

A Positive Approach

As we close out the year, businesses are busy evaluating 2014 and planning and budgeting for 2015. Earlier this fall, we asked a random sampling of WQP readers to share their thoughts on the year past and the year ahead in our 2014 State of the Industry survey.

The results revealed an industry that faces many hurdles in the coming year, but is positive about the future.

Survey respondents rated workforce—including finding skilled employees and training new hires—as one of the foremost challenges in the coming year. Out of 20 industry topics, they rated “staffing/training” as the most important. Nearly 10% said that “workforce” had a negative impact on sales in the past 12 months, and more than 20% predicted that “lack of a skilled workforce” would negatively impact sales in the next 12 months.

In a free response section, one respondent noted that it would be a challenge to “find good-quality, trainable people who want to work and commit to a career in the water industry. This goes across all areas of business, from sales to administrative to technical positions to entry-level-type jobs,” the respondent said. “Young Americans seem to lack the motivation necessary to do what it takes to be successful.”

Without getting into the perceived shortfalls of millennials in the workplace (a topic that has been well covered by the national news media), attracting new employees to the water industry will be a necessity as many current industry professionals reach retirement. In our survey, approximately one-third of respondents said they were between the ages of 50 and 59, with more than 42% reporting that they



were 60 or older. One of the biggest factors in attracting new blood into the industry may be that younger generations do not realize the many jobs that exist in the water field. To combat this, raising awareness of and generating interest in water quality will be key.

The second challenge at the top of survey respondents’ minds was the influx of foreign versions of filters and other products into the U.S. market. Approximately 18% of respondents said that “foreign companies” had a negative impact on sales in the past 12 months, with 15% expecting them to continue to have a negative impact in 2015. Customer education will be an important factor here—especially when it comes to helping them identify quality products that have been certified to NSF/ANSI standards to ensure they are safe and perform as claimed.

Despite these many hurdles, readers remained positive about the industry and the year ahead. Overall, 40% of respondents rated 2014 as a “good” business year, with more than 30% rating it as “very good.” More than 45% expect 2015 to be “very good,” with nearly 17% expecting an “excellent” year. In a free response section, one respondent noted that a “positive, hardworking attitude” was a key factor in positively influencing sales in the last year—and I encourage all of our readers to take this advice as they plan for 2015.

Kate Cline, managing editor
kcline@sgcmail.com



Scranton Gillette Communications Inc.
3030 W. Salt Creek Ln., #201, Arlington Heights,
IL 60005-5025
847.391.1000 | F: 847.390.0408

Editorial Staff

wqpeditor@sgcmail.com

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dheidkamp@sgcmail.com, 847.391.1047
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daly@sgcmail.com, 480.941.0510, ext.13
Advertising Coordinator | **Lucia Currans**
lcurrans@sgcmail.com, 847.391.1005
Reprint Coordinator | **Adrienne Miller**
amiller@sgcmail.com, 847.391.1036
List Rental Contact | **Geoffrey Garner**
geffrey.gardner@reachmarketing.com, 845.201.5331

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