

# Keeping Up With the Times



If the articles in this month's Dealer Insight special section are any indication, today's customers are changing. This means dealers need to change their sales approaches too—keeping up not only with customers' needs, but also the latest technology, research and regulations.

Today's customers are savvier than ever. Thanks to the Internet and the 24-hour news machine churning out constant updates, they are increasingly aware of water treatment issues and what may be in their drinking water. According to Eric Rosenthal in his article "Research Revamp" (page 16), consumers today are looking for hard facts, not opinions. All told, he says, this means that water treatment professionals cannot go into a sales presentation with the same old rhetoric—they need to be prepared with the latest

updates on contaminants and regulations and data from the latest research.

Today's customers also access information differently than in decades past. Rather than leafing through the Yellow Pages, many consumers turn to the Internet for information on companies, products and more. Search engines like Google are the go-to for many, meaning a change in advertising strategies is in order—advertising programs like Google AdWords can help direct people searching for softening or treatment systems right to your company (for tips on using this online advertising strategy, see page 20).

This is indeed an exciting phenomenon, but with it comes a new challenge. Today's customers also find information through social media, and while these outlets provide great opportunities for sharing news and interesting articles (I admit, I learned Osama Bin Laden had been killed on Facebook), they are primarily forums for opinion. It is up to dealers to help customers distinguish facts about water treatment from speculation.

And then there's the economy. Today's customers may be facing harder financial times, making the decision to purchase a water treatment system more difficult than ever. This means that dealers not only need to consider revamping their sales strategies, but also their companies' financial offerings. Frank Panzeca, *Water Quality Products'* 2011 Dealer of the Year, pointed out that hard times do not change consumers' need for softeners, but they do change their buying strategies—price becomes the leading factor in the decision, making big-box stores even tougher competition for dealers. Panzeca combats this by taking the time to discuss with customers the benefits of the softeners he offers and the value of the service his company provides. According to Gary Lukoski in his article, "The Power of the Payment" (page 14), a dealership's financing options, plus the way they are presented, can make all the difference—a low monthly payment is a great selling point.

Although customers' changing needs may require some flexibility and adaptability, there are some aspects of a business that never need to change: providing quality customer service and giving customers the best value for their dollars. Finding the right balance of new strategies and tried-and-true techniques may be challenging, but will ultimately provide dealers a formula for success.

*Kate Cline*

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## coming up next month

- Commercial Systems
- Industrial Systems
- Connectors & Accessories
- Business Column
- Testing
- WQA Forum

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