

KELLER'S OFFICE SUPPLY

The Keller team
(l. to r.):
John Lake
Rhonda Pruett
and Chip Keller

- **Key people:**
John Lake, furniture manager
Rhonda Pruett, inside sales
- **Product mix:** Office supplies,
office furniture, jan-san, printing
- **Founded:** 1998
- **Employees:** 6
- **Business partners:** S.P. Richards, ECI
- **Online supplies sales:** 33%
- **kellerofficesupply.com**



SECRETS OF SUCCESS: Keller Office Supply, Martinsville, IN

If you're an independent office products dealer, success isn't always about adding that big new account. Sometimes, you find yourself measuring success by how you respond when something bad happens to your dealership.

Case in point: Chip Keller of Keller Office Supply in Martinsville, Indiana. Martinsville is a small market—a community of some 15,000 about 40 miles south of Indianapolis—and Chip knew he was never going to be one of the industry's mega players. But over some 15 years, he had built up a business that provided a living and a little bit more for him and his team. Then, as the Great Recession was getting underway in 2008, things started getting nasty.

Not only was the general downturn forcing cutbacks among Chip's regular customers but he also started seeing a much sharper decline in business from one of his major accounts, a local hospital that had been a steady source of sales for over ten years.

A quick call to the hospital's head of purchasing confirmed Chip's worst fears. "He told us there was nothing wrong with our prices or our service but they had been bought by a larger company who had a supplies contract with someone else and we were pretty much history," he recalls.

No one, however, stays long in the independent ranks without a willingness to fight back in the face of tough business challenges. Chip is an inveterate networker and Step One of his response was to boost that side of the business.

"I had always been involved in the community but I started making a point of going to as many different civic functions as I could—local chambers, Rotary, etc.—and trying to meet more prospects," he explains.

But the recession was still biting, budgets were still very tight and new business was slow in coming.

Things didn't really start to improve until Phase 2 of Chip's recovery plan kicked in. **With the help of INDEPENDENT DEALER**

columnist Marisa Pensa of sales training company Methods in Motion, Chip took retail store manager Rhonda Pruett and re-directed some of her time towards an inside sales effort.

Rhonda spent about a month working with Methods in Motion trainers on her prospecting calls and even though she had no previous sales experience, she secured 12 new accounts for the dealership in just the first 45 days.

At the same time, Chip also started expanding his dealership's product mix. In addition to adding more janitorial products, he is currently in the process of partnering with a former quick print shop operator to offer a broader range of printing services.

None of these steps, Chip admits, are going to make up fully for the lost hospital business overnight but, he says, they are bringing in some very welcome new sales dollars and providing Chip and his team with more than a few good reasons to feel good about the future.