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PSN

POOL AND SPA NEWS

Developing a
Service Tech
Training Program

page 17

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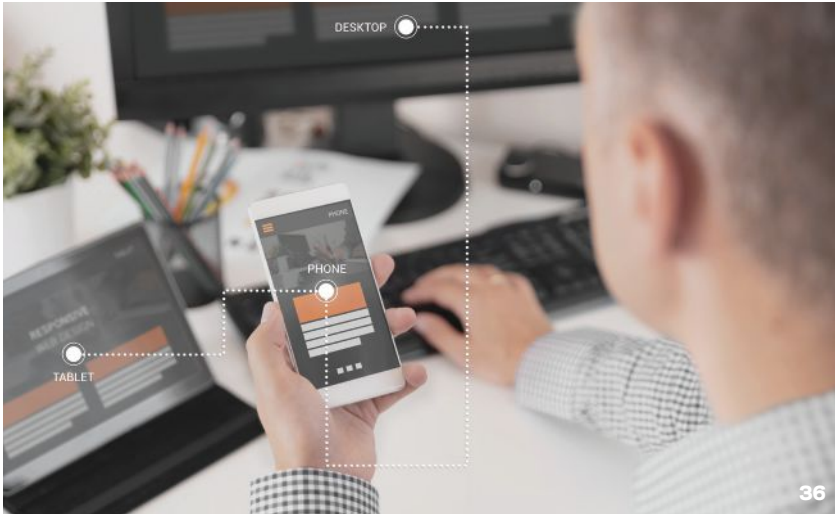
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This Issue is Your Road Map to Success



Joanne McClain
Editor-in-Chief, PSN

In this issue, we've got several features sure to give you something to chew on.

The first one launches a series of articles dedicated to training pool and spa service technicians. The idea sprang from our Top 50 programs. As you probably know, we have two: Top 50 Builders honors pool builders and Top 50 Service names service companies. (There is a third — Top 50 Products — but it is not judged in the same manner as the other two.) Achieving this distinction is one of the top honors in the pool and spa industry, and a powerful marketing tool for those who make it on the list.

One of the key criteria for judging Top 50 Builders and Service is staffing. How do top companies train and retain their employees? After all, a company is only as good as its people.

The answers ranged widely, so much so that it inspired Deputy Editor Rebecca Robledo to reach out to the companies with some of the more notable answers to ask for more details.

The results can be found on page 28 in “Masters in the Making.” Here, we look at the top five elements that comprise a successful service tech training program. Take a look and see if your service department or company implements these same tenets.

Next, we look at the importance of optimizing your company website in these fast-moving, post-COVID times. What does that mean exactly, and what do you need to know to keep your business competitive? Learn the answers in “Building and Optimizing Your Pool and Spa Business Website” on page 36.

Lastly, I was surprised to learn that many construction company owners do not have a business plan in place. It becomes problematic especially in times of growth — how can you effectively plan and manage growth without a road map? With the pool and spa industry still projected for a compound annual growth rate of over 7.5% between 2024 and 2032 (according to Global Market Insights), it makes sense to have a robust business plan in place. “How to Write a Practical Business Plan” may have first appeared in our sister publication *Remodeling*, but the principles described apply equally to pool businesses.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Joanne McClain". The signature is fluid and cursive.

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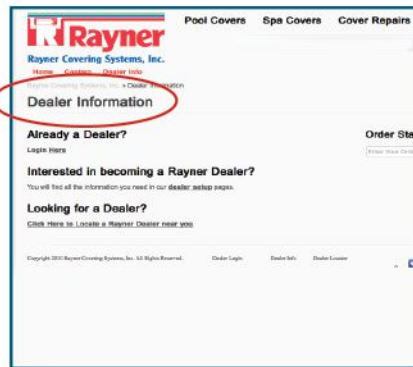


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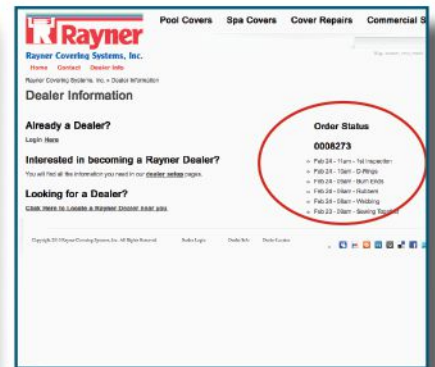
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Latest Model Aquatic Health Code Up for Vote

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO



The Model Aquatic Health Code is in the final stages of its next update, with a deadline looming to vote on proposed changes.

New sections on swimming lagoons and surf venues are being proposed for the fifth edition, as well as changes regarding CYA and free chlorine levels, and lifeguard staffing rules.

The MAHC is a federal model code applying to the design, construction, maintenance and operation of commercial and public pools, spas and waterfeatures. While overseen and subject to approval by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, it is administered by the Council of the Model Aquatic Health Code (CMAHC), consisting of a variety of stakeholders.

A new edition is released every three years. As part of the process, CMAHC members vote for or against a slew of proposals to change the text. This year, they will evaluate and vote on 203 change requests. Voting takes place until March 30.

Two proposals would add whole sections to the code — one for the design, construction and maintenance of swimming lagoons, and another for surf parks.

While cyanuric acid did not draw the kind of attention it had in previous MAHC revisions, a few proposals were filed. One would raise the maximum allowable level of CYA from 90 to 100 ppm. Another would require immediate remediation, but not closure, if a pool's CYA levels reached 300 ppm. A third would raise the levels at which a pool would have to shut down. Currently, the MAHC states that venues must close if the CYA-to-

free chlorine ratio surpasses 45:1. The proposal would raise the ratio to 150:1.

Chlorine levels were addressed by a couple of the key proposals. One would remove the 10 ppm free-chlorine maximum, instead instructing operators to keep levels below the maximum listed on the label. Another would mandate that pools shut down if they reach 10 ppm of free chlorine.

Filtration and sanitation also are addressed in a change proposal that would allow technologies that have been approved by German's DIN standard, as well as standards in Sweden and Austria. This is meant as a way to permit newer or more progressive technologies not currently named in U.S. standards.

On the lifeguarding side, voters will consider a change that would require at least two guards on duty at a given time. While many facilities use at least two lifeguards at a time, and training agencies generally teach multi-person rescues, professionals hesitate to impose such a mandate in light of the lifeguard shortage.

Anybody can read the change requests once they register onto CMAHC's website. Only CMAHC members can vote. To become a member or register for access, go to cmahc.org.

LAST CALL FOR TOP 50 BUILDERS

The final deadline to apply for the 2024 PSN and Pentair's Top 50 Builders recognition is here. Forms are due and the system will close Friday, March 29 at 11:59 p.m. Pacific Daylight Time. To enter, go to psntop50builders.com or poolspanews.com.



NESPA Seeks Change in New York's SVRS Requirement

The **Northeast Spa and Pool Association** hopes to see changes to New York's residential building code, especially regarding pool and spa safety, in the next round of updates. Specifically, the organization advocates altering language that

requires a safety vacuum release systems (SVRS) on all pools. The local industry would like to align with the International Swimming Pool and Spa Code, so SVRSs are only needed in the absence of dual main drains or other anti-entrapment protections.

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Haviland to Build New Flagship Laboratory

Chemical manufacturer Haviland Products Co. is set to build a new laboratory in Grand Rapids, Mich.

The 11,000-square-foot facility will house product development not only in the pool/spa space, but also in the water treatment market.

"Our new lab is not only an investment in Haviland's technical capabilities, it also offers new value to our customers, opening the door for further innovation in our target markets of water treatment, surface finishing and contract manufacturing," said Vice President Rob Pawson.

Officials expect the \$7 million facility to be operational in 2025.

Tara Hires Sales Manager

Vinyl liner and pool cover maker Tara Pool and Outdoor Products has named Daniel Batulanon as a new regional sales manager. He will cover the territories of Kentucky, Ohio, Michigan, Indiana, Illinois and West Virginia.

Batulanon brings more than 26 years of industry experience, with positions spanning from warehouse management to regional sales directorship. He has earned multiple awards, including Branch of the Year, Region of the Year and Salesman of the Year three times.

Tara is based in Owens Cross Roads, Ala.



AquaCal AutoPilot Signs with Thornburg Enterprises as Manufacturers Rep

AquaCal AutoPilot, a pool heat pump and salt chlorine generator manufacturer, has added Thornburg Enterprises onto its sales force as an independent representative group. Through this partnership, the manufacturer plans to boost its presence in the Western region, including Arizona, Nevada, California, Washington, Oregon, Idaho, Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico.

Thornburg Enterprises, based in Peoria, Ariz., specializes in manufacturer representation in the Western USA. AquaCal AutoPilot is part of Team Horner, based in Fort Lauderdale, Fla.

Raisanen Joins Bathing Brands as Retail VP

Bathing Brands, a distributor of bathing products, has recruited former Sauna360 Sales &



Marketing Director Mark Raisanen as its new vice president of retail programs.

Raisanen has more than three decades of industry experience, including growing Sauna360, a sauna and steam-heat bathing company that, at different times, held the names Saunatec and Finnleo. With that firm, his titles included regional sales manager, national sales manager, general manager, and director of sales and marketing.

California Free from Drought At Least Through 2025

Following a blizzard that dropped more than 100 inches of snow in Northern California, experts expect the state to avoid drought at least through next year. This combines with historic precipitation in 2023, leaving six of the state's most important reservoirs

at or above average water levels.

This comes after a severe five-year drought that left the state's pool and spa industry going from municipality to municipality, battling water restrictions that threatened to stop pool/spa construction.

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An underwater photograph of a person swimming in a pool. The person is in the lower right corner, wearing dark swim trunks and is reaching up towards a pool ladder. The water is clear blue with some bubbles and light reflections. The overall scene is bright and refreshing.

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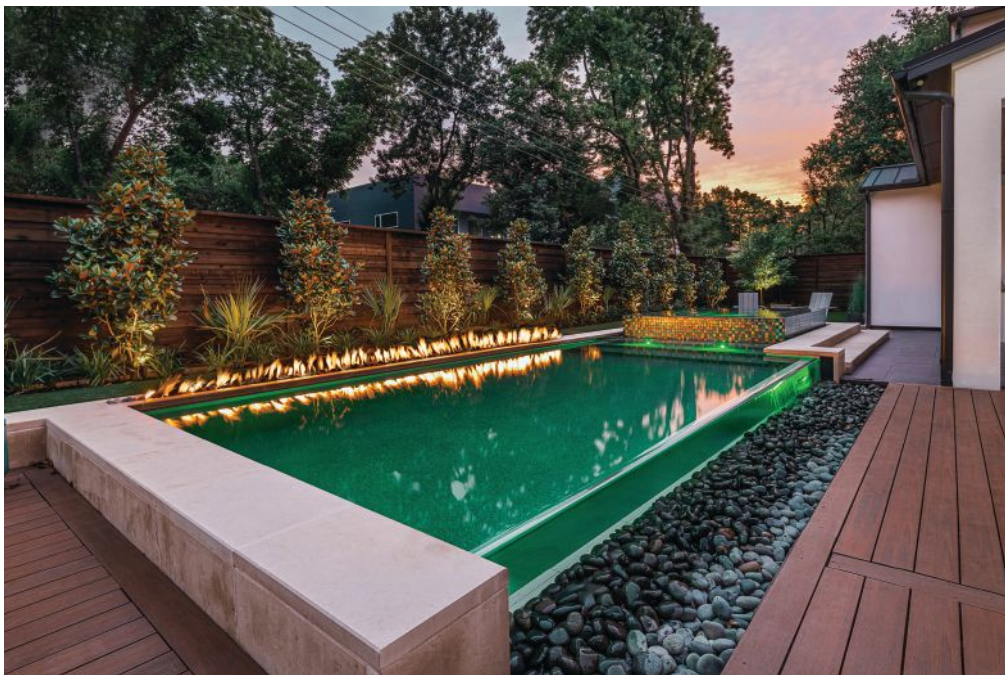
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Low-Key Spectacle

With its precisely placed elements, this poolscape packs plenty of drama into a low profile.

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO



Under the right circumstances, restrictions can actually inspire creativity, not thwart it.

Such was the case with this modern beauty, which was featured in last year's edition of Pebble Technology's book, *The World's Greatest Pools*.

The waterscape would sit behind a home designed in a local style called Dallas modern. "It has an Austin ranch-like look, but is also very clean," says Nick Hauk, owner and founder of Dallas-based Pure Design, which created the backyard.

In such environments, designers often turn to vanishing edges for their sleek, clean appeal. However, a regular vanishing edge wouldn't work, because

the yard sloped up toward the back. The elevation change would break the visual line from the weir to the horizon. Instead, he oriented the edge to spill toward the house.

"The goal was to make it look like the water was rushing toward the living room," Hauk says.

He raised the pool 18 inches and placed an acrylic panel across the entire width of the wall closest to the home. The panel, supplied by Hauk's other business, Dallas-based Elemental Acrylic, provides a view inside the pool, creating a dramatic effect at night when the lit interior glows.

"It just looks like an ice cube that's on fire when you're sitting in your

living room," Hauk says.

At one end of the pool sits a raised, perimeter-overflow spa blanketed with a gold and green glass tile. Across from it, an elevated wall veneered in leather-finished limestone provides built-in seating. The pool interior is finished in Pebble Tec's blue granite.

THE FIERY DETAILS

For this effect, Hauk wanted a fire feature running along the entire back of the pool. But the flames couldn't rise too high above the water.

He set the structure and fire source at pool level, and kept the flames to 6 inches in height. This would leave a low profile for the poolscape and avoid overpowering the acrylic.

"The flames play a trick on your mind," Hauk says. "I wanted that flame to dance on top of the acrylic edge. When it's off, you can't tell there's a fire pit there, but when it's on, the flames magically appear from the back."

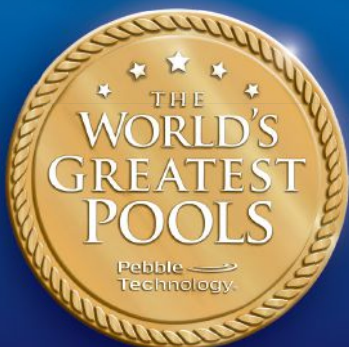
Hauk built the fire pit into the top of the pool's back wall, which was shot approximately 20 inches thick with a double mat of rebar to accommodate the feature.

He linked three 10-foot-long fire burners together to cover the expanse.

PHOTOS: BRI WOLMAN/INSTA BRANDS



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This caused one complication: How do you supply the fire feature with enough oxygen to feed all 30 feet, especially if the burner sits insider the wall?

Hauk and his team vented the fire pit with six 4-inch PVC pipes, which run from the pool wall, underneath the landscape bed behind it, and finally terminate in the alley. “It’s drawing oxygen behind the landscape and fence,” he says. “And the client doesn’t see any pipes.”

Gas needed to flow uniformly through the line so the feature would fire up consistently from end to end. “When we first turned it on, the first 10 to 15 feet were really good, but not the last 10 to 15 feet,” Hauk says.

In addition to the vent pipes, Hauk and his team mitigated this issue by adding a high-pressure gas meter on the house, satisfying the 220,000-Btu requirement.



ORGANICALLY MODERN

To meld with the modern look and safeguard the 4½-foot vanishing-edge catch basin, Hauk capped it with fiberglass grating, then placed black Mexican river rock on top.

“I didn’t want plants there, but I didn’t want to run deck up to it,” Hauk explains. “The Mexican river rock pro-

vided an organic touch to something that was very modern.”

The pebble acts as something of a filtering agent, as larger debris such as leaves will land on top of it, to be easily blown off or otherwise removed. However, the catch basin does require periodic cleaning, which means removing the pebbles and grate to access it.

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Meet the New Pleatco Pool Tech Grand Finalists

The latest Pleatco honorees both found their way to the industry after trying different careers — but they'll never look back.

BY GARY THILL



Every year, Pleatco conducts its Pool Tech Search, in which industry peers vote on service professionals for their excellence in a number of categories.

Two individuals boast the top title, now called Grand Finalist. This year, Cristina Forcione and Wes Kane hold that distinction. They and the others were honored at an event in January, held in Atlantic City, N.J. at The Pool & Spa Show.

Forcione and Kane found their ways to pool service via unconventional paths. Here's a look at each:

CRISTINA FORCIONE

Service Technician and Service Manager
Seychelles Pools & Spas
Lasalle, Quebec, Canada

If not for a soccer-related head injury sustained three years ago, Cristina Forcione might never have become a service technician, let alone Pleatco's Grand Finalist.

That injury spurred a move back to her home in Montreal, where a friend needed help with an acid wash. "I thought, 'Sure, I have nothing better to do,' and I was excited to try some-

thing new," Forcione recalls. "It was definitely a challenging day — pretty much everything that could go wrong, did go wrong. But ultimately, I loved the fact that I was working outside. Within a week I was hired as a service tech."

From there, Forcione was quickly thrown into the deep end, not just cleaning pools but also troubleshooting pool equipment and learning the temperamental nuances of water chemistry.

"I had a very brief introduction to how everything worked ..." Forcione says. "But I got the hang of it faster than I would have with traditional learning."

Along with her new Grand Finalist honor, Forcione is now a PHTA Certified Service Technician, which she says taught her the theory behind the practices she was already doing. "There were definitely some 'aha' moments," she added. "And I actually managed to teach my boss a few things."

That's no small feat, given that said boss has been in the industry for 20 years.

Though she's "gobsmacked" about winning the Pleatco award, Forcione believes it reflects the intensity she's put into learning everything she can about how to be the best service tech she can be.

"I think my passion was apparent in the interview," she says. "I have put in a lot of sweat, tears and effort to reach this milestone, and this recognition validates my unwavering belief in my

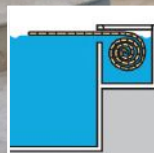
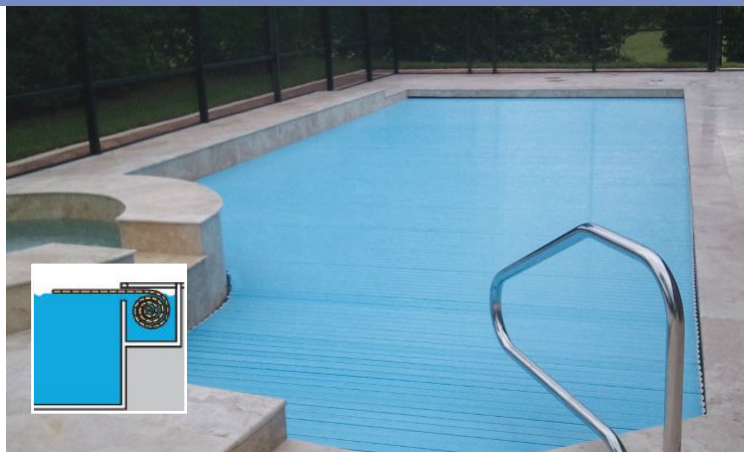
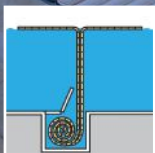
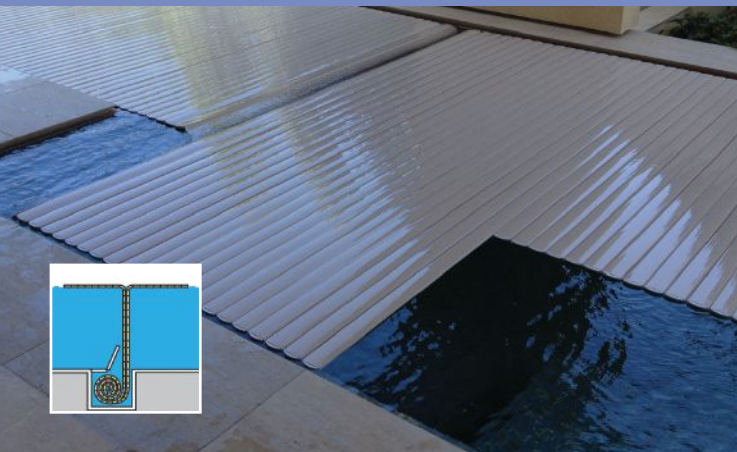


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abilities. It is a testament to my skills, knowledge and expertise in the field, and I am truly humbled by this honor.”

Forcione’s passion extends to the customer service aspect of the job as well.

“Customer service provides a lot of character development,” she says. “I’m surprised how many people don’t understand what goes into taking care of their pool. But it’s great to see the smile on their face when you take the extra time to explain it so they do understand.”

Going forward, Forcione wants to delve more into the troubleshooting and the construction side of the industry. The Vancouver, Wash. native is even considering a move stateside, possibly somewhere in the South, where the pool seasons are longer and she has more opportunity to practice her craft.

“I definitely want to stay in the industry, but I haven’t made a full decision of where I want to go,” she says. “I’m open to trying everything and seeing what works.”

WES KANE

Service Tech
Pools Unlimited Incorporated
Elliot City, Md.

After growing up in his family business, Wes Kane was ready to make a break from three generations of pool and spa professionals. His family even encouraged Kane to go to college and do something — anything — else.

“They definitely tried to steer me away from the business a few times,” Kane laughed.

But after earning his automotive engineering degree, Kane realized there are worse things than the “busted-up knuckles” of a pool tech.

“The turning point for me was when I got into the corporate world,” he says. “I saw all the people around me who were much older, and I just never wanted to be them. They were stuck in the same routine and the



The Pleatco Pool Tech Search Winners: (L-R) Lifetime Achievement Winner Rob Stewart; Young Leader Award Winner Ben Gardea; Grand Finalists Cristina Forcione and Wes Kane; Advancing Technology Award Winner Branden Lewis, Customer Service Award Winner Joe Puccio

same cubicle. I didn’t do well being trapped behind four walls and a computer. I’m more of a risk taker.”

So, seven years ago, Kane traded in his corporate job and returned to what he knew and loved — the family business.

“People are kind of stunned when they find out I have an engineering degree,” he says. “But I have zero regrets about coming back. I like being outside and working with my hands. When you walk into a backyard, it’s a completely new environment and every day is different.”

Kane says he’s more surprised than anyone about being recognized as a Grand Finalist in Pleatco’s Pool Tech Search.

“This is the first time that I have won an award or been a part of such a prestigious event,” he says. “And it feels truly humbling and exhilarating at the same time. Being acknowledged for my work in this field is an incredible honor, and it gives me a renewed sense of purpose to continue striving for excellence in everything that I do.”

Kane sums up that excellence in

two words: customer satisfaction. “The customer is your boss,” he says. “That’s who you need to make happy at the end of the day.”

This goes beyond maintaining pools, the service pro adds. He also takes care of “little things” such as putting chairs away. “We have to do whatever we’ve got to do to make them satisfied,” he says.

Kane credits his father for imparting those values by example, in the way he built the business and its reputation with a combination of leadership, mentorship and plain old hard work.

“Being a business owner is probably one of the toughest jobs there is,” the service professional says. “It’s really rewarding to see what you can accomplish with a good attitude and good people.”

As he looks to the future, Kane hopes to take over the family business, just as his dad did from his grandfather. “I’m looking forward to the day that I’m in charge,” he says. “In the meantime, I just want to keep making a good name for our company and doing a good job for all our customers.”

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Can You Pass This One-Question Test for Good Managing?

The answer could determine how well you succeed long term.

BY PAUL WINANS



I like to read a weekly column in The New York Times called “The Corner Office,” which is always an interview or a profile of a corporate leader. One that still stands out for me, is an interview with Walt Bettinger, who has been CEO of the Charles Schwab Corp. since 2008. Among other topics, Bryant asked Bettinger if he learned any leadership lessons in college. Here’s how Bettinger responded:

“A business strategy course in my senior year stands out. I had maintained a 4.0 average, and I wanted to graduate with a perfect average. It came down to the final exam, and I had spent many hours studying and

memorizing formulas to do calculations for the case studies.

The teacher handed out the final exam, and it was on one piece of paper, which really surprised me because I figured it would be longer than that. Once everyone had their paper, he said, ‘Go ahead and turn it over.’ Both sides were blank.

And the professor said, ‘I’ve taught you everything I can teach you about business in the last 10 weeks, but the most important message, the most important question, which is this: What’s the name of the lady who cleans this building?’

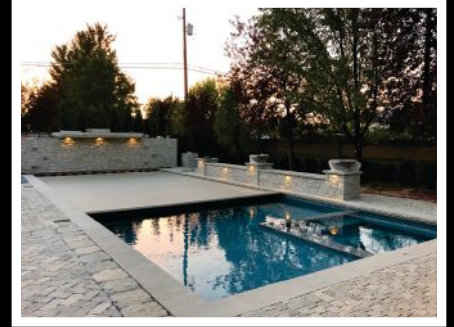
And that had a powerful impact.

It was the only test I ever failed, and I got the B I deserved. Her name was Dottie. I’d seen her, but I’d never taken the time to ask her name. I’ve tried to know every Dottie I’ve ever worked with since.

It was just a great reminder of what really matters in life, and that you should never lose sight of the people who do the real work.”

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I used to do a lot of on-site consulting and facilitate peer group meetings, both of which are typically done in hotel meeting rooms.

My work going successfully often depends on people I am meeting for the first time. When introducing myself, I work hard to remember their names. It takes several tries for me, as I am distracted getting ready to run the event.

Over the course of the event, each of the members of the hotel staff has a big impact on how easy it is for me to do a good job. Simple things — lunch being ready on time, the AV equipment working, or the room being refreshed when we are on a break — make a big difference for me and for the attendees.

My experience more often than not is that when I take the time to establish and maintain a personal con-

Focusing too much on results can leave a company owner forgetting about those who produce the results.

nection to the staff I will be depending on, I am taken care of very well.

What could you do in your business to connect better with those you depend on? Here are some things I recommend:

Every week, have lunch with a dif-

ferent employee, trade contractor or vendor. Ask them about how they are doing. Build a relationship.

Take the time to stop at a work site (or walk around the office) and thank your employees, one-on-one, for working with you. Make sure you make your appreciation specific to the person you are talking to.

The way to get great results is to focus on nurturing the people you depend on. Sometimes you have to expand your vision to see them. If you can do this, you'll pass the Real Test.

Paul Winans, a veteran remodeler, who worked as a consultant to remodeling business owners, and a facilitator for Remodelers Advantage, is now enjoying retirement. Paul's book, "The Remodeling Life: A Journey from Laggard to Leader" is available on Amazon. This article previously appeared in sister publication JLC.

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MASTERS *in the* MAKING

To start this series about developing a training program for your service team, experts share overall tips.

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO

There may exist as many versions of this fable as people who tell it.

One individual — say a company CFO — points out a particularly noticeable line item in the budget. “Hey, Boss, look at the cost of educating the employees! What happens if these employees leave?” says the CFO, in a version of the story told by Stephen Little, CEO of Claro Pool Services, in Palm Desert, Calif.

The CEO counters with food for thought: “What happens if they don’t train and they stay?”

While some in the service sector of the industry may continue to grapple with this conundrum, others have developed fully formed training programs that not only incorporate education

offered by associations and vendors, but include structured in-house training taking place over the first weeks and months of a new hire’s term, then continuing on an ongoing basis.

While company owners see industry education improving, it’s not enough to rely exclusively on association and vendor programs. It’s through in-house training that your company concocts its secret sauce. Besides learning the basics of water balance, techs need to learn your company’s specific way of doing things and what sets it apart in terms of technical processes and soft skills such as interpersonal communication.

“There’s a lot more that goes into being a high-quality service technician



As service technicians go out on their own, communication technology can help them get the guidance they need from the team.

when they start with the company. While a tech ideally could answer any question, you may not think you need that. Little, for instance, wants his entry-level techs to know the routine process inside and out, but he doesn't need them to know the whys of every part of the process.

Overwhelming newer technicians with too much information can set them up for failure, he believes.

For his company, "the goal is not to have a pool cleaner who can explain the potential of hydrogen or what the best method to sanitize the pool may be," Little says. "The goal and result of our training is that the pool cleaning employee can clearly explain what tests they are performing, what the expected result is and how to have an impact on any test."

— and a company — than just knowing how to do it," says Dan Lenz, vice president of All Seasons Pools, Spas & Outdoor Living, in Orland Park, Ill.

This becomes especially crucial as companies seek to grow. A structured training plan helps standardize procedures. For those who hire inexperienced individuals and train from scratch — whether by choice or necessity — a well-planned training program is crucial for getting them up to speed.

For those still wondering if the investment pays off, Little has personally found a direct and proportional relationship between the education he offers and his company's success.

"The very best indicator of success in this industry is the layers and layers of training over and over again," he says. "It is easy to become complacent, but there are literally dozens of opportunities to ward off mediocrity, but we must stand up and boldly take advantage of these opportunities."

In this series, we will cover the various elements that go into a solid service-training program. Here, we begin with some general rules to apply.

► **Set goals and expectations for each position**

Take a realistic look at what each technician will do — and not just the maintenance and repair tasks.

Some companies want their technicians to take advantage of any up-selling opportunity that comes along. If that's the case, they'll need information about the products you sell, as well as their benefits and drawbacks.

You may want service professionals to detect if a pool falls out of compliance with laws, codes and industry standards, both to safeguard customers and propose repairs. In that case, they will need to know local and state codes, as well as industry standards.

Also ask yourself how in-depth their knowledge needs to be, especially

► **Develop a clear training and promotion structure**

Establish a structured plan outlining what education will take place, as well as incentives and promotions given to each employee as they complete each stage. Not only does this help your company cement its training program, but it serves as a motivator for employees to continually evolve.

At All Season's, service techs begin as apprentices before advancing to Junior Technician and entering a new pay tier. "Our tiered level of pay offers clear, written incentives for advancement when specific objectives are achieved by the employee," Lenz says.

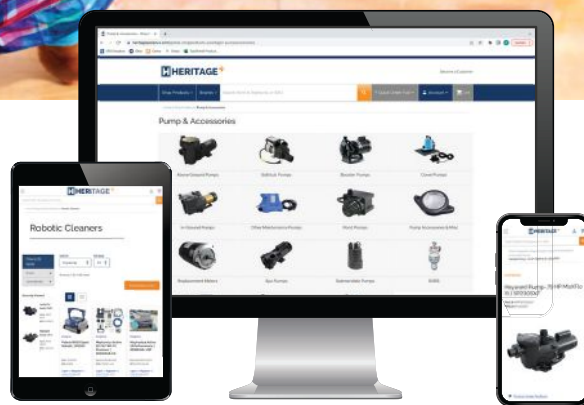
After they've gone through each stage of the Junior Technician tier, they become Senior Technicians and enter a new tier. Not only do they earn greater income, but they now help train apprentices and junior techs.

"We have an employee agreement for technicians that spells out how

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they can get from walking in with no pool knowledge to making a six-plus-figure income in a six- to 10-year time frame,” Lenz says. “And we’re delving deeper to be more specific as to the various tasks a tech needs to be proficient at.” Right now, that includes a 10-page document listing the procedures techs must be able to perform in the field.

The plan should specify how long new techs need to work in their current positions before being considered for promotion. Gohlke Pools, for instance, requires technicians to clean pools for at least one summer before they’re assessed as potential repair trainees.

“That gives us enough time to evaluate their work ethic, communication skills and mechanical prowess,” says Nick Day, general manager of the Denton, Texas-based company. “That could be as little as six months, but probably more likely a year.”

These evaluations typically take place as winter approaches, so they can receive intensive training in the off season. If a tech isn’t ready for promotion at that time, he or she will continue in their maintenance role for the next season.

▶ Take an active involvement in choosing employees’ outside education

Some companies want their techs to earn industry certifications quickly, so they require them in a given timeline.

Gohlke Pools has a Certified Pool Operator instructor on its staff, who teaches courses monthly for employees, commercial customers and others in the local pool, spa and aquatics industries. New service pros at the company must take the course offered soonest after their start date, then take the test.

Los Angeles-based Pure Swim lays out a sequence of four industry certifications that employees must take in the first six months. These include the CPO, as well as certifications from the National Plasterers Council, IPS-SA, OSHA certification, and the Pool Chemistry Training Institute.

Additionally, as an ongoing part of their education, employees must attend two weeks of outside instruction each year, paid by the Pure Swim, says its CEO, Rich Gallo.

Upon sending employees to trade shows, some companies mandate that they attend a minimum number of classes or hours of instruction each day.

Some managers will sit down with their charges to map out what classes they should attend to help them progress.

▶ Build repetition and multiple points of view into your system

This helps for a number of reasons. Different points of view will help fill information gaps. And because each person’s brain processes new instruction differently, presenting it in a variety of formats will more likely reach everyone. Finally, we retain information better through repetition, so hearing the same thing in a variety of ways will reinforce it.

For instance, Gohlke Pools’ master electrician will teach the service department at least once a year. And during their ridealong period, techs at Aqua Pool & Patio in East Windsor, Conn. spend time with the plumbing crew on the construction side. “They learn a lot by seeing what’s underground,” says President Michael Giannamore.

Lenz has his new techs ride along with different staffers, including management and senior technicians, so they get different perspectives. In-office courses are generally taught by a team of at least two, for the same reason. A manager might better understand the



Senior techs often play a key role in training. They should have the ability to stand back and watch trainees try the work themselves.



The best training programs include different types of instruction, including in the class and in the field.

LEFT PHOTO COURTESY CLAROPOL; RIGHT PHOTO COURTESY GOHLKE POOLS



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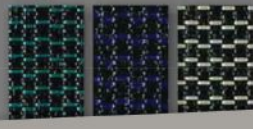
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theories and big picture, while somebody who works in the field knows better what the team will face day to day.

Look for more than one or two ways to teach. Of course, companies should combine classroom-type instruction with hands-on training. But Little says managers should go beyond that and look for every opportunity to educate.

"I order pizzas on Friday, so you get a paycheck and pizza," he says. "Some education happens when you're eating pizza and having a cold drink together."

► Set up your mentors to succeed.

Not even the highest level of competence at maintaining and repairing pools will guarantee a knack for teaching and training. Lenz, who once studied to be a teacher, appreciates this more than anybody.

"Certain people shouldn't be teach-

ers," he says. "We've all encountered them — I can read a Power Point, I don't need you to read it to me."

At All Seasons, Lenz generally chooses which senior staffers will instruct, based on temperament at least as much as subject matter expertise. His approach may seem counterintuitive to some: He looks for somebody who can listen and step back as well as they can articulate and demonstrate.

"We've had certain people who, no matter how much you try, will not allow a junior person to do the work," he says. "They want [the junior tech] to learn by watching. But our industry does not learn by watching, they learn by doing. So [mentors and trainers] need a willingness to say, 'I'll be the one holding the flashlight for you, and you'll do the work.' We're identifying

those who are willing to let others do instead of making them watch."

While managers and supervisors do the training in many companies, Gallo sees the job as an growth opportunity for those senior techs who have mastered the skills but have no desire to manage.

"Some [say], 'I love my job. I don't want to manage — I want to keep doing this.' But they love to train and show new individuals what they love to do."

To help mentors succeed, Gohlke Pools staff will provide support. Management will help assemble information and checklists to guide the instructor on the subject matter to cover. If a senior tech will present a class, another staffer may produce the Power Point presentation if the lead tech doesn't have that skill.

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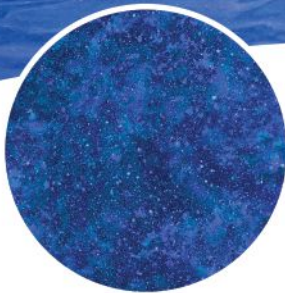
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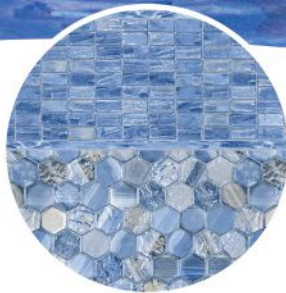
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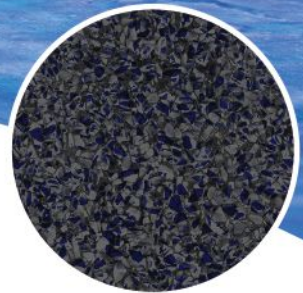
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BY RENA GOLDMAN



More than ever, optimizing your website has become an essential part of doing business.

This doesn't come just as a matter of evolution. While consumer behavior has continually changed to favor web and mobile use over the past decades, the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the process, says Pam Vinje, president and CEO of Houston-based Small Screen Producer, a digital media marketing agency for the pool and spa industry. Pandora isn't likely to go back in the box, so the pool industry will need to keep up.

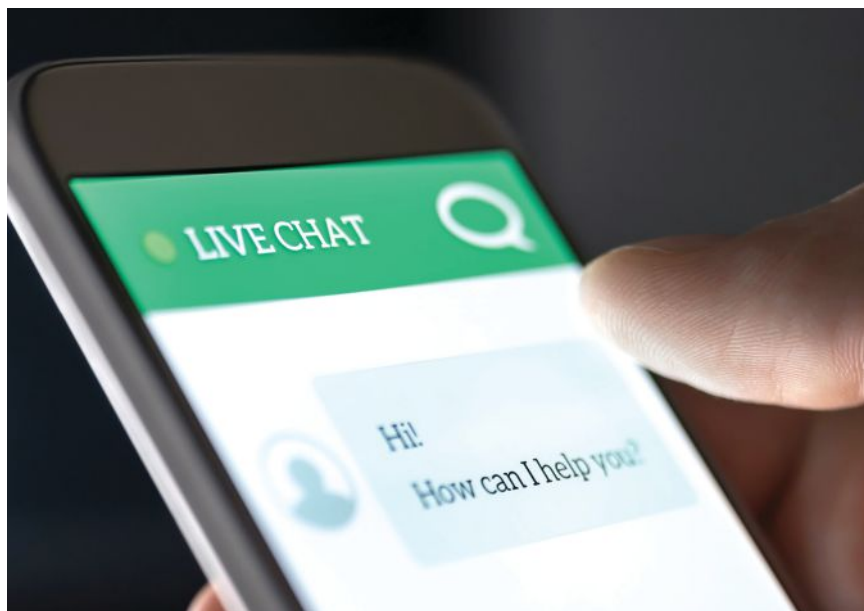
At a minimum, your website should load quickly, be optimized for mobile devices and search engines, and provide an easy and productive user experience. But, aside from such utility, several modifications can make online shopping easier and more appealing for customers, whether you're a retailer, service provider, or builder.

To move forward, Vinje says, industry websites should evolve from "brochure sites to 24/7 shopping sites." Customer preferences have changed. People want the opportunity to shop online 24/7. According to a study conducted in 2013 by author, advisor, and speaker Steven Van Belleghem, 70% of customers expect a company's website to include a self-service application. Research conducted in 2018 by Statista showed that 88% of customers expect a brand to have an online self-service support portal.

Knowing how customers prefer to interact with your site will help you create the best experience for them, which will lead to more business for you. Take these steps to maximizing your website's potential.

ASSESS YOUR CURRENT WEBSITE

Certain tell-tale signs will indicate your website needs an upgrade. If you notice one of these, pay heed.



Consider the age of your website. "If you've got a five-year-old website, you're not on today's technology," explains Jeff Pierce, owner of Crosshair, a marketing and website development company based in Tarpon Springs, Fla.

Three years serves as a good rule of thumb for knowing whether or not your website meets current technology standards. Operating systems, web browsers, software and the devices that display your site change rapidly. If a website is three to five years old, "too many of its components have aged beyond being updatable," he explains.

Website platform hosts such as WordPress issue platform updates, but, like updating your mobile device, you have to make sure the update runs.

Similarly, a site needs immediate attention if it is not optimized for mobile devices, meaning it is not built to display and function well on mobile devices compared with desktops. Check loading speeds on mobile devices with online tools for analyzing performance. Pierce recommends PageSpeed Insights. If on a mobile device, your website does not score a 70 or higher on PageSpeed, or if it takes more than 10 seconds

to load, it should be addressed. To find other website analysis tools, search for "tools to analyze website performance," and several options will come up. Some, like Semrush Site Audit, have free trials.

The website's copy or text also should generate good search engine optimization, or SEO. That's what allows Google to find your site and make it discoverable to potential customers. For example, your website text should include the company's location and services it provides, along with other search terms potential customers will most likely use to find you, explains Marshal Davis, president and founder of The Woodlands, Texas-based Ascendly Marketing and former owner of Beyond Blue Pools.

You can assess your site's SEO with tools such as Moz or SEMRush. Google has its own guidelines for best practices in creating content with good SEO.

ADD FEATURES FOR A SELF-SERVICE EXPERIENCE

As people conduct more transactions online, they expect a smooth self-service experience, even for big-ticket items.



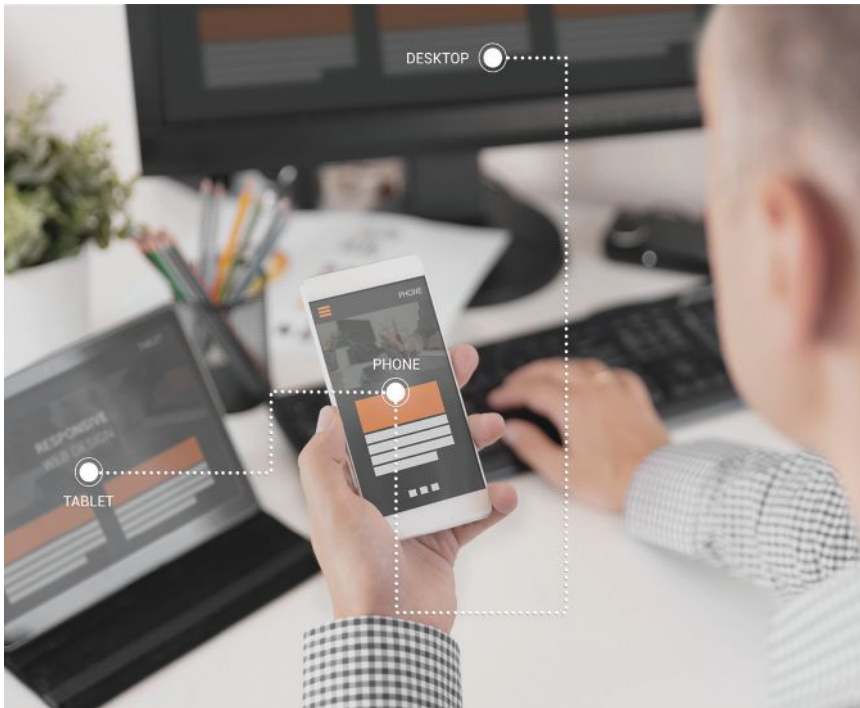
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to those that do. If you can't finalize the sale of large items such as spas or swim spas online, at least move the customer through the sales funnel by providing tools where they can select the spa and its features. Here again, they remain engaged and save time by coming into the store prepared.

On the service/maintenance side, self-service scheduling can be offered to replace scheduling done over the phone. Vinje created forms on the website for one of her service clients that allow new and returning customers to follow steps requesting a pool opening or closing.

More advanced elements to engage and nurture customers include chatbots. These applications or programs are designed to imitate human conversations and often handle frequently asked questions. They allow users to ask certain questions and get responses 24/7.

Video tutorials can be used to help build credibility and loyalty.

SHOWCASE YOUR BRAND AND WORK

Testimonials and an updated portfolio

Pierce recommends approaching your online process the same as you would the in-person experience you want to provide. Customers should find one just as rewarding as the other.

"If you're a 'brochure' site, if you don't have self-service options, that's the first thing you need to fix," Vinje says.

Rather than just providing a phone number or even a form to fill out, Vinje builds sites designed to lead customers through a "nurturing sales funnel," facilitating the journey potential customers go through on their way to a purchase. This funnel will look slightly different for service businesses, retailers and builders.

For pool/spa builders, the funnel might collect information needed to book an appointment with a designer, then lead the prospective customer to an online tool where they can build their dream design. Using the tool keeps them on the site, shows them available options, and allows the builder to upsell by showing decking and outdoor living

add-ons. By the time they meet with the designer, they have a better idea of what they want.

Pool/spa retailers can add e-commerce capabilities, allowing customers to purchase items on the site. Otherwise, you risk losing business

BUSINESS WEBSITES AND ADA-COMPLIANCE

Business websites are now governed by the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), which means they need to include design features and operate in a way that makes them accessible for people with disabilities.

"The information highway is considered public domain, and the websites are shops along the way, so you have to have your shop compliant," says Pam Vinje, president/CEO of digital marketing agency Small Screen Producer.

The U.S. Department of Justice Civil Rights Division states that the ADA's requirements "apply to all the goods, services, privileges, or activities offered by public accommodations, including those offered on the web."

While there are extensive guidelines for web content and tool developers, businesses don't need to do much to ensure a website is accessible. Vinje says there are companies that specialize in accessibility widgets that can be added to any site to make it compliant. These widgets are added to an existing website using a code.

Once the code is in place, users will see a pop-up that asks them what modifications they need. For example, if they respond by listing seizures or vision problems, the widget scans the existing website and instantly configures it to make the site accessible to someone with those disabilities.

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of completed projects for builders are still important elements of a website.

On a website, these elements provide benefits besides the more obvious ones — namely, they're easy to update, keeping your website fresh. As Google prioritizes websites that have newer content, this will help move your site higher in the search results.

For retailers and service businesses, testimonials add a social element to the website, bringing personality and credibility. If you have a Google Business profile, you can take testimonials from there to add to your website, Davis suggests.

GET HELP WITH AN UPDATE

These experts all recommend hiring a professional to help optimize and update your web platform.

While your teenage or college-age child may know the mechanics of

building a website, optimizing them requires another layer of expertise. Google's SEO best practices are a lot to absorb if you've never worked with them before, and it requires web development knowledge to work with features for e-commerce and self service. Davis advises building sites on WordPress, as it will be easy to find developers acquainted with the popular platform when the time comes for an update.

Some web developers and marketers, like Vinje, also have experience in the pool/spa industry or even specialize in it. Others bring their expertise in business websites in general. When looking for a website development company, Pierce recommends looking for a company that's done work for businesses that are larger than yours. At the very least, be prepared to provide a company logo, testimonials and high-quality project photos.

Professional websites can cost a few thousand dollars, depending on the number of pages and features. If you're worried about cost, Vinje suggests looking into a marketing cop with a manufacturer. Since it's in their best interest for dealers to have a website that converts, some manufacturers will pay, at least in part, for your website upgrade.

Remember, websites are no longer online brochures to be put up and forgotten. You'll need an update and maintenance strategy even after a site build or rebuild. Updates include continued modifications to the site's text, photos or product offerings, and maintenance includes keeping the site functional and up-to-date with current web practices. Some web development companies will do this for an additional fee, or you may opt for a tech-savvy staff member to take it on.



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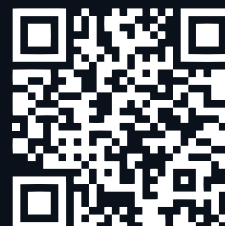
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SCAN TO CHECK

From sister publication Remodeling

HOW TO WRITE A PRACTICAL BUSINESS PLAN

The act of writing a business plan forces you to look analytically at your company's past performance in order to set reachable goals for the future.

BY RICHARD STEVEN



idea

A business plan is a map to finding the most direct route to your achieving your business goals and avoiding costly detours and delays. Yet most construction company owners have never written one. For them, the process seems daunting and the actual benefits uncertain.

I'm going to demystify the process of writing a business plan and show you how to make yours a practical management tool. One of the first steps toward effective management is accurate measurement. A good business plan makes your ideas measurable and helps you manage your business better and achieve your goals.

WHAT CAN A BUSINESS PLAN DO FOR YOU?

The practical value of a map depends on where you want to go. Not every business needs a business plan. If you want to maintain your business much as it is now, you need to invest time and energy in improving specific areas rather than in creating an overall map. To put it another way, you don't need a map if you're going to cruise familiar roads in a familiar neighborhood.

But if you want to make a change in your business and go someplace new, a practical business plan is a vital guide. Your plan will show you the way to reach your goal and help you predict what resources you'll need to get there. It will flag potential roadblocks or hazards and tell

you when you need new strategies to avoid delays.

With a practical plan, you will always know where you are, how far you've come toward your goal, and just how far you still have to go.

INGREDIENTS OF A PRACTICAL BUSINESS PLAN

A practical business plan — as opposed to one that gathers dust — consists of clear goals and effective tracking systems. Understanding these basic elements and how they fit together will enable you to create an effective map that can guide your business from where it is now to where you want it to be.

A practical business plan addresses the following issues:

- Sales goals and a tracking system for contracts signed
- Conversion rates and a tracking system for monitoring inquiries and leads
- Sales time needs and a time-tracking system
- Gross margin and pricing policies
- Company budget and a budget-tracking system
- Productivity goals and a productivity-tracking system
- Since a business is a financial enterprise, a business plan is really a financial plan. It starts with sales: How many contracts can you expect to sign and at what gross margin?

Of course, if you sell more than you can produce, your "success" will

be short and not very sweet. Adequate production capacity is essential to setting meaningful sales goals, just as a reliable vehicle is essential to a successful road trip.

In other words, the best business plan is useless unless you have the resources to execute it. Indeed, one advantage of going through the process of writing a plan is that doing so gives you advance notice of just what resources you'll need to make the plan work.

SALES GOALS

To set sales goals, start by analyzing last year's actual construction contracts. Group them into three to six logical categories, such as kitchens, baths, lower levels, additions, general. Sort the contracts into these categories, listing the number of contracts, the total value signed, and the average contract value per category. Add the categories together to get a company total for contracts signed.

Using this breakdown of last year's actual sales as a reference point, make a parallel list of reasonable goals for next year: number of projects by category, average value per project, total value per category. This sounds simple, but it often takes considerable thought.

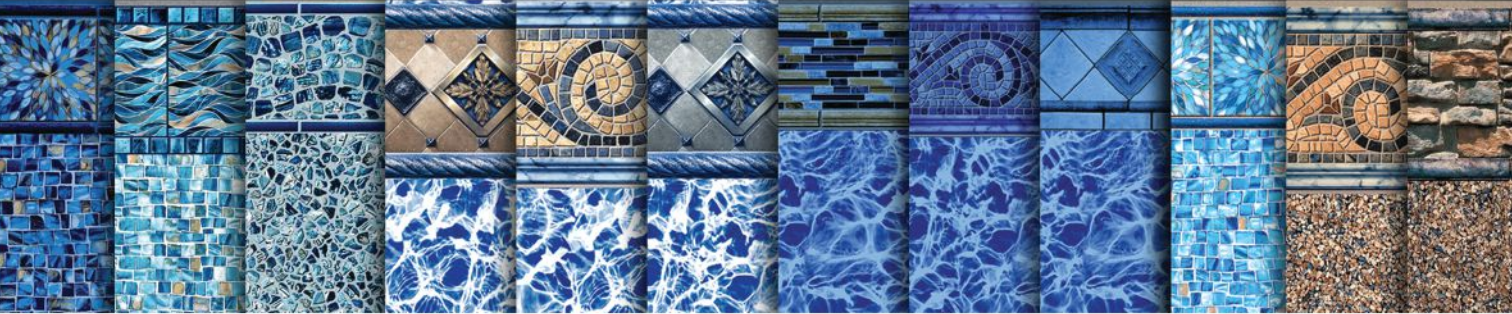
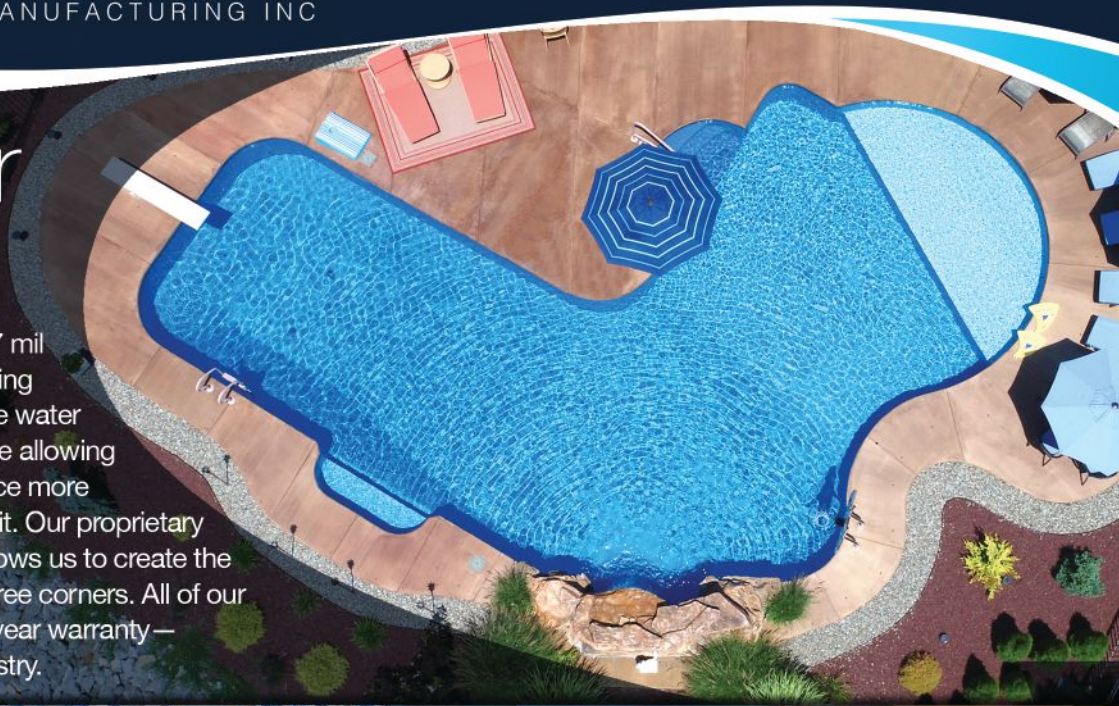
Let's say you remodeled four kitchens last year at an average price of \$43,209:

- How many do you think you can do/want to do/will do next year?



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- How many are in the pipeline now?
- What factors might affect the average value?

These goals become the foundation of your business plan, and the more thoughtfully you visualize and set them, the more powerful your plan will be.

After setting initial sales goals, do a reality check against last year's actual performance:

- Are projected changes reasonable?
- If you completed three kitchens last year, can you really do 40 next year?
- What will make that increase possible?

When the sales goals truly seem reasonable and achievable, tentatively adopt them and move to the next step.

CONVERSION RATES AND LEADS NEEDED

Now you need to analyze conversion rates and determine how many leads you will need to meet your sales goals.

This stage involves a series of questions:

- How many times will the phone need to ring for you to sell the number of contracts you have set as a goal? Again, this question is best answered in relation to last year's actual performance: How many inquiries did you field last year?
- Of those inquiries, how many

HOW MANY SALES HOURS IT WILL TAKE TO MEET PROJECTIONS IS A CRUCIAL AND EASILY OVERLOOKED ISSUE, ESPECIALLY WHEN THE COMPANY OWNER WEARS MANY HATS AND HANDLES ALL THE SALES.

were target leads? If this data wasn't recorded, make your clear-eyed best guess.

- How many design contracts did you sell?
- How many construction contracts?
- Using those figures, calculate last year's conversion rates.
- How many target leads converted to design contracts?
- How many design contracts converted to construction contracts?
- What percentage of total inquiries were target leads?
- How many total inquiries were needed to yield each construction contract?

Then, based on your analysis of last year, project next year's conversion rates:

- Are the rates themselves likely to change? Why?

- Will your new marketing company produce a higher ratio of target leads to total inquiries?

- Will improved sales techniques convert a higher number of target clients to construction contracts?

State your assumptions for future reference, then calculate how many leads you need to sell the number of contracts you have set as next year's goal:

- Does it sound possible? Realistic?
- Do the goals need to be changed?

Now you know how many inquiries and leads you need, and you have the basis for planning your marketing activities and budget.

SALES TIME REQUIRED

How many sales hours it will take to meet projections is a crucial and easily overlooked issue, especially when the company owner wears





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many hats and handles all the sales.

Begin with this question: How much time was spent on the selling process last year?

Make sure your answer includes the early stages of talking with prospective clients, before a preliminary contract, as well as any salesperson time spent in the “design” process after a preliminary contract. In addition, add all salesperson time spent finalizing specifications or maintaining a good client relationship after the construction contract has been signed.

If you don't have those hours recorded, don't despair. You're not alone. Use your best guess and vow to begin tracking your time so you have accurate figures for next year's plan. In my experience, an owner/salesperson often underestimates time spent in the selling process.

Next, divide the total number of hours spent selling by the number of contracts sold last year to get an average number of sales hours per contract.

You now have a historically accurate (to the extent that your data is accurate) benchmark to use for planning.

For example, if last year you sold 26 contracts in a total of 962 hours, you averaged 37 selling hours per contract. Let's say you plan to sell 33 contracts next year. Assuming you sell as efficiently as last year, you will need 1,221 sales hours, an increase of 259 hours.

So where will the additional hours come from? Will you delegate some of your other activities? Will you hire an estimator or an assistant? Will you sleep less and skip your vacation? Or will you sharpen your sales skills to reduce the average number of hours per contract?

You need to either set a realistic strategy for selling the projected contracts or revise your projections downward to a realistic level.

It's important to articulate your projection of the number of sales hours you will need next year. Such calculations often become the basis for rearranging roles and responsibilities within a company or for deciding to hire additional help. They also provide benchmarks for objectively assessing performance and making investments that increase efficiency.

GROSS MARGIN AND PRICING POLICIES

The sales goals you set will tell you how much money will be available for operating expenses, net profit, and owner income, but you also need to know your company's gross margin (GM).

Once again, actual past performance becomes the basis for future projections. You can learn last year's actual gross margin from your year-end profit-and-loss statement. The gross margin is calculated by subtracting all direct costs — or cost of goods sold (COGS) — from total sales.

It helps to consider this figure both in dollars and as a percentage of sales.

For example, if total remodeling sales amounted to \$679,542, and your direct costs were \$489,270, your gross margin was \$190,272, or 28 percent of sales.

If you expect to sell at the same prices and produce at the same level of efficiency, it is reasonable to use a 28 percent gross margin as your benchmark in setting next year's budget.

To assess whether your targeted gross margin will be adequate, you need to project operating expenses and net profit. Begin by reviewing last year's actual operating expenses and net profit as shown in your year-end profit and loss statement.

Examine each line item of operating expense:

- Is it likely to change? Up or down? Why?
- Will you incur new operating expenses next year? By, say, opening a new office or hiring a bookkeeper?

Answer these questions and thoughtfully estimate next year's operating expenses.

Once you've made a reasonable projection of operating expenses, decide on your net profit goal.

Let's assume for simplicity's sake that you decide on a net profit goal of 5 percent.

Given your sales projections, your gross margin goal of 28 percent, and your projected operating expenses, will you be able to achieve a 5 per-





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cent net profit? Or does one of the variables need to be changed?

You might realize that you need to increase prices — which is preferable to increasing sales volume at the same margin — or possibly hold the line on your operating expenses.

Remember, there are only two ways to increase your gross margin: by raising your prices or by lowering your direct costs. Unless you are ready and able to do one of these two things, use your actual gross margin percentage from last year to predict your gross margin for next year.

Your gross margin goal informs your pricing policies. Typically, to allow for slippage, your projects should be priced to achieve a gross margin several percentage points higher than your company target.

That means if your company target GM is 28 percent, you should be pricing individual projects at a 31 percent or 32 percent GM.

COMPANY BUDGET

The most straightforward way to write a company budget is to mimic the format of your P&L statements. The budget is simply a projected statement rather than a historical one. Instead of actual sales, you insert your sales goals.

Using your projected GM percentage, you can calculate both direct costs (COGS) and GM dollars. Subtracting the projected operating expenses from the gross margin will give you the projected net profit figure.

YOUR GROSS MARGIN GOAL INFORMS YOUR PRICING POLICIES. TYPICALLY, TO ALLOW FOR SLIPPAGE, YOUR PROJECTS SHOULD BE PRICED TO ACHIEVE A GROSS MARGIN SEVERAL PERCENTAGE POINTS HIGHER THAN YOUR COMPANY TARGET.

It's helpful to write an annual budget and then break it down into monthly averages. You can then create a spreadsheet comparing each month's actual performance with the budgeted amounts. Information from this budget tracking report is an invaluable management tool that can help you spot potential problems and take corrective steps before they become critical.

PRODUCTIVITY GOALS

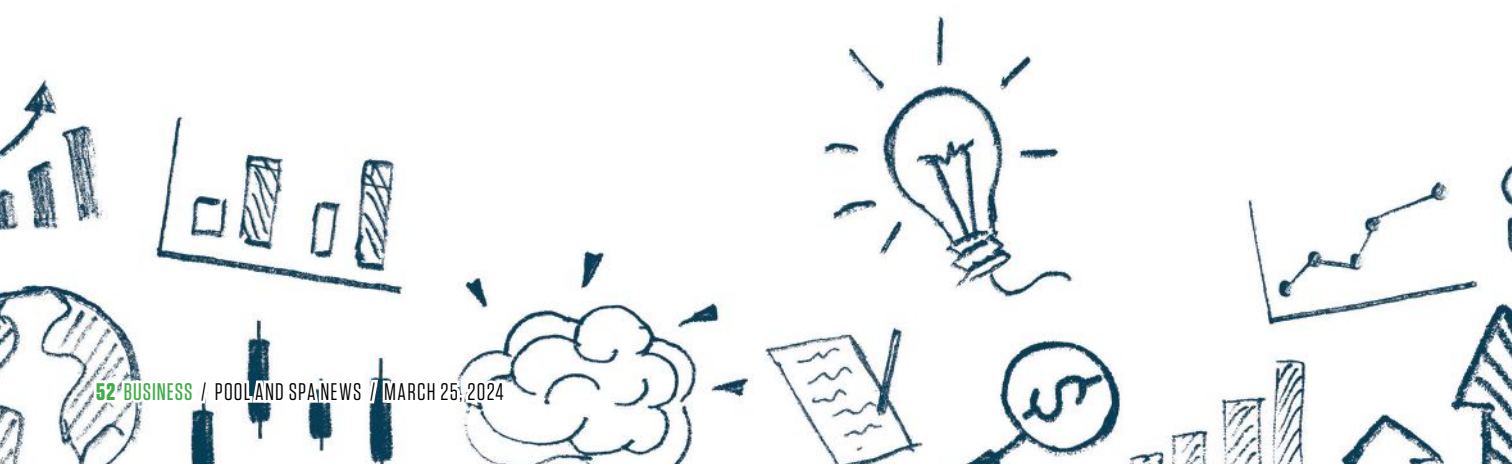
The final issue you need to address in your business plan concerns field staff: What will be required to produce those sales? To answer this question, you must analyze past productivity and set productivity goals.

Productivity can be objectively

measured by dividing the total value of work completed in a specific time period (a month or week, for example) by a relevant unit, such as lead carpenters or direct-labor hours (DLH).

If your P&L sales figure from last year was \$679,542 and you employed two lead carpenters, your output per lead carpenter was \$339,771. If your total direct-labor hours amounted to 4,432, your output per DLH was \$153.33.

Calculate your last year's actual productivity rate. Use that figure as a starting point for setting objective goals for next year. Remember that productivity can be greatly influenced by a variety of factors. Raising your prices will increase output/direct-labor hours (OP/DLH); using a higher percentage of subcontractors



will increase OP/DLH; employing better management and scheduling will increase OP/DLH.

There is no "right" productivity figure across the industry. The correct figure for you will depend on a mix of factors unique to your company.

Calculating your actual historical productivity rate enables you to predict how many direct-labor hours or lead carpenters you will need to produce your projected volume of work next year. It also gives you a benchmark for working to increase your productivity and measuring the results of your efforts.

For illustration purposes, let's say you set a productivity goal of \$185 per DLH. If your sales goal is \$824,000, you will need a total of 4,454 direct-labor hours. Assuming a full-time field-staff person works 2,000 hours in a

year (40 hours a week for 50 weeks), you will need 2.23 people.

Establishing accurate productivity benchmarks has many benefits. These benchmarks help you schedule projects, anticipate needed staffing changes, and identify individual performance that either exceeds or falls short of company expectations.

BON VOYAGE

The first time you write a business plan, you'll most likely need to rely on educated guesses for much of your benchmark data. But as you track actual progress in key areas on a monthly basis, you'll build a company database that will allow you to make accurate predictions and better decisions with every planning cycle.

The numbers in your plan have power only if you know what lies be-

hind them and believe in them. Goals plucked from the air cannot pull you forward. Your plan will be an effective map if you visualize the reality behind each goal and thoughtfully accept it.

As with any endeavor, the most difficult business plan to write is the first one. Once you've done it once and have used monthly reports to track progress in key areas, successive plans will become much easier. Instead of facing roadblocks that seem impossibly congested, you will be able to identify and follow the best avenues for your business, creating a practical map that takes you where you want to go.

Richard Steven, president of Fulcra Consulting, specializes in helping remodeling companies create and implement effective management plans.

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(continued on page 66)

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This free-standing lift boasts a 325-pound weight capacity, achieved by utilizing a sand ballast system with a 15-inch opening that allows for easy filling and removal of sand when necessary. Adding to the functionality of this lift is a quiet 255-degree rotation, making pool entry seamless.

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Contact: Aqua Creek Products | aquacreek.com



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Cover Care LLC Professional Auto-Cover Installation and Service

Cover Care, LLC, is a national, full service company specializing in installation and repair of automatic pool covers and removable fences.

Cover Care technicians are trained to install, service and repair all brands, makes and models of automatic pool covers.

The company has specialists in more than 50 major markets in the U.S., allowing any pool retailer, pool builder or pool service professional to partner with Cover Care in the installation and service of pools that include an automatic pool cover.

"We make it easy for pool professionals to subcontract out the installation and maintenance automatic pool covers, allowing pool pros to easily offer and profit from selling auto covers without having to train or have personnel on hand to maintain and install them," says Jacob Bloss, operation director of Cover Care LLC.

Contact: Cover Care LLC | cover-care.com

Coverlon Safety Cover

Offered in mesh or solid materials, these covers are available in a variety of colors. The solid covers come in natural, earth-tone colors of gray and tan, in addition to blue and green. Super-mesh comes in green, blue and tan; regular mesh is available in those colors, plus black.

The safety cover is fabricated with durable materials, and strapping on the top and underside — the entire length and width of the pool — making for a stronger, safer cover, notes Frank Patel, company owner/president. "Our regular spring is what other companies refer to as 'heavy duty,'" he says. "Customers are pleased with the construction, especially for waterfeatures and complicated pools. They comment on the superior fit, construction and longevity of the covers."

Installed properly, children and pets cannot fall or accidentally slip into the pool. They also are tamper proof, requiring a special tool to remove or install.

Contact: The Cover Co. | coverlon.com

Swim Check Fix Phosphate Tablets

Swim Check Fix Phosphate Tablets are formulated to remove phosphates in swimming pool water. They are simple and easy to use.

"Add the tablet directly to the pool skimmer for efficient phosphate removal," says Mike McBride, marketing manager for Industrial Test Systems. "It's more affordable and longer lasting than liquid removers. One tablet lowers phosphates by over 500 ppb for 10,000 gallons."

The patent-pending, time-release tablets are individually wrapped.

Technical support is available by calling 803-329-9712, and marketing materials are available on request.

The product comes with a 1-year warranty.

Contact: Industrial Test Systems | sensafe.com



Kayden Premium Safety Covers

Kayden Premium Safety Covers are offered in three types of materials: a standard mesh that blocks 90% of UV light, a SunBlocker mesh that blocks 99% of UV light and a solid material that blocks 100% of UV light.

The springs are made from ultra thick gauge steel with non-slip, attached keepers for easy adjustment, and feature stay-put spring covers that won't slip off. The webbing and thread are the strongest available with specialized stitching in every corner for strength.

The raised wall treatment is designed for easy installation as well as ease of opening and closing the pool.

The Kayden No Drag Cover Bags are more than big enough to fit the cover, no matter how it gets folded, and feature handles so the cover can easily be moved without having to drag it.

The covers are available in green, blue, tan, gray and black.

Contact: Kayden Mfg. | KaydenMFG.com



Aqua-Xtreme Virtually Solid Mesh Cover

Loop-Loc's Aqua-Xtreme Virtually Solid mesh covers are constructed with light-blocking fabric that not only deters algae growth but drains quickly at up to 80 gallons per minute without clogging, eliminating the possibility of a standing water hazard, says LeeAnn Donaton-Pesta, Loop-Loc's president/CEO.

"Aqua-Xtreme covers are built super strong and will last for many years to come," Donaton-Pesta says. "Homeowners and dealers love opening up Aqua-Xtreme Covers in the spring to a pool almost as clean as the day it was closed".

Tough, double thick solid polypropylene webbing straps surround the perimeter, and the springs are made of noncorrosive 302 stainless steel for superior weight-bearing capacity.

All Aqua-Xtreme Virtually Solid mesh covers are supplied with a 15-year, pro-rated warranty.

Contact: Loop-Loc | looploc.com



SmartMesh Safety Cover

SmartMesh is Merlin's patented mesh safety pool cover that provides 100% shade while letting water pass through its high-tech weave.

Its ability to block sunlight significantly reduces algae growth, and the material can filter debris down to 40 microns.

The covers come with heavy-duty, triple stitched straps that crisscross along the pool surface and are stretched tight by tension springs anchored in the deck.

The webbing has a break-strength more than three times the government standard.

"SmartMesh offers the highest abrasion resistance, tear and burst strength compared to the average mesh cover leading to a safer backyard for loved ones," says Rabia Danyaro, Merlin's marketing coordinator.

SmartMesh safety covers are available in four colors: green, blue, tan, and gray, and come with a 15-year warranty.

Contact: Merlin Industries | merlinindustries.com

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POOL AND SPA NEWS



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is your hub to apply for our annual prestige programs, including Top 50 Builders and Service award programs, and Masters of Design.



MeycoLite - The Original Safety Cover

MeycoLite fabric was used in the original safety pool cover created by Meyco founder, Fred J. Meyer, Jr., and is the fabric of choice for some of the world's largest winter pool covers, says Phil Saltzman, Meyco's director of sales.

MeycoLite is lightweight at just 4.4 ounces per square yard, which makes it easy to install and remove. Its generous weave eliminates the need to pump off surface water, allowing it to drain through the cover. Meycolite is treated for color fastness to minimize fading and requires minimal care over the winter.

"Meycolite also blocks 95% of the sun's rays, reducing UV damage to the pool area," says Saltzman.

All Meyco covers have thick straps and double perimeter webbing for increased tensile (break) strength and are made with stainless steel buckles and aluminum tips that won't rust or stain pool decking.

Contact: Meyco Pool Covers | meycocovers.com

Ladders, Handrails and Barrier Free Entrance Railings

Northern Stainless & Rail Products offers stainless steel handrails, ladders, and barrier-free entrance systems for residential and commercial swimming pools.

Stainless steel handrails and ladders provide essential support for swimmers, enhancing safety especially for children, the elderly, and those with mobility issues. Stainless steel is durable and resists corrosion, and its smooth surface reduces the risk of injuries caused by sharp edges or rough surfaces.

Barrier-free entrance systems made of stainless steel enable easy access to the pool for everyone, including individuals with disabilities.

Northern Stainless & Rail Products offers technical support at 866-891-1106.

The company typically offers a 1-year warranty for residential products and a 2-year warranty for commercial products.

Contact: Northern Stainless & Rail Products | norrail.com

Pool Safety Cover

Rayner Covering Systems manufactures duplicate and custom pool covers.

The company uses materials such as mighty mesh, which offers 98% UVA/UVB protection; standard mesh, which offers 93% UVA/UVB protection; or solid vinyl, which provide 100% UVA/UVB protection.

All covers are webbed on top and bottom with 1-inch web that is double stitched with UVA/UVB-protected thread for durability.

Rayner offers free measuring and install (for fee) programs for pools as well as a repair program for existing covers.

"Individual attention is given to each customer for every order," says Richard Rayner, president. "Customers are very pleased with Rayner's ability to successfully cover very difficult or elaborate pools that other companies have turned down."

Rayner offers up to a 25 year warranty on covers depending on the material.

Contact: Rayner Covering Systems | raynercovering.com



Gray Mesh Safety Covers

Tara Pool and Outdoor Product's Regular and HD Mesh Safety Covers now are available in gray to complement any outdoor setting.

"Customers have requested a gray mesh material for several years and we are glad to finally be able to satisfy their needs," says Thomas Kennedy, Tara's marketing director.

The Regular Mesh offers easy installation, quick water drainage, and convenience. The HD Mesh provides 99% shade factor, preventing algae growth and ensuring a clean spring opening. Both covers feature heavy-duty springs, stainless steel springs, solid brass anchors, and double-layer webbing for durability.

In addition, Tara safety covers can be customized with a company's logo and contact information. Tara will produce a 8.5-by-11-inch, 13-ounce vinyl custom label with a pool company's information and stitch it onto the cover.

Contact: Tara Pool & Outdoor Products | tarapools.com



Ultra Aluminum UAF200 2-Rail Residential Pool Fence

Ultra Aluminum's UAF 200 2-rail pool fence meets BOCA safety code and can be made in multiple heights when municipalities choose to exceed those minimum standard.

"This fence is quite robust and can be as much as 30% heavier than similar products found in the marketplace," says Ben Jodoin, who handles sales at Ultra Aluminum. "Quality is particularly important when it comes to pools since lives can literally depend on it."

Ultra uses the finest powder coat finishes that meet or exceed AAMA2604 standards for performance and durability.

"Coupled with our selection of self-closing hinges and safety latches, this product provides peace-of-mind for pool owners or anyone else looking to secure their property," says Jodoin.

This product has a limited lifetime warranty.

Contact: Ultra Aluminum Mfg. | ultrafence.com



Vac-Alert VA-2000 SVRS

The Vac-Alert Safety Vacuum Release System's spring-loaded piston reacts instantaneously, opening to atmosphere and releasing the life-threatening suction of the pool or spa drain.

The Vac-Alert VA-2000 can be installed for every pump that draws water, including pools, spas, fountains, slides and vacuum ports. Once installed, it takes little or no maintenance.

The SVRS meets all requirements of the International Code Council, both the International Building Code (IBC) and the International Residential Code (IRC). It meets or exceeds all the ANSI/ASME performance standards for safety vacuum release systems.

The units are easily installed, adjusted and tested with standard tools and supplies.

Most installations can be completed in less than 30 minutes.

Vac-Alert VA-2000 comes with a 3-year limited warranty.

Contact: Vac-Alert Industries | vac-alert.com

Product Profiles: Pool Finishings



Pump Shut-off System/ SVRS

Vacless' VGB-compliant SVRSs feature an electrical pump shut-off system with an alarm or siren, which instantly turns the pump off upon entrapment.

The SVRS is automatically resettable in 3 minutes, and features no nonsense programming, no false tripping, choice of air or no-air induction, and no by-passing for pool vacuum cleaning.

It installs in 5 minutes onto the pump in place of the suction side drain plug without the use of tools, and is designed for use with pumps of up to 25 horsepower.

"The best thing about this product is the easy installation, no nonsense programming and unquestioned reliability," says Hassan Hamza, Vacless' president.

Marketing materials and technical support are available.

The units are covered under a 3-year warranty.

Contact: Vacless Systems | vacless.com



Dimension Series Morning Fog 2x4

Launched in January 2023, the new Dimension Series glass tile comes in three unique colors: Cirrus Blue, Dusk and Morning Fog. Matching 2x4 bullnose trim tile available for the most functional, professional and attractive way to finish corners and edges.

"This uniquely shaped glass tile is frost proof and will last a lifetime," says Missy Kent, marketing coordinator for Artistry in Mosaics. "Our customers love this tile because of its unique shape."

The company offers more than 100 stylish glass tile options from trendy to classic. Marketing materials can be requested by visiting artistryinmosaics.com/request-catalog.

Contact: Artistry in Mosaics | artistryinmosaics.com



HS-1 SL

Deck-O-Seal HS-1 SL is a one-part, self-leveling hybrid sealant, developed with silyl-modified polymer (SMP) technology. It cures under the influence of atmospheric moisture to form a medium modulus sealant with excellent adhesive properties and resistance to ageing and weathering.

HS-1 SL is designed for horizontal expansion joints in swimming pool decks, patios, and sidewalks. HS-1 SL is self-leveling and does not need to be tilled.

It is packaged in a convenient easy-to-use 32-ounce pouch, which eliminates the need of a caulking gun that is required when using cartridges. The pouch comfortably fits in the hand for easy application.

"The HS-1 SL has become a fan favorite very quickly," says Jim Dill, the company's division manager. "This new innovated pouch really makes a difference in the ease of application."

Contact: Deck-O-Seal/W.R. Meadows | deckoseal.com



NEW PebbleQuartz

PebbleQuartz is a new, silica-based quartz pool finish with a smooth texture and appearance.

“It delivers better resilience and durability than traditional marble-based quartz finishes,” says Kari Paulson, vice president of marketing at Pebble Technology International. “This finish is a perfect choice for residential pool remodel projects or for commercial pool projects.”

Available colors include White Classic, Baja Blue, Coastal Grey or Aquarius. Pool builders can also consider adding optional Quartz accents in dark blue, light blue, teal or black.

Marketing materials can be requested by calling customer service at 800-937-5058.

PebbleQuartz comes with a 5-year material warranty and a 2-year applicator-provided workmanship warranty.

Contact: Pebble Technology International | pebbletec.com

Ramuc Hi Build Epoxy

Ramuc Hi Build Epoxy is a self-priming, two-coat system that rolls easily and builds to 8 mils dry per coat, rendering “smoothing” qualities on rough surfaces. It provides stain, chemical, and abrasion resistance and offers up to 8 years service life.

“This superior high-build epoxy renovates aged concrete, plaster, and fiberglass/gelcoat surfaces at one-third the cost of plastering,” says Thomas Maellaro, Ramuc’s vice president of marketing. “This has been the go-to refinishing paint for contractors all over the U.S. due to its excellent performance and long service life.”

Hi Build Epoxy is compatible with saltwater systems and is VOC compliant in the U.S. and Canada. It’s available in one or two gallon kits.

Technical support and marketing materials are available on the company’s website: ramucpaint.com.

The product is covered under a 1-year warranty.

Contact: Ramuc | ramucpaint.com

Roll-On Cement Pool Plaster — Sider-Proof FF-PR

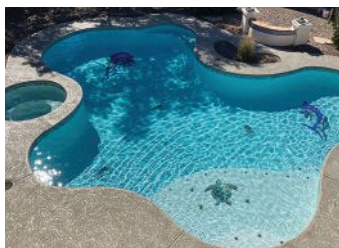
A cement-based, swimming pool plaster and resurfacing coating gunite and shotcrete pools, existing plaster and marcite, concrete and ICF swimming pools. It is packaged as a kit and easy-to-apply with a standard paint roller and smoothed with a MagicTrowel. It is suitable for residential, commercial, hot tubs, chlorine and salt water system application. This coating is also designed to coat and waterproof waterfalls, fountains and concrete ponds. This product is NOT a pool paint but a true cement-based swimming pool plaster and resurfacing coating.

The manufacturer describes the application as “easy as roll-it-on and blade-it-smooth!”

It comes in several standard pre-blended colors and custom colors, and also is available with premixed colored quartz.

A new instrumental video is now available on YouTube and sider-crete.com.

Contact: Sider-Crete Inc. | sider-crete.com



Radiant Fusion

"Radiant Fusion is the most trusted micro-pebble pool finish available on the market, smoother than traditional and mini-pebble," says Astrid Petersen, national sales manager at Universal White Cement.

The finish is pre-blended with Universal High-Performance Cement enriched with pozzolans and polymers. It's also enhanced with 25% Jewels for Pools Glass Blend, the company's proprietary multi-hued glass beads and abalone shell mixture.

Radiant Fusion is protected under a comprehensive 7-year warranty.

"This pool finish provides not only beauty but long-lasting strength and durability," says Petersen.

Contact: Universal White Cement | finestfinishpools.com



Z Poolform

Z Poolform is a reusable PVC form used to create decorative concrete copings for pools.

Interchangeable Form Liners will allow for a variety of different edge profiles and textures not previously possible with pool coping forms.

Z Poolforms can be used with vinyl liner, fiberglass, or concrete pools. It attaches to the pool wall without the need for tie wires.

The forms are not stripped until the concrete has cured, meaning there is no need to finish or dress the edge while the concrete is still green, saving time and money.

"Any pool builder or concrete contractor who does at least one pool deck a year will love this product," says Dario Baldoni, the company's vice president of marketing and technology. "The high level of relief and detail created with the textured form liners can be matched to the stamp, resulting in a realistic stone look."

Contact: Z Poolform/Concrete Countertop Solutions | concretecountertopsolutions.com

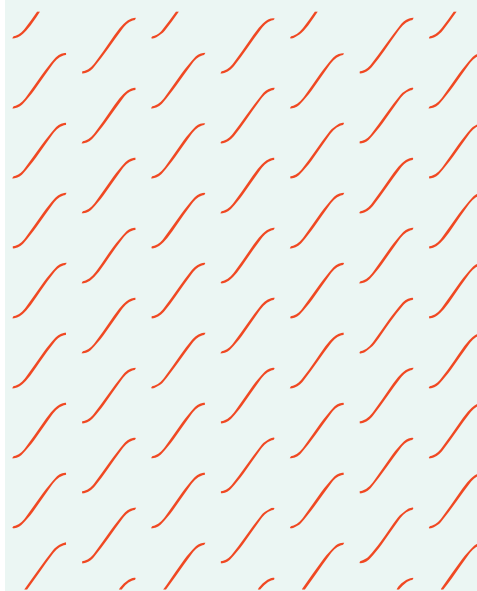
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(continued from page 54)



Pentair, Booth 101

Product: IntelliBrite Architectural Series Lighting

Features: spread light widely and evenly to minimize hot spots, dark areas, glare and stripes

Contact: pentair.com



PoolCorp, Booth 301

Product: POOL360 PoolService

Features: software for service businesses offers leading route optimization, mobile water testing, automated billing/payments, integrated pricing with pool360 for installation and repairs, and more

Contact: pool360service.com



Poolside Tech, Booth 221

Product: The Attendant

Features: from pumps, heaters and actuators to lighting and salt cells, The Attendant can control and monitor any equipment from existing manufacturers in the industry, such as Pentair, Hayward and Jandy

Contact: poolside.tech



Raypak, Booth 501

Product: Crosswind V

Features: fits on standard equipment pads and industry standard 2-inch water connections, conveniently accessible through the front panel for enhanced serviceability; small and light

Contact: raypak.com/crosswindv



Speck Pumps — Pool Products, Booth 643

Product: BaduJet Turbo Pro System

Features: designed to provide a smooth and strong swim lane; magnetically coupled motor for seal-free operation

Contact: usa.speck-pumps.com

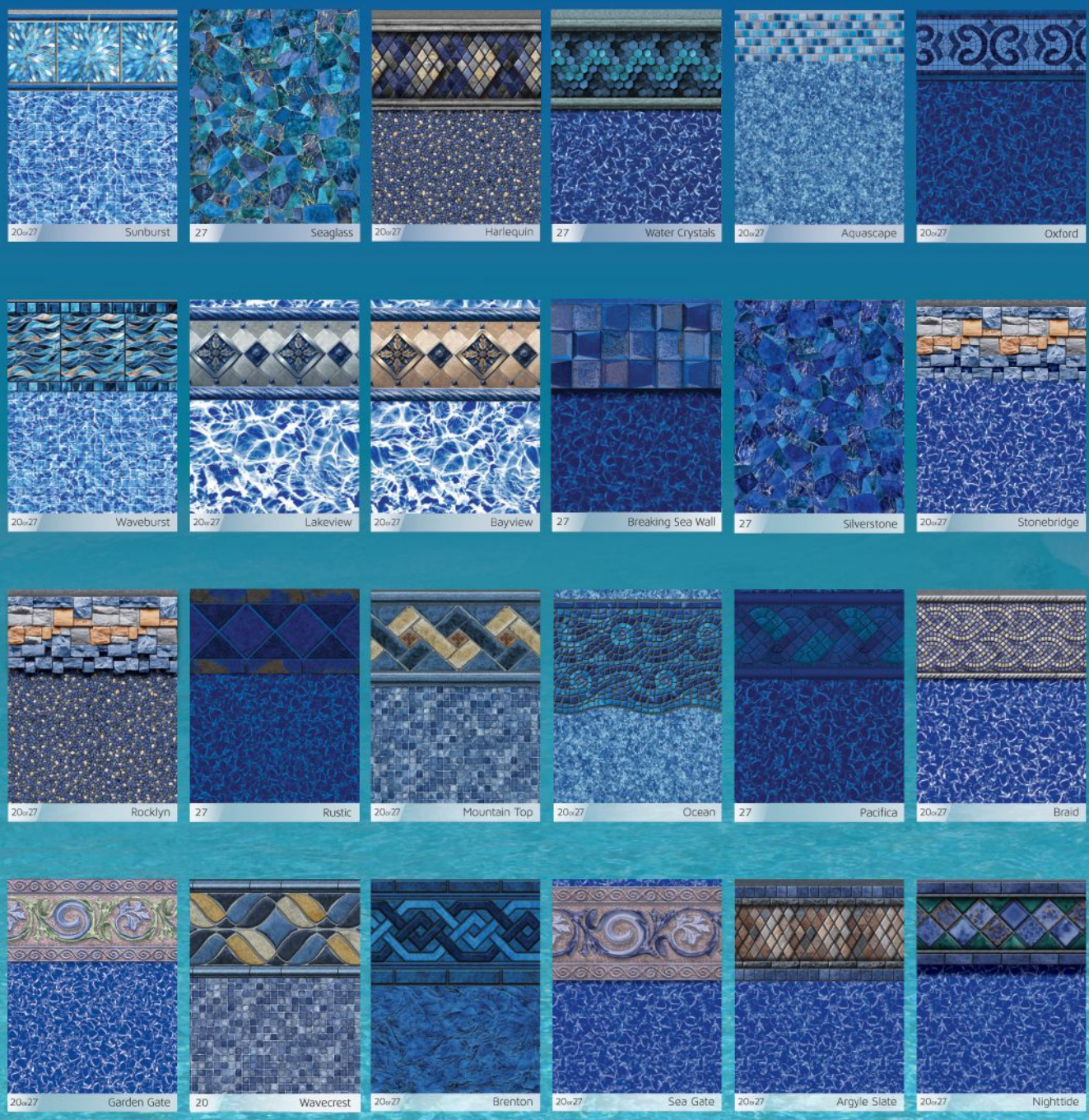


The VacDaddy, Booth 338

Product: The VacDaddy Pool Vacuum 2.0

Features: portable pool vacuum with a continuous power supply; new IP67 dimmable transformer for international adaptability; larger filter bags

Contact: thevacdaddy.com



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