

CUSTOM WATER CARE PROGRAMS

INCREASING PROFITS BY BUILDING CUSTOMER LOYALTY



For some pool and spa/hot tub companies, the service department is the largest part of the business.

Photo courtesy All Seasons Pools

Pool and hot tub specialty retailers across North America continue to report strong growth—from pool and hot tub sales to accessories and outdoor living product purchases. Despite this, the biggest challenge for most is chemical sales—or the lack thereof.

The question many retailers have is how they can sell more water treatment products at a profit when competing against big-box stores and online merchandisers. The answer is simple. Customize, specialize, and personalize each customer's water treatment experience. Doing so will help build customer loyalty and, ultimately, increase profits.

Today, those businesses that have perfected this sales technique are not only making money selling chemicals, but are also successful at using these products to bring in additional business. This article will discuss different concepts retailers can put into action to increase profits by building customer loyalty.

MADE TO ORDER

When developing a way to differentiate a specialty retail business from the competition, the most important thing to avoid is competing on price. Should a retailer attempt to compete in this fashion, many owners will see inconsistent growth in their water care business even though their customer base might be growing.

To avoid this, customized water treatment programs should be developed specific to each customer, as this gives them a reason to return to the store to purchase water treatment products as well as other accessories and services.

What is the best way to get started?

Offering customers a simple 'discount bag' program is a great way to get a program like this off the ground. Start with a 'green' initiative and provide reusable bags to every customer. The next step is to offer a discount on water care products, filters, etc.,

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when customers return to the store with the bag. This program raises brand awareness outside of the store, while also increasing customer loyalty.

It is also important to consider instructing staff to use the term 'water care products' and not 'chemicals.' Using the term 'water care products' directly reflects the fact pool and hot tub maintenance is also part of an overall wellness program for consumers who want to take care of their bodies. Thus, they do not want to soak in a bath of chemicals.

Another integral part to this program is to ensure the products made available to customers are different from competing products in the marketplace—especially those sold at big-box stores and online merchants. For instance, unique 'water care' products that are capable of maintaining proper pH balance and preventing scale build-up, in addition to making a bather's skin feel good when exiting the water. These are the types of products consumers are unlikely to find at a mass merchant.

SPECIALIZED SERVICE

Pool and hot tub stores are called 'specialty' retailers for a reason. The industry is chock full of maintenance and service professionals who are experts in water testing, diagnosis, and water treatment product sales. In fact, many customers likely visit their local pool and hot tub store based on its reputation for providing accurate water diagnosis and water treatment programs.

That said, a store's water-testing area is essentially a water diagnostic centre which builds customer loyalty; therefore, it is important to capitalize on this expertise and use it to distinguish the business from competitors.

For example, when a customer comes in to have their water tested, and sits at the diagnosis centre counter to watch and wait for the results, they will often chat with staff. Therefore, staff should be properly trained and understand their value to the customer in getting to the source of any water-related problems. This can be exemplified to the customer by explaining what tests are being performed and why. This time should also be used to educate the customer and explain the various options available to them for water treatment.

Make sure the customer realizes these tests are unique and valuable and are far more comprehensive than any test they can do at home, as the water



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Photos courtesy Underwater Pool Masters



Today, new technological advances in water testing make it possible to provide a complete water analysis in under two minutes.



Every water diagnosis centre should have seats/stools at the lab to allow customers to see what goes on behind the counter, but more importantly provide them the opportunity to speak with the technicians.

CUSTOMIZE, SPECIALIZE, AND PERSONALIZE EACH CUSTOMER'S WATER TREATMENT EXPERIENCE. DOING SO WILL HELP BUILD CUSTOMER LOYALTY AND, ULTIMATELY, INCREASE PROFITS.

Make sure the customer realizes the in-store water tests are far more comprehensive than any test they can do at home.

Photos courtesy All Seasons Pools & Spas



diagnosis centre not only measures pH and alkalinity, but also sanitizer levels and metals, in addition to performing filter testing for water clarity to get an idea of how well the filter is performing. This is why every water diagnosis centre should have seats/stools at the lab to allow customers to see what goes on behind the counter (e.g. watching their water

sample change colours), but more importantly, provide them the ability to speak with the technicians. This personal interaction is one way a specialty retailer can differentiate its services from a big-box store, while also remaining competitive. Another approach where some have had success is selling water treatment products that are supplied locally or made in North America.

ADD A PERSONAL TOUCH

Personalizing a water treatment program for customers is a great way to ensure the profitable sale of pool and hot tub chemicals. However, to do this, staff should be knowledgeable and well-trained on the unique benefits every water treatment product the store offers—especially when it comes to solving special problems for customers.

One way to personalize a water treatment program is to have staff develop a comprehensive questionnaire for customers so they can be sure to supply (sell) them the appropriate water care products to correct any water quality problems they are experiencing. These programs need to be tailored to each customer to provide unique benefits that make the service offered by the pool and hot tub retailer stand out from the competition.

Take hot tub sales for example. An important aspect to selling these products is taking the time to discuss water treatment early in the sales process. This discussion will also help the retailer distinguish themselves from mass-merchants. This differentiation ultimately allows hot tub retailers to charge more and increase profits when selling water treatment products available through other sales channels.

Always take the time to find out what the customer's previous experience has been with hot tub usage and what they liked or disliked about it. This is the starting point to tailoring a water treatment program specific to their needs which might also include a saltwater system, chlorine, bromine, or ozone depending on what they are comfortable with. Taking the time to guide the customer through the available options is another way to set the bar high as an expert supplier of hot tubs and hot water chemistry knowledge. Taking the time to tailor a water treatment program may also lead to additional 'up-sell' opportunities for products other than hot tub chemicals, which is an added bonus.

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Photo courtesy
Underwater Pool Masters



Offering customers a simple 'discount bag' program is a great way to increase customer loyalty.

Photo courtesy
Oasis Hot Tub & Sauna

KEEP EVOLVING AND IMPROVING

It is important to continuously look for ways to improve upon current water testing and water care programs. One way this can be done is to embrace new technological advances in water testing (e.g. spin tests), which are capable of providing a complete water analysis in under two minutes. These systems link into a computer program and provide a complete printout of every test performed, including product recommendations. The database associated with these tests are quite powerful and allow a retailer to store test results by customer, note information about their pool and hot tub, and combine it with information on previous products used, in addition to recording other valuable information about the customer and their backyard.

These systems can even be pre-programmed to prescribe certain chemicals sold by a retailer—both private label and other specialty water treatment products. The report recommends certain products, depending on the water quality issue, which can assist

staff in selling a specific water treatment program. This can be especially helpful for seasonal staff during the busy summer months. By embracing today's water testing technology, combined with knowledgeable staff, a specialty retailers' water treatment centre can be profitable by providing customers with personalized water treatment solutions.

Staff should also keep abreast on the latest health research related to aquatic fitness and hydrotherapy so they can share this knowledge with customers. This can be accomplished in several ways. For example, having articles readily available for customers to read, including these articles as printed handouts in the customer's checkout bag to read when they get home, or sending an e-mail with links to the articles. This process should be modified continually based on customer feedback.

In the same manner, be sure to have a simple, step-by-step printed process that suggests water care products for start-ups, as well as weekly, monthly, quarterly, and even yearly water quality maintenance, including tips on draining and refilling pools and hot tubs. Additional revenue streams can develop as a result of a customized program. During the customization process, look for opportunities to develop upsell products and services that can be performed by staff. The more a retailer can offer, the greater the potential for profit.💧



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