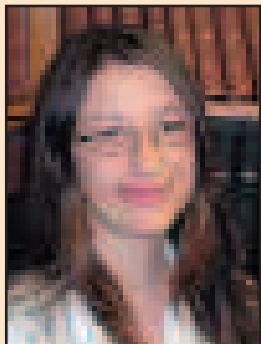


Staying Connected, Staying Informed

A lot has been said about the benefits of educating the consumer. It is the industry's responsibility to educate the public—including the government—about the nation's



water status, from infrastructure needs and water shortages, to water treatment technologies, contamination issues and, as of the last three years, security issues. However, while we look for ways to educate the consumer, I think it is important not to lose focus and keep educating ourselves.

In this month's Editor's Emphasis article on page 26. Mark Rowzee, education director for the Water Quality Association talks about the benefit of E-learning and I would like to take this further ahead—or, if you wish, go back to basics—and

stress the importance of networking.

We all know the benefits of networking, and a growing number of business owners are coming together to learn from each other's successes and failures. Yet there are those who stay behind.

One reason is that networking can be a challenge. It does require that you leave your day-to-day responsibilities aside and make time to meet regularly with others to share experiences and ideas. Networking in relation to running your business doesn't have to be a formal process that "eats up" a lot of your time. There is more to networking than attending events that allow you to meet new contacts and exchange business cards. It simply means understanding the value connections can add and taking advantage of every possible opportunity you get to talk about your business.

Then there is the competition factor. Networking means that rather than seeing others as competitors, you see them as a valuable source of ideas, direction and support. Chances are, if you have a question or a problem, there is someone who has gone through the same thing before. Simply hearing their thoughts and learning what they did right or wrong can be very beneficial.

And while networking is just one way of learning, it does help change what could be seen as a cookie cutter approach to running your business. It takes dedication to provide the right service and solution to the customer, and networking can provide some of the answers.

Lastly, I think trade shows and industry events continue to be a great way to stay ahead of important water issues, discover new products and share ideas with peers. With all that in mind, the end of this month marks the beginning of the 46th International Bottled Water Association's Annual Convention and Trade Show, which will take place in conjunction with the BevExpo 2004, to be held Sept. 29–Oct. 1, in Tampa, Fla. (see our IBWA Show guide on page 14).

Hope to see many of you there and don't forget your business cards.

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