



Hangin' with Harrington

The Girl's Got Spunk

By Erin Harrington, Managing Editor

Despite the competition and the established vendor-distributor relationships already in place in the area, Candace O'Connor shook up the status quo, signed on an impressive line-up of vendors, and is drawing a lot of dealers through her doors at her new distribution company, The Security Source, Inc. When you consider the obstacles O'Connor has hurdled, you've got to admire her stamina. Think about it—starting an entirely new security equipment distribution operation. And, in Cleveland, Ohio, of all places—a market already penetrated with national and regional distributors.

Preparation, always a key ingredient to success, has definitely played a part. O'Connor brought to the venture some 29 years of experience in the wholesale distribution industry, 23 of them in security. A fixture on Cleveland's distribution landscape, she joined the staff of a small Cleveland distributor in 1982 and worked her way up to President before leaving in September, 2003. She started her distribution career in purchasing, and achieved increased profits through effective negotiations with vendors. Sales were her next conquest. O'Connor built them by building relationships and involving herself with several industry associations. By 1990, when equipment prices were falling dramatically, O'Connor, General Manager by then, habitually found ways to cut expenses



without cutting services to the dealers. Success is her legacy and now she is bringing all the right stuff to The Security Source, Inc.

Knowing she needed to stand out amidst the competition, O'Connor raised the bar on service. While providing value-added services certainly isn't a new concept in distribution, O'Connor is approaching her delivery of them with a fresh perspective and an energized commitment. With how quickly products and applications are evolving, she sees technical support among her most important offerings.



Candace O'Connor

"Technology in security electronics is changing rapidly," O'Connor says. "The manufacturers are changing quickly to incorporate new methods and complex features. Keeping up with all of this change is time-consuming and demanding. The main focus of security dealers is on selling and installing systems. Our role at The Security Source, Inc. is to educate our customers on the products and any changes to them or their applications."

O'Connor is quick to credit her team for bringing the knowledge and expertise needed to the table. They are Rich Blaha

("the best CCTV guy I've ever met," O'Connor says), Mike Steffancin ("he's great at fire,") and Jeff Stark, who was a dealer for 20+ years and "is great at troubleshooting technically," O'Connor adds. Together, The Security Source, Inc. team is serving the needs of dealers in Ohio and the Midwestern states.

The MO at The Security Source is that they will grow by helping their dealers grow. "We are their reference library," O'Connor states. "We test equipment. We make end user calls with the dealers, whether it is a demo, to troubleshoot a system, or to train the end user on how to get the most out of his new system."

Going against conventional wisdom, as all other distributors in the area are located on the east side of Cleveland, O'Connor chose a west side location close to downtown but within minutes of all the major highways. Within their first year of operation, The Security Source, Inc. closed the year with very healthy sales numbers, just under \$2,000,000. "Reviewing the sales data, it was projects that the dealers needed intense assistance with that put us over the top," O'Connor points out. "Projects such as a closed circuit camera system at a huge distribution terminal here in Cleveland, a new parking garage at a large institution locally, and a chain of oil change shops nationwide provided clear proof that our plans were working."

In setting up their product lines (they include Security, Fire, CCTV, Access, Sound, Wire & Cable, and Hardware & Accessories), O'Connor points out that her first order of business was deciding which lines she wanted to put in place, then going and talking with the vendors.

The Beat



In negotiating for certain lines, O'Connor gave the vendors her word that, even without open terms or the same pricing as some of their competitors, her company would move the equipment at a faster rate. "We only made this promise to vendors we really wanted to partner with," O'Connor states. "We had the track record and the credibility and were confident that we could keep our word. It worked." And, it hasn't gone unnoticed—O'Connor was just recently nominated to become one of the Top Ten Women Business Owners in Cleveland.

Achieving success takes more than business savvy alone. Launching her own distribution company as a woman in a predominantly male industry and in a location seeped in competition, took guts. Why did she do it?

"I had to try to make this dream become a reality," she admits. "My basic strategy was to tackle price competition with exceptional service. We were the new guys and we wanted to be the very best that we could in serving the needs of security dealers. I was sure that if dealers would give us a chance to prove this, if they could experience the difference, and if they began to see us as a partner, that we would have a growing enterprise."

Providing security is an immense responsibility, O'Connor feels. "Although everyone in the chain needs to make a profit, the end users' safety and peace of mind are critical," she comments. The security dealer, our customer, is ultimately responsible for this. "Our essential task, as we saw it, was to assist the dealer and ensure that a security dealer who chose

us as their supplier met this challenge very successfully."

It's a task that Candace O'Connor and the staff at The Security Source, Inc. are up for. Watch out!



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