

Inside mover

by Jeff Gardner, Maximum Performance Group

This month's top performer has all the inside moves

K Keith Saville is a top performing sales professional from Sunbelt Office Products which is located in Norcross, Georgia, just outside of Atlanta. Keith sold over \$2.9 million dollars in 2007 and his goal for 2008 is \$3.25 million. The interesting thing about Keith is that he does this all over the phone: Sunbelt Office Products utilises a B2B sales model that is 100 percent insides sales.

Keith Saville started out his business career in hotel and resort management with Marriott working in Syracuse, New York. Tired of the cold weather and snow, he decided to move to Atlanta in 1996. He got a job selling hotel and ticket packages for the Atlanta Braves baseball team. In late, 2001 he looked up an old friend, Brian Rossi who told him that he had a sales position available with Sunbelt.

He joined a company that exudes passion and enthusiasm, typified within the first few seconds of a phone conversation with charismatic VP of Sales, Rossi. How often when you ask "how are you?" does someone answer back: "I am living the office products dream"? Clearly he influences the culture at Sunbelt and is one of the reasons it is so successful.

Keith remembers the first time he met with Jim Anderson, the company president, who told him that a sales job with Sunbelt was a great opportunity for someone who was aggressive and willing to work hard. Obviously, Keith took the advice to heart and feels he could never say enough to fully thank him for the opportunity.

When Keith started at Sunbelt there were only 4 salespeople, today they have 40. Even in December 2001, Sunbelt's model was insides sales.

Sunbelt is independently owned and operated and reached \$18 million in sales for 2007. That is an incredible number especially when you consider that in 1999 the company did less than a million dollars. In 2008 sales are tracking its goal of \$22 million dollars.

JG: Why are you successful?

KS: First off, I am very passionate about what I do. I realise that there's only a one percent difference between a top and an average

salesperson. To keep that edge, I have to do the little things that make the difference, like taking the time to write that thank you card or taking the time to make that extra sales call.

Another reason for my success is that our company has invested in technology and continues to invest. Our systems and tools are such an important part of what we do. Without those, there would be no way that I would be at \$2.9 million in sales.

Our drivers are great. They are the face of Sunbelt and when they go out on deliveries they actually bond with our customers. When I first started we had two drivers. One day the two drivers were overloaded with deliveries so Jim Anderson, our owner, went out and made deliveries that day. Now we have 21 drivers. We are gifted because we have such good people around us and we all work together.

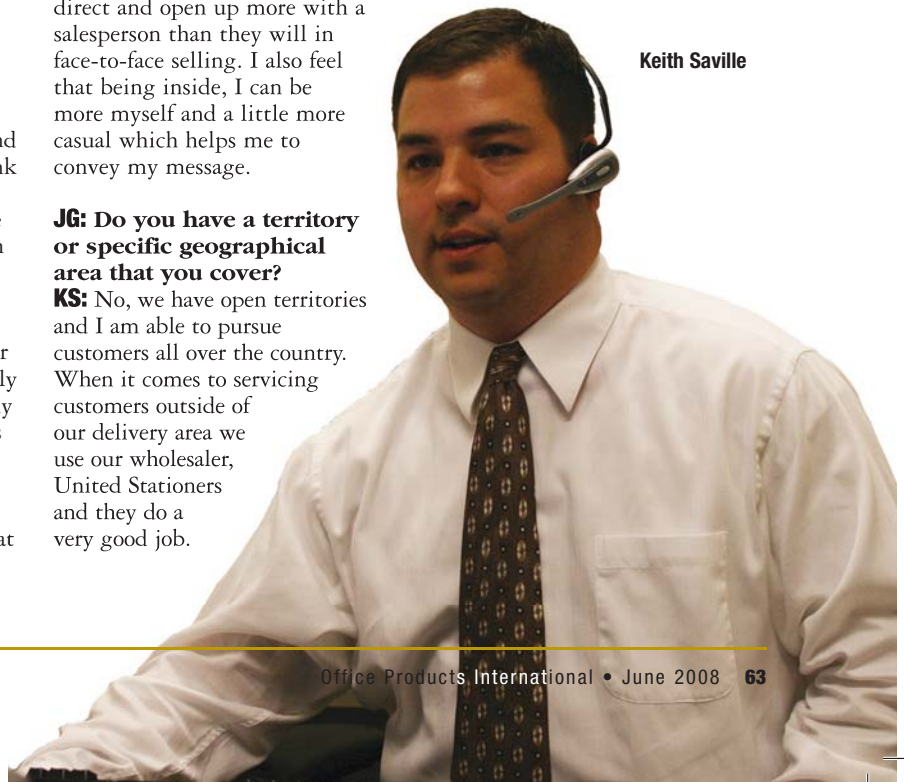
JG: What are the advantages to being an inside salesperson versus outside?

KS: One of the biggest advantages is that I am able to contact many more people than someone that goes outside. Over the phone, customers will tend to be more direct and open up more with a salesperson than they will in face-to-face selling. I also feel that being inside, I can be more myself and a little more casual which helps me to convey my message.

JG: Do you have a territory or specific geographical area that you cover?

KS: No, we have open territories and I am able to pursue customers all over the country. When it comes to servicing customers outside of our delivery area we use our wholesaler, United Stationers and they do a very good job.

Keith Saville



JG: What size and types of companies do you target prospect?

KS: I have customers in many different industries and my typical customer has 40-100 employees.

JG: Sunbelt has been described as a new account acquisition machine, how do you personally acquire new accounts?

KS: Now that I have an established base of business, a lot of my new customers come from word of mouth or referrals, and I'm not afraid to ask for referrals. In addition, I still make cold calls every day. Last month I added 12 new accounts.

JG: What about growing the sales with your current customers, how do you approach that?

KS: Growing current customers definitely is a focus. Our new software is able to break the purchases down by category for us. So it makes it easier to identify opportunities. I make a point of having conversations with my customers that go something like this: "We've been working well together for a while now and I really appreciate your business. One of the things I've noticed is that we've been able to help you out in these three categories. However, I failed to ask you about this... I'm sorry I didn't catch this one for you because I know I can offer better savings for you." I take the responsibility upon myself that I didn't let them know we offered a certain product or category.

JG: Walk me through a typical selling day for you.

KS: I usually get in early around 7.30am and until 9.00am I am doing quotes, taking care of emails, and customer analysis type activities. Then from around 9.00am until midday it's solid phone time, calling customers, quoting deals, and closing sales. After lunch around 1.00pm I make my prospecting calls. Then the rest of the afternoon is busy with order entry and trying to catch things before the end of the day deadline.

JG: What are your favourite books or audio programmes?

KS: My favourite audio/DVD is Michael Wickett's programme: *Explode Your Potential*. As far as a best book, my favourite is Brian Tracy's *Be A Sales Superstar*, it's a quick read that has very positive and motivational points that help with everyday life, not just sales.

JG: How do you keep yourself motivated in selling and deal with rejection?

KS: My family is a huge part of my motivation and I want to provide for them. However, in sales there are times when you get rejection; it's just part of the game of selling. The important thing is you just have to make sure that it's only a small part of the game.

I'm also not afraid to learn new things. There's not been a day when I've come into this building and I haven't learned something new. I learn from the other salespeople at Sunbelt, even the new people have ideas we can all learn from.

JG: Tell me about a memorable sale that you've made

KS: I made a cold call to a company and the call went okay, but it wasn't one of my best, however they did buy a couple of toners. About two months later, I wasn't hearing from them. So I called the decision maker and he said he was having problems getting things delivered on time and getting in touch with a salesperson from his current supplier. So I showed him how I could solve those problems and he started ordering from me. Then I found out he was the decision maker for a nationwide company. Well they are now my largest account. It's one of those things that you never know who you are going to get on the line when you make that call.

Another example is a large company that I called on for over a year. The decision maker was very hesitant to even consider a change. So I kept calling her and slowly I was able to develop a certain amount of rapport. I finally took the approach that she didn't have to give me all the business, just the next order. Well she did and with that order she found out that everything I had been saying about Sunbelt was true. After that initial order she gave me all the business.

JG: What advice would you give someone new starting out in sales in the office products industry?

KS: There's definitely a tough period for the first three months, where you might doubt yourself. However, don't get discouraged because it is a process of getting catalogues and your name out there to the prospects. You have to lay the foundation first before you can make it happen.

Surround yourself with positive people. And most important stay focused on what drives you so you're doing it for the right reasons. ■

Don't forget to contact me with your suggestion for a top performing salesperson to be featured in an upcoming article. Good Selling!



Jeff Gardner is the president of Maximum Performance Group, a Chicago-based training and consulting firm that specialises in the office products industry. For more information, you can contact him direct at jeff@maximumperformancegroup.com