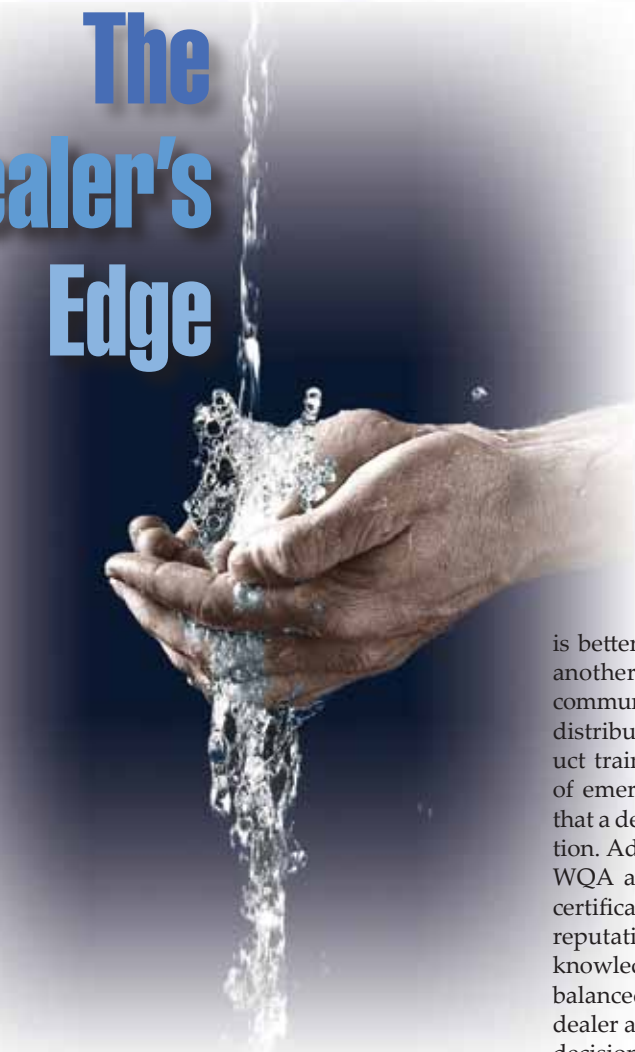


# The Dealer's Edge



**I**n water treatment, there is no such thing as one size fits all. That applies to treatment, products and company practices. While there are a wide variety of products designed to treat nearly any water problem successfully, the deployment of those products and systems can be radically different from town to town, county to county, even state to state. What makes the difference is how a dealer approaches the problem as well as the solutions he offers to his client.

Water treatment can be a cut-throat business, especially in areas where there are high concentrations of competing dealers, both independent and franchisees. The dealer's edge can often be cultivated from a combination of factors, including assignment of the best personnel to make a great first impression, being knowledgeable about treatment issues and having adequate product information on hand at the beginning. A customer who is confident the person who is laying out the options is sincere, knowledgeable and available will readily commit. The good dealer prepares himself for this scenario before he knocks on the door.

The best initial contact with a customer entails testing the water to determine its composition and quality and whether it requires treatment, as well as the best products/systems to use. Establishing a trusting environment to discuss this initial step is, at best, dependent on factors that cannot be nailed down in a manual or guidebook. Competence, personality and presentation will determine whether a dealer or his representative is successful in providing the client with the right information to make the best choice for his needs, based primarily on a sense of trust in who is making the pitch.

With advancements in technology, there are more and better products being manufactured to encompass a widening array of treatment problems. This requires dealers to be at the top of their game all the time, to explain why one product or system

is better for a particular problem than another. Maintaining an open line of communication with manufacturers and distributors, taking advantage of product training and being knowledgeable of emerging problems all help ensure that a dealer is in an advantageous position. Additionally, taking advantage of WQA and manufacturer training and certification further enhances a dealer's reputation and credibility. Taking this knowledge to the customer provides a balanced conversation to help both the dealer and the customer make the right decisions.

By Denise M. Roberts

Depending upon the general water characteristics in a given area, dealers who engage local water authorities and experts gain an additional advantage by knowing what to look for in the water source and possible treatment products and systems to stock. Being prepared puts the dealer another rung higher up on the competitive ladder, especially when customers are aware that the dealer isn't arrogant, doesn't imply he knows it all and is willing to bring in other specialists if necessary. By engaging outside experts, this can prove to the prospective client that he is getting the best information without necessarily having to rely upon a single source. That's why it's also important for dealers to have information handouts ready for the client to review.

Establishing rapport can be a very difficult part of the process for many, so it's up to the dealer to make sure everyone in his company, be it sales, installation, maintenance or bookkeeping, is honest, sincere and more interested in the customer's needs than his bottom line. There's a new breed of consumer out there that demands far more than ever before. Beat them to the punch by having everything ready to lay out on the dining-room table and explain why they need your services, as well as why you are the best choice to meet those needs. There's a fine line between arrogance and confidence. Exude confidence without appearing arrogant and you're one step closer to bringing a new client into

your realm for the long term. One size does not fit all, any more than one method of making a sale works for everyone. Cultural norms vary from region to region. As such, home-grown dealers know the mindsets of their area and are better prepared to modify their strategies as needed. This may include referring a client to research local water conditions, contact other clients for in-person testimonials, etc.

In our trust-but-verify modern society, dealers who take part in local events, become members of the local Chamber of Commerce and have their business included in the Better Business Bureau rating system are better positioned as reliable sources with whom to do business. The dealer who guards their business reputation jealously creates a level of confidence and success. This is what a prospective client wants to know. The

many avenues available to check a company's status make it far easier for consumers to find the right person for the job. The dealer who takes this seriously enough to make sure he is well-regarded in his community and his industry will land on top of the search heap.

Of course there are other elements to success but if you can't get your foot in the door, all of the wonderful systems and great products won't mean a thing. As with any business, it takes far more than opening a shop or buying product to attract the customers. You must know your marketplace, the mindset of the populous, the regional experts to have on your side. Most importantly, being able to stand in front of someone and become their ally in keeping their family safe and healthy will result in more success than the best products on the market. ♦