

## Braving the Storm



The past year was a rough one for businesses in the U.S. and around the world. The economy continues to weigh heavily on everyone's minds. This year, *Water Quality Products* conducted its fifth annual State of the Industry Survey to find out how the economy affected the water treatment industry. Once again, readers indicated that the down economy and depressed housing market were the factors that most negatively affected sales in the last year.

The economy is not keeping everyone down, however. More than one-third of survey respondents said they plan to expand their businesses in the next 24 months by adding new product lines, expanding territories or increasing advertising. Expansion has another effect—it means business owners will have to hire new employees. Many readers expressed that finding, hiring and training qualified, dedicated employees would pose the biggest challenge in the coming year.

Another bright spot amid the economic woes is the positive effect technology has had for water treatment businesses in the past year. For the second year in a row, readers reported that company websites and the Internet had the biggest positive impacts on sales.

In addition, social media continues to increase in popularity for the water treatment industry. LinkedIn is still the most popular social media outlet for the industry, with 42% of respondents saying they use the website for business—an increase from 25% in 2010. Facebook and Twitter also increased in use, with 22% of respondents reporting they use Facebook and 6% reporting they use Twitter (compared to 16% and 4%, respectively, in 2010). Approximately 50% of readers said they did not use social media for business in 2011—down from 66% in 2010.

The social media trend has a lot to offer businesses in the water quality industry. Many consumers turn to the Internet as their sole source of information when looking for companies and products. Social media provides an avenue in addition to a company website that gets a business's name out there. It also gives companies the opportunity to connect with current clients, hear their questions and concerns, and provide news and updates. It could also be one way to find those new employees.

The next few years will likely be a bumpy ride for the water treatment industry as the economy recovers and the housing market improves. But as long as businesses continue to be resilient, innovative and willing to grasp any opportunities that come their way, they will be sure to weather the storm.

*Kate Cline*

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### coming up next month

- 2012 Industry Forecast
- Point of Use
- Testing
- Commercial Systems

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