

Distributing Success

Mark Tibbetts of H₂O Filter Warehouse

By Nate F. Searing

Foreign competition seems to be the biggest challenge for distributors today. More and more product is coming in from Taiwan and China at very competitive prices ... as a result, there are two segments in the dealer market. There are the dealers who will pay higher prices for U.S.-made products, and the other segment who will shop the entire market of wholesalers to save 10 cents on an imported filter housing or carbon block filter."

"At H₂O Filter Warehouse, we're dealing with both segments. We have relationships with many of the largest U.S. companies like KX Industries, John Guest and GE. We've also recently started bringing in containers of products from Taiwan."

In order to stay viable in a

market facing competition from across the ocean and from big box stores across the street, the solution is simple, says H₂O Filter Warehouse president Mark Tibbetts. "Confront these competitors by offering what the big stores can't: service."

Tibbetts began working in the industry 14 years ago at National Safety Associates, selling a basic line of carbon filters through a try-it-you'll-like-it, direct sales approach, hooking up a counter top unit and letting the prospect try it for a week.

"I was with them for three and a half years. In that time, I recruited a sales organization of over 1,000 people and was responsible for millions of dollars



in sales of NSA products," Tibbetts said. The problem, however, was a front-loaded marketing program, so few people in the sales organization stayed on beyond several months. After leaving NSA, and spending more than a decade in the industry learning truly successful ways to attract and retain clients, Tibbetts found the simple answer: good customer service.

H₂O Filter Warehouse, the brainchild of Tibbetts and Bo Blasingame (the company's sales manager) has been distributing drinking water products for only one year; yet the company is already turning heads with its customer-oriented approach. The two men worked together for more than four years at H₂O Distributors, Inc., a retail dealership in Marietta, Ga., owned by Tibbetts. They decided to begin a distributorship that would complement the efforts of their dealership.

Today, the company offers a complete line of filter housings, Flowmatic products, John Guest fittings and tubing and KX Industries carbon block filters. They are the newest master-stocking distributor for KX Industries MATRIKX extruded carbon block (the only one in the Southeast) and are adding dozens of new customers every month.

That rapid growth has already prompted the need to move into a new facility later this spring, increasing their warehouse space by four times. The move comes on the heels of the introduction of their new RO line, made with John Guest fittings as the next step to their existing line, built with Jaco fittings. In the coming year, H₂O Filter Warehouse also hopes to add pressure tanks, control valves and medias to its extensive product offerings, Tibbetts said.

Simple customer service. It simply works. ♦

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