

Supplier Programs Contribute to Dealer Success

The water quality improvement industry has approximately 10,000 water treatment dealers selling products to consumers throughout North America. Thousands of these dealers are independents not aligned with a major franchise supplier. There are also hundreds of new dealerships starting up every year. These independent water treatment dealers are entrepreneurs and demand a level of independence from supplier control, yet they have a need for support to train their personnel, receive sales and marketing assistance and grow their business. These dealers have access to the best technology the industry offers, which provides a high level of consumer features and benefits; however a demand for more supplier support and training is evident.

By Thomas Leunig

Dealer Training Program

In order to offer dealers more support, GE Infrastructure Water & Process Technologies, a manufacturer of components has partnered with their OEM assemblers to provide the highest level of support to dealers, without encroaching on their independence and entrepreneurial ambition. As a result, GE launched a nationwide dealer-training program called World Tour Seminars. The concept was to offer regional manufacturer sponsored dealer training. The dealer would be able to send their sales personnel, sales managers, installers and service technicians in for a one- or two-day program that covered a diverse variety of topics from technical aspects to sales and marketing features. The dealers asked if the course content could provide Water Quality Association Continuing Professional Development Credit and now all WQA certified individuals can obtain credit for attending a World Tour Seminar. When this program was first launched it met with immediate success. Every year it expanded based on the feedback received from the dealer attendees.

Dealer Financing Program

It was also discovered that there was a demand for a consumer-financing program tailored to the needs of independent dealers. This resulted in the GE/AFI Dealer Financing Program that is a partnership between GE and Aqua Finance, Inc., a water treatment financing provider. This program offers dealers the latest consumer financing options that meet the requirements of the independent dealer.

The program is the only national dealer-financing program for independent non-franchised dealers.

Dealer Sales Training

GE also received feedback from dealers asking for more sales training. This requirement was a challenge, because franchised dealers are provided with this type of training, but it is expensive, ongoing and built into the cost of the equipment. To meet this challenge, GE partnered with Carl Davidson, president of Sales and Management Solutions, Inc. together with *Water Quality Products* magazine to sponsor a series of two-day Sales & Management Training Seminars that are designed to provide extensive training for dealers. Davidson is a leading resource for dealer sales and management training and a *WQP* columnist. GE also added sales training content to the World Tour Seminars for 2005 with a variety of mini-modules featuring Davidson on several topics that are "hot buttons" with the dealers, such as prospecting and lead generation, setting retail prices and turning service technicians into lead sources. These mini-modules provide immediate value to the dealers attending the World Tour Seminars and will promote and feed the more extensive two-day Sales & Management Training Seminars. This unique combination and partnership provides for a new level of sales and management training for the independent dealer.

Dealer Network

There was also a request at World Tour Seminars for an informal professional organization for the independent dealer to join that would provide communication, unified programs, and ongoing growth and support for the dealer. This resulted in formation of the GE Platinum Dealer Network. The Platinum Dealer Network was and remains the industry's only organized group of independent dealers. Members of the Platinum Dealer Network receive access to unique programs, a quarterly *Soft Water Splash* newsletter, and special benefits such as free admission to Water Quality Association events, discounts on WQA educational training programs, WQA memberships, special sales and marketing materials, customized dealer literature,

and assistance with website development. One of the most popular features of the Platinum Dealer Network is a web-based dealer locator that links the members directly with consumers who are researching treatment and equipment options on the Internet. Dealers may join the Platinum Dealer Network at any World Tour Seminar or through their OEM supplier. The GE Platinum Dealer Network will continue to expand and grow as the industry, technology and consumers evolve, assuring that the professional, independent water treatment dealer continues as one alternative for consumers looking to improve their quality of life. *wqp*

About the Author

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