

Prime Sellers of the Premium Brand

by Eileen Keller

Successful salespeople are often best described as entrepreneurial souls. Dedicated to excellence, they are skilled at picking premium products, matching the customers' needs with appropriate solutions and developing a fruitful sales plan. The best salespeople know they must be able to answer the buyer's age-old question, "What's in it for me?"

Selling the premium brand of beef is one way John Landry of Sysco Food Services of Kansas City and Mark Idoni of Lankford-Sysco Food Services LLC distinguish their customers and help to grow their clients' businesses. Landry was recently recognized as *Certified Angus Beef*® (CAB®) Specialist of the Year for 2002. Idoni received the brand's inaugural Distinguished New Performer award.

Landry's mindset and his abilities translate into good business, says Jim Hope, president and chief executive officer (CEO) of Sysco Food Services of Kansas City. The distributor's CAB sales have remained solid since it first appeared as a top 20 CAB distributor in October 1999. Its sales for fiscal year (FY) 2002 grew 26% with Landry's leadership, earning it 11th place in CAB sales for the year, the highest a broadline distributor has ever achieved.

"John has tremendous passion for the business and for the beef industry," Hope

says. "He is always teaching. He has done an incredible job in training our marketing associates on the value of the CAB brand."

"John's committed to the CAB brand and his ability to integrate it into the Sysco-Kansas City offerings has helped create dedicated customers by making them more successful," says Mark Polzer, CAB foodservice director. "This includes nontraditional foodservice accounts, including five hospitals."

Built on solid relationships

Looking beyond immediate sales, Landry fosters a relationship with the Kansas Beef Council (KBC) and, as a trained chef, has helped cook for industry tours. He also hosted a tour of the Sysco facility in Kansas City for the American Angus Association, which allowed them to get a firsthand look at how a major foodservice distributor works. Landry has also developed opportunities, including television exposure, to tell consumers about the CAB brand, helping to develop additional business for his customers.

Landry's customers know he goes the extra mile for them, Hope says. On a recent trip to Wichita, Kan., from Kansas City, he received a phone call. A customer in Garden City, Kan., needed assistance. Landry added an estimated 500-mile detour to his road trip to help the Garden City customer — and still

met his commitments in Wichita.

"His passion and work ethic really are second-to-none," Hope adds.

Landry brought with him a thorough understanding of the foodservice business, Hope says. He worked diligently to gain broad distributor experience and now blends all of it to assist clients as the Kansas City protein brand manager and CAB specialist.

Building brand awareness

Idoni also brought a foodservice background to his position at Lankford. He started in March 2000 as a center-of-the plate specialist, but quickly became the distributor's CAB specialist in August 2000.

"He took a newly licensed distributor and helped build sales volume and brand awareness," Polzer says. "He was instrumental in quickly adding our convenience products to their selection."

One of his many strengths is identifying clients who will profit from adding the brand to their menu and then finding the right CAB products for them, says Fred Lankford, president and CEO of Lankford-Sysco.

"He understands the high quality and the attributes of CAB fresh and value-added products," Lankford says.

Idoni's efforts recently earned the distributor third place among foodservice distributors in sales of CAB convenience products.

"He is dedicated to educating Lankford's sales team, helping our customers succeed with the right product and service, and [he] helps to keep everyone focused on the advantages the CAB brand brings to customers," Lankford adds.

CAB's foodservice distributor partners are responsible for licensing restaurant and other foodservice partners and servicing those accounts. Each distributor has a specially trained CAB specialist who works closely with the brand's foodservice division. Foodservice sales are more than 30% of the brand's annual sales, with continued growth anticipated, Polzer says.

CAB's Food Service Specialist Seminar is an annual event designed as an educational opportunity to share innovative ideas, to review issues and to improve sales management skills for licensees' representatives. It was held in Newport Beach, Calif., Jan. 15-17. The awards were presented Jan. 16.

