

KEY ACCOUNTS SPOTLIGHT



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How long have you been at the co-op and how long have you worked with Key Accounts?

2018 was my 33rd year at the co-op and I've been managing Key Accounts for 19 years. I started as a Customer Service Supervisor, worked in our security division and then moved on to marketing. I recently transitioned to the newly formed Energy Services Team. I've taken my key account experience to help develop strategies for applying new technologies to both residential and C&I membership. I've worn a lot of hats!

What do you like most about your job?

I love that every day is not the same day. It's always different. I enjoy seeing what our manufacturers make, what they create. We're always helping our school districts where we can. We build relationships with some really great people.

Are there any special events you hold with Key Accounts?

South Carolina holds an Industry Appreciation Week every year. We started getting involved years ago with a golf outing, but after the Great Recession people downsized so it kind of tailed off. More recently, we began hosting a thank you barbeque in each of our three districts. We encourage our Key Accounts to bring their wrench-turners, the folks that don't normally get out of the plant very often. It's neat to see our CEO sitting down with a facilities guy, still in his uniform. We don't have a formal program at the event, we just feed them, thank them for their business and give them a small, branded gift.

What are some things your co-op does that you consider Key Accounts best practices?

The strongest thing we do is outage notification and follow-up. Our system will send me an email if a Key Account is affected, so I can then reach out to the business. We're close to having it set up so that an email and text will go directly to the point of contact, increasing efficiency. The business needs to know if it's going to be minutes, hours or days. They need to know if they should let the employees standing around go home for the day. The outages usually hit our school districts the hardest. We saw after Hurricane Irma those superintendents just need you to be honest with them, like we always have been. Meanwhile, the neighboring IOU just told them what they wanted to hear. Be proactive with honest, open communication.

Tell us about a few of your top Key Accounts.

We have a Walgreens distribution center, which is our largest load. Next largest, we serve Sandvik Coromant, who makes carbide cutting tips. We also serve the Greenville water treatment plant, who is a big user for us. We serve the number one sprinkler head manufacturer in the country as well as a company that makes commercial kitchens for the military. They can just drop those in the middle of the desert. Pretty cool operation.

Do you have a Key Account that is really unique and what makes them so?

Tri Tech, who builds military kitchens, is definitely one of them. We also have the company who produces the control arms for Boeing aircrafts. That's the rod that enables the wing flaps to go up and down, so pretty important.

Any new or "on the horizon" technologies you think will impact working with Key Accounts?

Robotics is playing a huge role in mechanizing operations too. We have one company that die cast aluminum parts for lawnmowers. It's brutally hot there in the summer because they have to keep the aluminum in liquid form. Perfect scenario to use robots in place of people.

How about shifting or new industry trends?

A top priority is working with renewables. We have members that have green mandates that they have to meet. Knowing that, we help our C&I folks make those scenarios mutually beneficial. With our industrial manufacturing people in particular, they've learned they can do more with less and increase their profit margins. We don't have as many plants operate over the weekend.

What tools or resources in the network have really helped you in your professional development (TE, NRECA, CFC, NREDA, etc. or local & state organizations)?

Touchstone Energy has been very helpful in providing the network of people and resources that help me do my job. The Key Accounts list serv is great for getting four, five, six responses from my peers really quickly. Then you come to the conferences like NET and see what people are doing right. After taking Erick Rheam's Key Accounts Master Course, I sat down with my internal team here at Blue Ridge and we talked about communications strategies when working with folks in different departments. Here's why I need to contact you and what's the best way to contact you.

What is one learning experience you can share and how did it change the way you did things overall or with a specific Key Account?

We had one situation where we totalized their transformers into one meter reading. We found out that one of the modules was struck by lightning and wasn't reporting, so they weren't paying their bill for quite some time. It wasn't our fault but we worked it out with the Key Account by being transparent. When you make a mistake, be honest, be fair and do the right thing. Down the road, it'll come back to you.

When you have an unhappy member, ask them what they think is fair. Chances are they are willing to accept a lot less than you were planning to give them. That's served me well over the years.

What keeps you busy outside the office? Family, hobbies, other organizations?

We're empty nesters now! I'm very involved in mentoring young people. I've found there's a huge need for workforce development. People can't show up on time, can't pass the drug tests. You've got to mentor them through what they didn't get growing up. That's where my passion is.

What's one piece of advice would you give to someone starting in the Key Accounts job role?

Create a network, internal and external. You need buy in from the top, particularly in the early stages of a Key Accounts program. Get your colleagues, your internal network, to understand the importance of the program. During our weekly safety meetings, I've had decision makers from our school district and one of our manufacturers come in and let our staff know all the things they have to consider when the power is out. They don't need to know exactly when it's coming back on, but they need some info to make informed decisions. That's been huge with our linemen, helping them understand the priorities for some of our Key Accounts. As for building your external network, the NET Conference has been an invaluable sounding board and networking platform.

Visit <https://biznetwork.touchstoneenergy.com> to learn more.

