

## Proximity Wireless

Keith and Susan Ebel put it all on the line: The house, the retirement portfolio, their personal credit cards, their cars—even Keith’s prized ’63 Corvette was leveraged to the hilt to get Proximity Wireless off the ground in April 2002 and keep it running in those early, sometimes dark years.

“We financed ourselves from Day One,” says Keith, “but it cost us dearly. We could have lost everything.” Instead, they persevered past start-up, then through the recession of 2007–09 before they started landing the kinds of clients needed to get their wireless solutions company into high gear. Most any entrepreneur has the nerve of a riverboat gambler, but in the Ebels’ case, that appreciation for risk and reward is backed up with a value system grounded in personal responsibility.

“I don’t believe in trying to build personal wealth with somebody else’s money,” Keith Ebel says. “Philosophically, if you’re not willing to put your own stuff on the block, why would you be willing to put somebody else’s on the block? That’s not good business.”

This year, Lenexa-based Proximity Wireless was among the Top 10 in *Ingram’s* Corporate Report 100, showcasing the Kansas City region’s fastest-growing companies. Its growth rate from 2008 through 2011 was 528 percent. The company, with just four people on the payroll, works with major manufacturers in the wireless realm to integrate the full range of wireless communications, seamlessly linking cellular systems with private radio, Wi/Fi, WiMAX, telemetry, GPS systems and more. Proximity Wireless was inspired by Susan’s sales background and Keith’s history of more than two decades in microwave circuit systems design—a deep understanding of the technology, right down to the circuit board. He saw an opportunity emerging in what today is a \$5 billion growth industry because of a huge gap between service providers and the black box providers. Most Fortune 1000 companies, he said, have extremely adept back-office IT groups, but their knowledge base stops where convergence starts.

The Ebels’ approach to business development sprouted from the works of Mike Michalowicz, author of a business self-help book called *The Pumpkin Plan*. “You’ve got pumpkin farmers that spread a lot of mediocre seed over a large area in kind of mediocre soil and they’re going for volume,” Keith Ebel says. “Our approach is, we want to grow a few 1,000-pound pumpkins. And take them to market and everybody goes, ‘Ooooh, aaaaah, look at that magnificent half-ton pumpkin.’”

But that doesn’t just happen, he says: You have to make sure you pick the right seeds, fertilizer and soil, the right amount of water and sun, and you have to get rid of all the little pumpkins

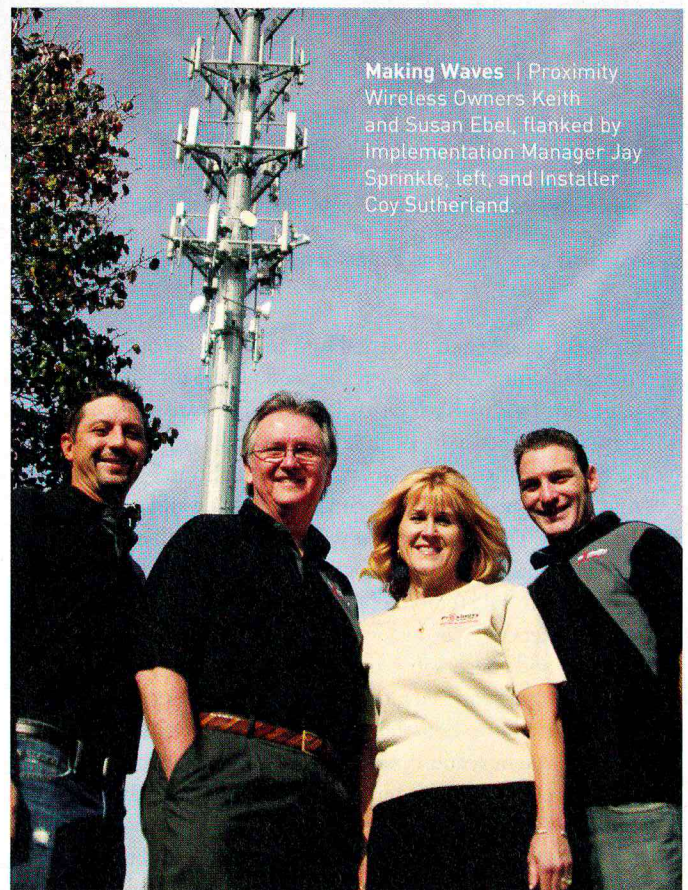
that spring up around it that are taking your attention away from the big one. The theory, put into practice, has yielded clients like Sprint, Garmin, Kansas City Power & Light, the Chiefs, DHS, Corning and John Deere & Co. Those are some big pumpkins, and Ebel says the key to carefully nurturing each.

“You come in, you are given an opportunity or you groom an opportunity with a client like that, then you knock it out of the park for them,” he says. “And then the next facility they have on their mind, they call you because they look at you and say, ‘Wow, this company really fawned over us. They paid a lot of attention to us. They made sure that every little detail was attended to. They took care to meet our specific need and not try and push something on us that didn’t meet our today/tomorrow/5-year goals.’”

“When you can do that in a high-tech field like this, that’s where you gain a lot of mindset and market share from those types of clients, and then they come back over and over and over again.” **I**

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**— KEITH EBEL,  
CO-OWNER,  
PROXIMITY WIRELESS**



**Making Waves** | Proximity Wireless Owners Keith and Susan Ebel, flanked by Implementation Manager Jay Sprinkle, left, and Installer Coy Sutherland.