

Ten Marketing Tips for Water Quality Dealers

Many water quality dealers are known for being aggressive promoters. Other dealers simply sit around waiting for the phone to ring. As we move into the last quarter of the year, every dealer needs to take some time to assess his or her current marketing strategy. Typically, when a water quality dealership becomes an aggressive marketer, it's usually easy for that company to capture market share and grow. But is now the time to promote your water quality business?

By Dale Filhaber

According to economic experts, the economy is improving. The stock market is better, spending on advertising has increased, corporate America has cash, and jobs are being created. The beginning of an economic growth cycle is usually an excellent time to capture market share. Based on years of advertising and promotion experience in the water quality industry, here are 10 tips to help dealers finesse their marketing program.

1. Is now the time to advertise?

You should advertise during good times and bad. If needed, you can adjust your advertising and invest less when the market is slow, but you still should advertise.

2. The cost of media depends upon the size of your market.

Be aware that larger markets cost more when it comes to advertising. For example, a market like Los Angeles, CA will cost a great deal more than Reno, NV. It's important you create a budget large enough for the size of your market.

3. Should you use more electronic media?

There's no doubt homeowners are using different media today than they did 10 years ago. Newspapers are losing readers; *Yellow Pages* are having difficulties. Advertising on the Internet continues to grow, young people are using text messaging and TV is the favorite medium of baby boomers.

4. Telemarketing? It still works.

Dealers set more appointments using telemarketing than any other medium. Even though there are fewer 'clean' phone numbers available to call than ever before, this is still a top marketing medium in the water quality industry. New connects and new homeowners are top lists for telemarketing, since dealers can reach these prospects before they appear on *Do Not Call* lists.

5. What about direct mail?

Absolutely! Dealers can target the best prospects in their market, targeting those homeowners they cannot reach with telemarketing. While the volume of mail has decreased in the past few years, the importance of mail that is delivered to the household has increased. Dealers who utilize direct mail need to make sure their material is eye-catching and stands out. Phone numbers and website addresses must be prominently displayed. Hint: keep postcards on hand for those times when your local newspaper reports a water problem in your area so you are ready to respond.

6. Use the media's website to promote your business.

If you're buying radio, TV or other media, ask them to run banner ads and promote your business on their websites. Ask for a link between their media sites and your website. Make the request part of your negotiations.

7. What about social media?

Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn are some of the social-media sites that are popular today. Will it work for promoting your water quality business? It takes time to be involved in social media and while it should be part of your strategy, you still need to use traditional media, such as direct mail, telemarketing, local TV and radio, etc. It's also important to plan how you will handle a negative posting, since those do happen from time to time.

8. Video is a powerful tool.

Shoot video within your business, show off some of your products, talk about the latest equipment you offer and the importance of having RO systems serviced. Post your video on your website, on YouTube and use it in your TV ad. Video gives you the power to present your message in a unique and informative way.

9. Consistent advertising is critical.

Today's homeowner is inundated with advertising messages. You need to make sure your message is there when local homeowners are ready to buy.

10. Take a long-term approach.

Depending on the size of your budget, it may take a few years for you to create top-of-mind awareness. Then you need to continue to advertise to hold your position in the marketplace. Once you stop advertising, your recognition factor can disappear very quickly.

The success of your water quality business depends not only on the decisions you make today, but also on how committed you are. Now is a good time to start planning and growing for better times.

About the author

◆ Dale Filhaber, President of Dataman Group Direct Mail & Telemarketing Lists based in Boca Raton, FL, is also President of the Florida Direct Marketing Association. 'DataDale,' as she is known in the industry, has been a guest lecturer at several WQA, national and regional water conferences. She has published numerous articles about marketing in the water and home industries and is the author of 'Ask DataDale,' a popular blog for the direct-marketing community. Filhaber will be presenting 'Top Direct Marketing Techniques for Small Businesses' at the upcoming WQA Conference in Las Vegas, NV. She can be reached by phone, (800) 771-3282 or email, dale@datamangroup.com. Visit the section of the company's website dedicated to water quality dealers, www.datamangroup.com/water_conditioning.asp.