut has over three decades of experience in the Jan/San industry, as does his vice-president of marketing, Henry Levenstein. But experience isn't just at the top of the management ladder. Supply King's ten field representatives average more than 15 years in the industry and the customer service representatives average about six years of experience.

However, at Supply King the training is never over. According to Levenstein, there are continued opportunities to discover new products, techniques and procedures. "We are always in training for something," he comments. So, Supply King representatives are armed with the latest information to better service customers.

It's not just the field representatives that are able to counsel customers. Levenstein points out that Supply King customer service representatives are knowledgeable about products and can answer most questions that are asked when customers call in. If the question is one that a customer service rep is not fully prepared to answer, "then the call gets transferred to me or another available salesperson," explains Levenstein.

A voice-mail recording doesn't help when it's midnight and you've realized you've made a mistake while stripping the floor. And, after the switchboard shuts down for the night, punching "0" probably won't get you a live person who can take responsibility until regular working hours. Although Supply King has a voicemail system to handle the volume of calls they get each day, the "first point of contact for our customers are their salespeople," notes Levenstein. "All our sales representatives are available by their cell phone at all

hours." And, that also means they are available on Saturdays. "One of my accounts, a nursing home, called me one Saturday in the late afternoon," recalls Bruce Crystal, sales associate for Supply King. It was a summer day that Crystal was spending with his family on the New Jersey shore. "They were out of lids," he remembers. He changed out of his beach clothes, got into his car and drove to the warehouse. After col-



lecting the product, he then drove to the account and delivered the lids.

He lost some fun in the sun with his kids, but he didn't leave a customer hanging for something they really needed.

By working with seasoned Jan/San professionals at Supply King, customers have discovered that they save time and money. One way customers have economized is relying on the expertise of the Supply King representatives to help them determine their facility orders. "I just had a customer provide

me with the blueprint for an \$80 million facility," notes Crystal. "I spec'd the opening order for everything from garbage cans to toilet tissue."

Beyond being a convenience for customers, the knowledge that comes to bear on that type of service not only saves the customer time, but assures there's no purchasing mistakes. The customer is not stocked with hand soap for the next ten years or shorted on toilet tissue the first week of operation. As Crystal points out, he takes the responsibility for providing the right products in the right amounts based on the blueprint. And that type of accountability takes a big load off the minds of his customers.

SUPPLY KING

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Adrienne Levin, vice-president
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Year Founded: 1982
Number of Employees: 27
Annual Sales: \$9 million
Warehouse Space: 26,000 square feet
Number of SKUs: 4,500



Customers depend on Supply King for good service, effective products and helpful advice. Also, Supply King's experienced staff is something end-users can count on.

Depend on creativity

Sometimes garnering new business takes individual initiative and drive. By the same token, servicing the customer can sometimes challenge one's imagination and circle of resources. Sales representatives at Supply King are given a lot of autonomy when it comes to servicing their territory.

"We permit the salespeople to function as close to their own business as possible," points out Levenstein. "We do very little to dictate schedules or geography, although we do direct general structure." That, according to Levenstein, gives the "good" salespeople the opportunity to be highly successful. "The sky's the limit," he adds for those wanting to work hard.

The sales reps are provided with some leeway, therefore they feel free to be creative in attracting new business and keeping existing business. As an example, one salesperson had an account that was a chain of non-profit nursing and assisted-living centers. They switched to a purchase order system, which had to be funneled through a home office. Supply King worked with the account to build an inventory sheet to meet these new ordering requirements and provide ordering consistency across all 22 locations.

"I work to get customers whatever they need," says Supply King rep Crystal. Sometimes that takes some real creativity. Crystal has a beach club account that asked for a couple dozen "baby pools" one spring in anticipation of the summer season. After exploring some wholesale options, Crystal uncovered a reliable source and delivered the small plastic pools. It's now an item that is requested from this account at the beginning of each summer season. And, each year Crystal finds the best resource and assures delivery.

Depend on technology

Although independent, Supply King plays technology hardball with current software and hardware. Their Web site is gaining popularity with some of their customers for an easy way to reorder. And, with the addition of DDi System's Distribution Management Software, sales representatives are able to provide real-time inventory information from their remote laptop computers while sitting at a customer's conference table. By using the new computer system, sales reps can work from home, checking on customer accounts and reviewing business reports. The DDi System also performs automated billing by truck, so the company can convert an order to an invoice an entire truck at a time, which saves considerable time and labor.

Although one account may be very proficient in the use of technology, another account may rely upon a manual process for ordering and accounting. Supply King has

proven its flexibility in addressing the needs of accounts at either end of the spectrum. For those accounts that find Internet reordering the most efficient use of their time, Supply King has responded with easy online ordering. For those accounts that prefer to either fax, e-mail or phone in their orders, there is accommodation, as well.

"Some accounts don't want janitorial staff online at computer monitors at odd hours of the night," explains Levenstein. "So, we accommodate whatever process works the best for the customer." He points out that some larger customers have their own system for ordering and Supply King adapts to make them comfortable. As an example, "We have one large account that needs to order using Excel files," he adds.

In addition to orders, Supply King has a process to check e-mails throughout the day. With the proliferation of the Internet, many potential accounts across the country are finding Supply King through the search engines. By staying flexible in how to service accounts — even those in different states — the company keeps its customer base growing.

There's only so much growth you can generate through current account expansion. Shelly Kawut discovered this reality a long time ago. Since the beginning of Supply King in 1982, he realized the worth of listening when opportunity knocked on his door. His company has expanded to being the largest independent distributorship in the state by smart business growth and acquiring the right companies at the right time.

Over the years, Kawut has integrated four other companies into his business. Three have been janitorial/paper supply companies, and the third, Contamination Control Products, is a division of Supply King that specializes in meeting the needs for critically environmental equipment and supplies. In a world filled with faceless voicemail and overwhelming national conglomerations, it's easy to see how customers can depend on the independence of Supply King and the service they deliver. **W/S**



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