



Research Revamp

Integrating softened water research into sales presentations

By Eric Rosenthal

Over the past several years, the Water Quality Assn. (WQA) and the Water Quality Research Foundation (WQRF) have completed three research studies that provide the industry with insights into their core customers and the quantifiable benefits of using softened water. While this research is valuable in and of itself, when put in the hands of a trained salesperson, it can be the difference between making a sale and going home without that much-sought-after order.

The recently completed Longitudinal Consumer Attitude Study was the third in a series conducted by WQA to track consumer attitudes toward water treatment options and motivations.

In 2010, WQRF completed the Energy Savings Study, which demonstrated the energy a typical homeowner could save by using softened water in a water heater. The data showed that a traditional water heater costs up to 30% less to operate if it uses softened water instead of hard water. Furthermore, the study captured the impact of using softened water versus hard water on plumbing fixtures.

In 2011, WQRF completed the Detergent Savings Study, which demonstrated that a typical homeowner could cut detergent use by up to 50% by using softened water instead of hard water.

While these studies have been presented at the annual WQA Aquatech USA tradeshow for the past several years and promoted on the WQA website, many, if not most, companies in the industry still are not using the research when discussing the benefits of softened water with customers. Everyone in the industry is aware of the lifestyle benefits of using softened water, but having access to scientific research that proves its financial benefits is invaluable and should be included in any discussion with consumers.

“We have read the study, we all ‘wowed’ about it and then it just died,” said Kevin Kaserman, president of Mr. H2O/Dunbar Water Pumps & Filters in Wells, Maine. “All the water publications print information about it. We read it, but we don’t express it to the end user.”

Three reasons for this have become apparent. First, many in the industry still are not aware of the research,

and more importantly, while WQA members might be aware of the studies, their employees are not. Second, many industry professionals who are aware of the research do not know how to integrate it into their consumer presentations. Third, many water treatment professionals do not want to change the presentation and consumer dialogue that they feel have been successful for many years.

Reaching Modern Consumers

Today’s consumer is smarter, more Internet savvy and in search of hard data rather than personal opinions. While repeating the same presentation you have always done may get you the same results you have always gotten, changing the way you talk to today’s consumer could mean even better results.

“I decided to make a banner immediately utilizing the Water Quality Assn. information and ... pictures and descriptions of the study. I started utilizing [it] for home shows,” said Dan Cote, owner of Aqua-Max of Maine, located in Lewiston. “We have actually seen an increase in our business because of it.”

If the water treatment professionals who use the research are any measure of success, you can expect to get better sales results by including these research results in your consumer dialogue.

A News Sales Approach

Following are five steps that should help you and your teams grow sales by creating more effective consumer presentations.

First, become familiar with the research studies and the marketing material created by WQA. The research studies are free to WQA members and are available on the WQA website in the "Market the Research" section.

Second, share the results of these research studies with all of your employees. It is as important for your customer service agents and service staff to be familiar with the research results as it is for your salespeople.

"One of the things that we do in our dealership is we have trained the installers [and] service [staff] to promote the soap studies and actually sell soap packages to our consumers," said Cote, adding that even the company's secretary is well-versed on the detergent savings study. "That's what we're here for—to explain all those benefits. We try to promote the Battelle study [Energy Savings Study] as often as possible, with everything that we do."

Present the research to your employees during your weekly meeting or do it one day during lunch. WQA has short summaries of the research and consumer ads available for your use.

Third, determine how to integrate the message into your sales presentation. The research needs to be presented at the right time so it is a natural part of the conversation. Salespeople have to feel that it is not forced.

Fourth, have your salespeople practice the new presentation. Otherwise, they likely will revert back to the way they have always done their presentations.

Finally, go on a sales call with each staff member to see firsthand how they are presenting the information. Then, modify the sales presentation based on what works best.

Creating Awareness

Winning with customers is a goal for all of us. "If all dealers, even competing dealers, were to focus

on the studies, the general public would become more aware of it, and it wouldn't be a whisper, it would be more like a shout," Kaserman said. "It's really all about trying to promote the efficiency of treated water so that the public is aware of it."

These studies can help you create a

better dialogue with customers, help them feel better about the products they are buying and ultimately result in increased sales for your company.

"[WQA] gave you the ammunition. It's up to you to pull the trigger," Cote said. "It's our responsibility to pass this on." *wqp*

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