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J.J. Keller & Associates, Inc.: Adjusting to a Changing Market

by JOHN CARR

When John J. Keller founded J.J. Keller & Associates, Inc. in 1953, the cutting edge of computer technology was the IBM 701, the computer manufacturer's first commercially available machine. Weighing roughly 20,500 pounds and occupying almost 3,000 square feet, it was nothing a company that focused on transportation, insurance, and warehousing needed to think about.

But over the years, computers have changed, and J.J. Keller's business has evolved. Today, Keller is a leader in the regulatory compliance field, helping more than 300,000 customers guarantee that their businesses are in line with government regulations in health and safety, human resources, the environment, and so on. The company publishes a range of newsletters, guides, and other publications designed for people who work with a variety of compliance issues. Keller covers just about all industries, although the roots of the company still show through in its various transportation and driver management and training offerings. And in 2005, the company's web-based KellerOnline service won The Software & Information Industry Association's (SIAA) CODiE Award for Best Vertical Business solution.

"J.J. Keller is a company that focuses intently on customer service," says John Blossom, president and founder of Shore Communications, Inc., "keeping in tune with its clients' needs and using their support staff to build relationships that lead to more product satisfaction and deeper insights into how product improvements can serve their clients best."

A Big Player in Compliance

"Keller's one of the bigger publishers that focus on compliance areas," says David Curle, director and lead analyst for Legal, Tax & Regulatory Information with Outsell, Inc. "We do an annual market sizing of the legal publishing—among the independent companies, Keller's pretty big."

This is quite an understatement: According to a 2008 Outsell report on the Legal, Tax & Regulatory segment, among independent compliance information providers, J.J. Keller has four times the market share of its closest competitor, Complinet, Ltd. And Outsell estimated Keller's 2007 revenue to be \$169 million, compared to Complinet's \$42 million. Keller states that 90% of the Fortune 1000 uses its products and services.



Here is an aerial shot of J.J. Keller's Neenah campus in Neenah, Wis., home to many of the company's 1,200-plus employees.

But Keller doesn't think its offerings are only beneficial to large companies. "We feel that our content can help people at the executive level

and staff management level of any size company be aware of compliance issues and risks in particular," says Webb Shaw, Keller's director of editorial resources. "Not understanding those risks and not having a place to go to learn about them can be very dangerous in terms of agency fines, court rulings that can be very expensive, and some very bad publicity as a result of say an accident or some other incident that could lead to that kind of exposure."

Shaw offered the example of a 2005 explosion at BP Products North America, Inc.'s Texas City, Texas, refinery. The company was initially levied a \$50 million fine and 3 years probation for violating the Clean Air Act, and subsequent governmental investigation resulted in further fines of \$2.4 million and \$92,000. These large fines were the result of many smaller violations of exactly the sort Keller helps its clients avoid, such as unsafe electrical equipment, failure to correct deficiencies in





J.J. Keller's North Park headquarters in Neenah, Wis.

equipment, failure to evaluate alarms and instruments for design reliability and integrity, and more.

KellerOnline

J.J. Keller has kept up with the times, offering software solutions to its clients beginning in the 1990s and web-based interactive tools in the new millennium. These include FleetMentor, a trucking fleet management advisor; Prospera, a human resources management tool; and the award-winning KellerOnline safety management tool.

KellerOnline began development in 1999, and it went live on Jan. 1, 2001. "We initially started out with a big name web company as a partner in developing it—at the time they were a big name, now they don't exist anymore," says Shaw. "We realized after a couple months that they didn't know anymore about what we were trying to do or how to do it than we did. And that was the revelation that we were really on to something."

Blossom describes KellerOnline as "a robust solution for the regulatory/compliance space, combining easy access to key regulatory documents with training and human resources solutions that enable professionals dealing with work safety and related compliance issues to get a wide array of sources rapidly and cost-effectively."

KellerOnline is a feature-rich product, providing a large set of tools and reference for the safety management professional. Legal information on the site is automatically customized to be state-specific based on the IP address where a user logs in, and drop-down menus enable users to change state customization quickly. Features of the service include the Safety Management Process, which lets a user generate a new safety program based on regulations and best practices; Reminders and News & Alerts, where changes to the site and to the law are highlighted; Topic Index, covering more than 900 safety topics; Reference, covering federal and state regulatory information; and a monthly webcast regarding a safety topic.

The site also features a human touch: KellerOnline has a staff of 45 to 50 editors who update the site three times a day and who are available to help users. The site's Personal Assistant feature lets users post questions and have Keller's editors do the research for them. Linda Voight, customer retention representative for

KellerOnline, Prospera, and FleetMentor, says, "We'll have executives who have someone bring a problem to them and they say 'No Problem, I'll do the research and find the answer,' and then they actually just turn it over to us."

Expert-Powered Tools

"We have a very broad and deep group of subject matter experts, and that's really the power behind all of these tools," says Shaw. "We also have a fully functioning research and technical library that they tap into," that employs seven information professionals and holds roughly 98,000 titles and 1,000 routed periodicals.

Users can also access the expertise of other users, either through a message board or the Info Exchange, where they can upload and share files, such as PowerPoint presentations or PDFs.

The Interactive Tools are the "meat and potatoes" of KellerOnline, according to Voight. This section provides users with access to a large selection of prewritten safety programs that only require a user to input the specific names of individuals from that company. This section also includes Training Programs, Chemical Programs, Audits & Benchmarking, and Recordkeeping Programs, as well as additional tools such as a formula calculator, facility marking guide, and a Create Your Own Policy Handbook tool.

Outsell's Curle says KellerOnline "moves toward a real workflow product that someone can use on a daily basis to get the jobs done that they have as a safety compliance officer. It's a standout product in that sense."

With more than 17,000 current subscribers, the company claims KellerOnline is the most used online safety solution available. According to Curle, though, the product is quite popular, but its use is by no means ubiquitous. "The whole space is really pretty fragmented, there are a lot of small providers in the safety compliance space, so it's hard to say that it's a standout product in the sense of being universally adopted or anything like that," he says. "I think they have pretty good penetration, but there are a lot of small players and that's true of pretty much all of the compliance space."

Blossom does not think the competition is stiff. "While I saw some interesting technology solutions for this space in this year's field of competitors for the SIIA CODiE, none was really positioned



Books on regulations and compliance lead J.J. Keller's family of products.

from a service standpoint to compete with J.J. Keller's approach," he says. "While they will be challenged in the [future] to keep their products well-integrated into other emerging enterprise platforms, for now J.J. Keller has done a great job of pushing itself and its clients in directions that will be beneficial for both of them for years to come."

Beyond Online

Besides KellerOnline and its kin, J.J. Keller is engaged in several other activities beyond traditional publishing. For one, Keller can and does build custom solutions for clients. "We are finding an increase in the amount of content we license through our custom solutions unit," says Shaw. "And in some cases, it's what we call pure content licensing; in other words, people want to be able to put our content on their intranet, for example, so they license that right. In other cases, they're licensing content that goes into a custom product or service."

Keller places a premium on its customers' privacy with regard to this service (as well as others). "There are some people that we actually have a clause in the contract that states that we can't talk about the fact that we even have a contract with them," says Shaw. "Compliance is a sensitive issue."

Shaw notes that another area of focus for Keller is licensing its content through aggregators, syndicators, and other third parties. Currently, the company is partnered with Voxant, Inc.; Mochila, Inc.; iCopyright, Inc.; and Books24x7, with other contracts in the works. "We're especially interested in the special libraries market," says Shaw. "As we know firsthand, they're big consumers of online content—and discriminating consumers."

The Future of Compliance

Whatever the future holds for the compliance market, it's a good bet J.J. Keller will be a big part of it. "Compliance and

workforce safety solutions are becoming more advanced and varied, but J.J. Keller has been highly conscious of the need to keep many traditional tools and techniques in tune with how people look for these solutions and expect them to be delivered," says Blossom.

He adds, "Manuals, training videos and other staples of the industry will continue to be around for many years to come, but J.J. Keller has worked to keep their wide range of solutions in tune with how people want them delivered today."

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