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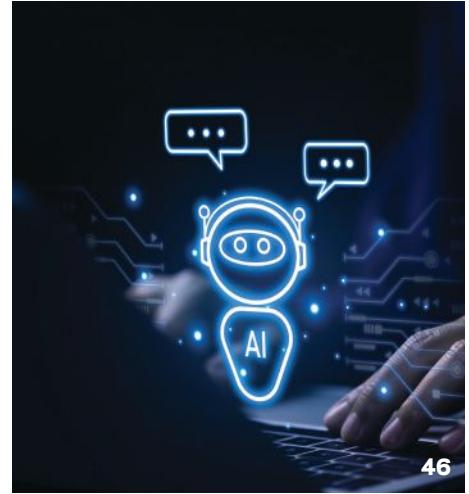
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COVER: COURTESY TOP 50 PRODUCTS MANUFACTURERS
ABOVE LEFT: LOOP-LOC
ABOVE RIGHT: ADOBE STOCK

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People, Not Prompts



Joanne McClain
Editor-in-Chief, PSN

“P^{HARMACIST.”}
“Pharmacist.”
“PHARMACIST,” I growled into my phone for the umpteenth time. My teenager snickered in the car seat next to me. I had been on the phone for the past five minutes trying to reach a human being at the pharmacy to ask a simple question. For whatever reason, its automated system could not hear my request and kept repeating its command for me to tell it what I wanted. I had been saying “pharmacist” and getting madder and madder each time I had to repeat it until I was practically yelling.

Remember when human beings actually answered the phone, especially at businesses? Yup, the good old days. I know this complaint practically makes me a grumpy old, git-off-my-lawn lady, but I have to say I miss the courteous and friendly interactions with receptionists. That important, frontline, customer-facing position really set the tone for the company, and for the most part, they could direct you to the person most likely to be able to help you.

These days, it’s fairly rare to encounter a receptionist. And I get it — why pay someone a salary to do a job that an automated system can handle for far less money?

It’s a tale as old as time. Technological progress means more and more tasks can be automated for the sake of efficiency and economy. We live in an amazing time when AI is not only getting smarter and faster, but is being integrated into all aspects of our lives, including how businesses interact with their customers.

But here’s where I want to wave a little red flag for the pool and spa busi-

ness owners out there: Just because you can automate something doesn’t always mean you should.

In industries like ours — service-focused, reputation-based, and often rooted in long-term customer relationships — the human element isn’t just a nice-to-have, it’s a must-have. Your receptionist isn’t just there to route calls. They’re the first impression, the voice of calm when a client is frustrated, the person who remembers names, follows up, and makes customers feel like they matter.

Automated systems, no matter how efficient, don’t laugh at jokes, pick up on tone, or read between the lines. They don’t build loyalty. They don’t win referrals.

If a customer has a billing question or a scheduling issue or just wants to know when their tech is coming, do you really want their experience to be the robotic version of “PHARMACIST!?” Or do you want them to feel heard, understood, and well taken care of?

That doesn’t mean there’s no place for automation — of course there is. Smart tools can absolutely enhance operations and support your team. But they should support the human experience, not replace it.

As business owners, let’s make choices that elevate service rather than undercut it. Technology should make us more connected, not more distant. In the rush toward progress, let’s not lose what made our companies stand out in the first place: real people, delivering real service, with real care.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Joanne McClain'.

jmcclain@zondahome.com

POOL PROS' TOP 3 FINANCING QUESTIONS, ANSWERED BY AN INDUSTRY EXPERT

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Joe Garcia, Senior Business Development Manager, National Sales at Lyon Financial, shares insights to empower pool builders to help homeowners achieve their backyard dreams.

Q: MOST OF MY CUSTOMERS PAY IN CASH. WHY SHOULD I OFFER FINANCING?

It's a common misconception that many buyers pay in cash. Even if customers express a preference for cash, mention financing; it may lead them to consider lower monthly payments and extra project features and upgrades. Offering financing can enhance their buying power by 20 to 30 percent, boosting client satisfaction and increasing the average invoice for contractors.

Q: HOW CAN I INCORPORATE FINANCING INTO MY BUSINESS TO ATTRACT MORE LEADS?

Always mention financing to every customer and make it easy to access. Add a financing section to your website, and include a link to your financing partner in your email signature. Promote financing options on social media, brochures, and advertisements. Additionally, your financing partner should be able to provide you with complimentary marketing materials to help promote your partnership.

Q: HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE CUSTOMERS WHO ARE HESITANT ABOUT A POOL TO DECIDE TO MOVE FORWARD?

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UAG Sells to Private Equity Firm

With the new acquisition, outside investment reaches the industry's buying-group sector.

by **REBECCA ROBLEDO**

UNITED AQUA GROUP HAS BEEN SOLD TO A PRIVATE-EQUITY firm with a track record in the pool and spa industry.

In a deal that closed in March, New York-based Tenex Capital Management purchased the Las Vegas-based buying group. “We’re really proud to partner with Tenex,” said UAG President/CEO Craig Goodson. “We’ve been in business now for 62 years, so this just ensures our next 62. It’s the next step in our evolution and growth.”

Tenex has held companies in virtually all sectors of the industry. Its portfolio currently includes Dallas-Fort Worth-area builder and service firm Gold Medal Pools, which it purchased in 2023. It owned the distribution roll-up Aqua-Central before selling it to the parent company of Heritage Pool and Spa Supply. As part of that sale, Tenex retained partial ownership of Heritage until Home Depot purchased the distributor last summer.

Tenex also owned manufacturer Custom Molded Products (CMP), which it sold to Fluidra in 2021. The firm’s portfolio also includes companies from related industries such as plumbing/HVAC and home construction.

“I think UAG couldn’t have chosen a better partner,” Goodson said. “They’re a powerful company that’s known in our industry, with a great reputation of being smart and strategic. Their experience in the pool industry, their experience in running businesses of our size... and the team of people they have behind them to help from a strategic and efficiency standpoint is what we’re counting on and excited

about.”

Goodson said things will largely remain business-as-usual for the organization, whose member count currently stands at 350 firms across all 50 states.

“Nothing’s going to change with the structure of our company,” Goodson said. “It’s just a matter of... making it as efficient as possible.”

Members will continue to have the opportunity to gain UAG stock, he said: “There will be a stock option aspect. [The transaction] won’t affect how members gain stock in the future.”

With Tenex and its resources at UAG’S disposal, the buying group expects to help fund growth. For the time being, it will focus largely on organically growing the members it already has, Goodson said, as it does not want to speed up its recruitment and vetting process when choosing new members.

“We treat UAG like it’s more of an invitation-only group than an open invitation,” he said. “So we’re not aggressively seeking new members. That’s why organic growth is so important to us and top of our list.”

While Tenex may provide guidance on such matters as strategic planning, legal issues, accounting and IT, no changes are expected for UAG’s staff.

“We have 23 people, and I expect that number to increase over the course of the next 12 months,” Goodson said.

UAG will be included in Tenex’s Fund IV, established last year and currently worth \$1.9 billion.

Some have wondered if this means Tenex plans to apply the roll-up approach to buying groups, potentially purchasing others and merging them. Goodson said he knows of no such plan at this time.



The Puzzle of Trade Show Scheduling

With competition for venues tightening, trade show organizers struggle for consistency.

by **REBECCA ROBLEDO**

GOOD NEWS FOR REGIONAL SHOW EXHIBITORS AND attendees: The next season of events are expected to run without overlap.

In today's environment, that is no small feat for organizers.

Did you wonder why the trade show schedule for the 2024/2025 season seemed unusual? Regional shows that normally take place in February were held in March and vice versa, while others came at different times of the month. Worse was the overlap between shows that caused some companies to choose between one or the other.

Some frustrated professionals asked why the organizers

couldn't coordinate.

As it turns out, they tried — as they do every year. But while demand increases for venues, booking has become more of a challenge.

The demand puts pressure on smaller regional shows in particular, as they compete with larger events that enjoy priority scheduling. Even some of the regional pool/spa industry shows that go back to the same venue every year get pushed aside to accommodate the bigger fish.

"These convention centers are built to attract hotel rooms to cities, so when you're the size we are, they fit you where they can," said Blaine Siske, show director for the Southwest Pool & Spa Show.

This year's Western Pool & Spa Show has been held at the same spot in Long Beach, Calif. for nearly 40 years. But lately, the convention center has attracted other types of events.

"It's gymnastics, volleyball, cheerleading — things like that taking up big portions of large venues," said WPSS Show Director Eric Nielson.

For this year, the increased competi-

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Submissions To participate, please fill out the entry form for each project and submit photos. Please note that while this platform accepts low-res images, we will require hi-res images for print and will contact you for those directly. High-res is defined as digital photos measuring 8x10 inches at 300 dpi.

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2026 Regional Trade Show Schedule:

Desert Pool & Spa Show — Jan. 10, Mesa, Ariz.

MidAmerica Pool, Spa & Outdoor Living Show — Jan. 13-15, Indianapolis

Southeast Pool & Spa Show — Jan. 21-23, Nashville

The Pool & Spa Show: Powered by NESPA — Jan. 27-29, Atlantic City, N.J.

Western Pool & Spa Show — Feb. 12-14, Long Beach, Calif.

Southwest Pool & Spa Show — Feb. 15-19, San Antonio

Everything Under the Sun Show — March 6-7, Orlando

tion meant the event took place about a month earlier than normal, and it overlapped with the Southwest show.

A similar situation faces the Southeast Pool & Spa Show, held in Nashville. Held in a very popular destination city, it only uses one hall of the convention cen-

ter's four.

“And because we’re an industry show versus a consumer show, we’re not going to bring in the same crowds,” said Show Director Jocelyn Larsen. (She also manages the MidWest Pool & Spa Show, which so far has avoided such issues.)

On top of those factors, the Southwest show, often in Texas, has its options limited by renovations taking place at the Dallas and Austin convention centers.

All this leaves venues slower to commit. “Our ideal situation is to be closing out the show and know the dates for the next year, but that doesn’t always happen for us at the Southeast Pool & Spa Show,” Larsen said.

Furthermore, show directors can no longer predict when other events will take place, making it more difficult to schedule around them.

While all the show directors here reported healthy attendance and exhibitor showings in 2025, some suspect the numbers could have gone even higher if schedules had been on track. Said Nielson of the Western Show: “People mentally are just used to it [in March].”

Fortunately, this crisis was averted for 2026 and, as some of the regional shows report significant growth, they hope the challenges will lessen.

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FLUIDRA INVESTS IN ROBOTIC CLEANER MAKER

Pool/spa equipment maker Fluidra has invested \$100 million in Aiper, a manufacturer of robotic pool cleaners, gaining it 27% of the firm and making it a “significant minority owner.” Through the relationship, they plan to “leverage the two companies’ combined strengths to grow the overall cleaning market and customer base.”

PHTA SEEKS INPUT ON WATER CONSERVATION STANDARD

As PHTA begins revising ANSI/APSP/ICC-13 Standard for Water Conservation, it seeks subject matter experts for its committee, and will open the standard for public comment.

PHTA-13 addresses the efficient use and conservation of water for residential and public pools, spas, portable spas, and swim spas. It is also meant to provide guidance to government entities trying to conserve during drought.

Those interested in serving on the committee must have a working understanding of the standard’s current language, and to actively participate in the language-drafting process for approximately one year. All stakeholders may apply. Interested parties who do not serve on the committee can attend meetings as observers throughout the revision process.

EASTON MAKES MARTHA’S VINEYARD ACQUISITION

Service consolidator Easton Select Group has acquired Island Pools, a 25-plus-year-old pool design, construction, renovation and service firm based on Martha’s Vineyard in Massachusetts. The acquisition includes all business segments. The company will continue to operate under the Island name. Its leadership, including former owner Ted Rosbeck, will remain with the company.

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Data to Watch This Spring

Economists share developments and trends that shape the housing market and overall economy through the spring.

by VINCENT SALANDRO

POLICY UNCERTAINTY. TARIFFS. LABOR MARKET CONCERNS. Inflation risks. Stock market volatility. Low housing affordability. These factors have created a challenging economic landscape, contributing to a soft start for the housing market.

The economic picture is constantly evolving. To help synthesize the big-picture trends, economists from Zonda, the NAHB, and the National Association of Realtors (NAR) share factors impacting housing and the overall economy and important developments to track during the spring.

Demand Patterns

Ali Wolf, chief economist at Zonda, explains that in March, housing market demand started to feel more subdued, describing the trend as ‘fine’ but leaning toward negative. “Fundamentally, nothing has changed dramatically in the economy,” Wolf says. “What has shifted is consumer confidence.”

Uncertainty around the labor market and federal policy has frozen demand from many would-be home buyers. Zon-

da’s New Home Market Update found new home sales dipped nearly 12% in February compared to 2024. Similar patterns are taking place in the existing home market.

“Home prices continue to gain [for existing-home sales], and they have increased 20 consecutive months on a year-over-year basis,” says Jessica Lutz, deputy chief economist and vice president of research at the National Association of Realtors (NAR).

National Association of Home Builders chief economist Rob Dietz’s outlook shifted from cautious optimism in mid-February to “near-term reluctant pessimism.” Positive forces in the industry — the structural housing deficit and positive demographics — are being cancelled by frustration about policy uncertainty, concerns about labor, and caution by prospective home buyers.

“We’re thinking the risk of recession right now is about 20%; in any given year, it’s about 10%,” Dietz says. “What I think we are seeing is an economy that has hit a bumpy patch that is moving into slow growth mode.”

Over the coming months, Wolf, Dietz, and Lutz say job report numbers, inventory figures, consumer confidence, stock market behavior, and GDP growth will be important to track.

Job gains dipping below 50,000 a month job, or GDP showing less than a 1% growth rate in the first quarter would “indicate an economy approaching stall speed,” Dietz says.

Other expectations:

- Larger home builders will have advantages over smaller ones.
- High-end homes will move more briskly than lower-priced counterparts.
- An NAR report predicts baby boomers most likely benefitting in the current housing market, with millennials most likely to experience negative impacts.

This is edited from a piece that originally ran in sister publication BUILDER. For the full version, visit builderonline.com.

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2025 TOP 50 PRODUCTS



Welcome to this year's top pool and spa products! The chosen products come from those published in our December 2024 New Products issue and based on information provided by manufacturers.



Aqua Technics Pools

The Saint-Grande fiberglass composite pool features a large entry zone with a generous second step area; spa seating for up to six adults with two recliner seats and bench seating; a spillway that cascades into the pool; and a long bench seating on one side of the vessel.

Contact: aquatechnicpools.com



AquaStar Pool Products

The new FlowStar Actuator is designed for universal compatibility, retrofitting effortlessly to third party valves. They offer plug-and-play connectivity for 24VAC systems, feature easy-to-adjust back-mounted rubberized dip-switches and an easy drop-slotted cam setting ability for precise control.

Contact: AquaStarPoolProducts.com



Automatic Pool Covers

The improved PowerTouch is an automatic pool cover controller that keeps pools closed and safe when not supervised. This lock-code controller provides tool-less, one finger torque limit adjustment. It now also has easy to read "OPEN" and "CLOSE" buttons and a simple checkmark button.

Contact: automaticpoolcovers.com



Carvin Pool Equipment

The D Valve features a PVC body and fiberglass reinforced components (cover, handle and diverter assembly) to ensure resistance to corrosion, chemicals and harsh weather conditions. A PTFE sealer ensures ease of use. The shaft spline accommodates most standard actuators on the market.

Contact: carvinpool.com



CCEI

New 24V-DC Transformer safely powers pool and spa lights using a direct connection with two compartments that keep the primary and secondary light connections independent. It's equipped with an ON/OFF switch and a re-settable circuit breaker to protect against overload. UL Listed.

Contact: ccei-pool.com/us



Chill Tubs

The Chill Tub Pro is designed for those seeking the ultimate recovery experience. The spacious vessel is designed to deliver the benefits of chromotherapy with jets circulating the water to eliminate the thermal barrier. Users can set the temperature to as low as 3 degrees and as high as 40 degrees.

Contact: chilltubs.com/us/product/chill-tub-pro



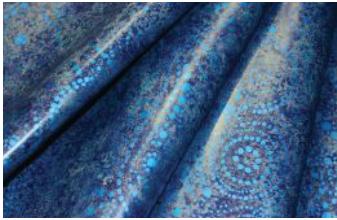
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Continental

The Starlight Swirl inground pool liner is designed with a unique swirl pattern and iridescent accents that give pools a soft, glowing effect. Made from high-quality vinyl, this liner is built to resist fading and wear, ensuring long-lasting color and performance. Available in a range of specifications.

Contact: continentalpoolliner.com



Cubic Electrical Appliance Ltd.

The new Supreme Vertical Variable Speed Heat Pump features twin rotors in the compressor, reducing vibration. It has 10 adjustable compressor speeds and smart mode technology providing automatically adjusting to environmental conditions for optimal performance and energy savings.

Contact: cubic-heatpump.com



Eeziblue

Eeziblue is a monthly pool additive that utilizes a patented CuZn Synergy formula, combining copper and zinc to effectively eliminate and prevent algae growth. It can be used as a monthly treatment or a quick fix for green pools. It is now available in trade friendly 40-pound bucket.

Contact: eeziblue.com



Fire by Design

The Battery Powered All Weather Electronic Ignition System is specifically designed for use on outdoor fire features without the need for low voltage wiring. It can be controlled via switch or Bluetooth.

Contact:

Contact: firebydesign.com



Fluidra

The Polaris FREEDOM Plus cordless robotic cleaner is equipped with convenient remote control so users can call it up for lightweight waterline retrieval. FREEDOM Plus comes with an Easy-Charge caddy for direct contact charging when not in use and hassle-free transport to and from the pool.

Contact: polarispool.com



Frank Wall Enterprises

The STO-PRO4 makes installing in-ground liners with plastic steps easy. Just roll in the STO-PRO4 to the step, open it, lay it down and install the liner. Insert the vac hose directly into the tool to pull the liner into place. When the liner is removed it falls right into place with no wrinkles or sagging.

Contact: frankwall.com

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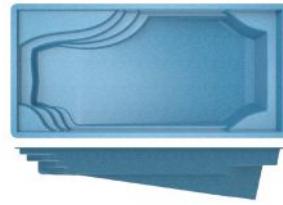
www.RaynerCovering.com



Gecko Alliance

Gecko Waterlab is a water monitoring and dosing recommendation product for spas. This redesigned Gecko myspa app enables remote control of spa functions, including temperature adjustments, water sanitation monitoring, and water maintenance recommendations.

Contact: geckoalliance.com/products/gecko-waterlab



Imperial Pools

The new Blue Anchor Resort Collection of fiberglass pools offers customers 26 exciting models to choose from. The collection also offers poolside and spillover spas, and tanning ledges. The collection is exclusively available in North and South Carolina, Tennessee and Georgia.

Contact: blueanchorfiberglasspools.com



King Technology

The new FROG Pool Solutions is a dry, concentrated specialty pool chemicals that come in prefilled pods. For algae, use FROG Algae Gone and FROG 90-day Algae Barrier. For phosphates and filter efficiency use FROG 90-Day Good Bye Phos. For cloudy water with FROG 90-Day Good Bye Cloudy.

Contact: kingtechnology.com



Las Olas Luxury Living

The Las Olas Pool Lounger features two patent-pending innovations: a mermaid-shaped design and its interlocking, tool-free assembly. Made from UV-resistant high-density polyethylene, it's durable, lightweight, and stackable. Made with eco-friendly materials and recyclable packaging.

Contact: lasolasluxuryliving.com



Latham, The Pool Company

Latham's new plunge pools bring leisure and luxury to backyards of any size. Offered in both fiberglass and vinyl liner options, this collection of six plunge pool designs includes step and bench configurations with features such as swim up seating and slip-resistant steps.

Contact: lathampool.com/plunge-pools



LEDGE

Hoopstr is features UV20 rated resin for all-weather resistance. It offers easy wheel-out positioning with stainless steel hardware and powder-coated metal rim.

Contact: ledgeloungers.com

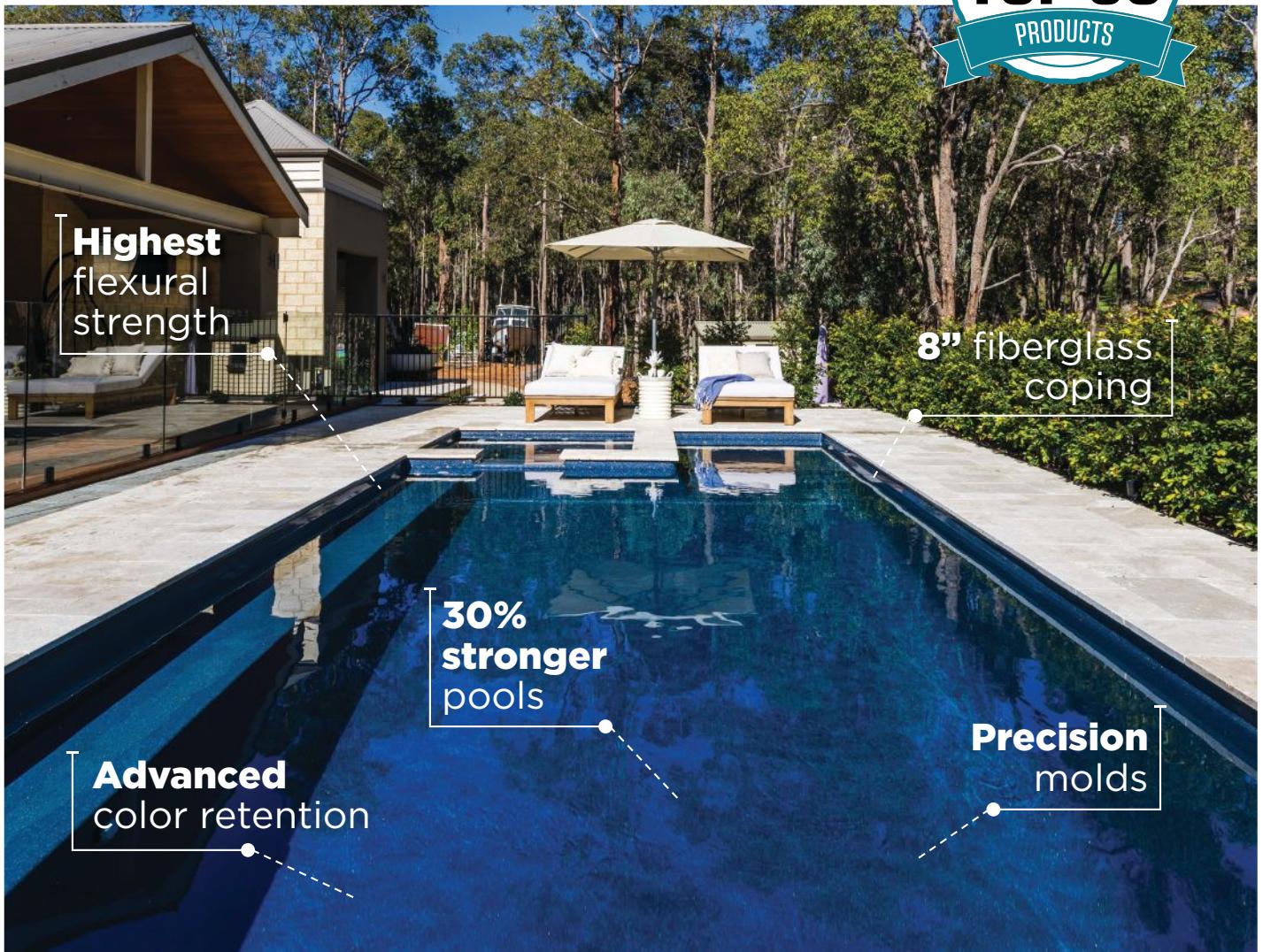
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LOOP-LOC

Bubbles & Bliss is a new vinyl liner pattern that combines the natural elements of the sea with a bubbly and creative mosaic that plays on the fluid movements of the ocean.

Contact: looploc.com



MicroGlass

MicroSetNCure is a liquid admixture formulated to enhance pumpability, workability, finishing and performance of plaster, quartz, pebble, and polished finishes. It's designed to improve pump, cure, hydration, chemical resistance of cement, and promotes even pigment distribution.

Contact: microglassllc.com



Mont Alpi Grills

The Artwood series is an outdoor kitchen in a box, no assembly required. It's manufactured using recycled HDPE and 304 Marine grade stainless steel. The product is standard in a weathered grey cart that is suitable for modern or traditional environments and is available as a four or six burner option.

Contact: montalpionline.com



Nationwide Industries

The Trident Safe Signal Magnetic Latch helps prevent accidental pool entries, especially by young children, and helps maintain pool safety even in low-light conditions. An audible alarm sounds if a gate is left unlatched for more than 15 seconds, and blue LED lights provide 360-degree visibility.

Contact: nationwideindustries.com



Nidec Motor Corp.

The Neptune Hybrid motor features a high-efficiency brushless permanent magnet motor integrated with a standard PSC induction motor and a variable speed control. It meets the new efficiency regulations from the U.S. Department of Energy, and is engineered to offer up to 80% energy savings.

Contact: Nidec.com



Okeanos Fiberglass Pools

The new Libra fiberglass inground pool measures 12-by-30 feet and offers two separate tanning ledges, making it ideal for deckchairs and for children to play. With a depth of 4 feet 11 inches across the entire pool, it is perfect for every family member to enjoy.

Contact: okeanospools.com

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Pentair Pool

The new IntelliCenter Lite system is more affordable, featuring a smaller enclosure for the breakerless power center. With five relays and optional high-powered wireless, it is a great replacement for the EasyTouch Lite system. It includes Pentair Pool app control and remote monitoring.

Contact: pentair.com



Platinum Spas

The Portofino Spa in the Platinum Spas Luxury Range features an Aristech Acrylic finish, 66 powerful jets, and the exclusive PlatinumRevive Red Light Therapy for a rejuvenating hydrotherapy experience. It features built-in Wi-Fi control and the immersive PlatinumMelody Sound System.

Contact: platinum-spas.com



Poolside by CGT

The Baia pool liner pattern is the latest in the new Aquasculpt line. Its large-scale repeat features an array of medallions inspired by classic architecture, mimicking Venetian plaster with a brushed finish. A specialized print process offers blends polished medallions and textured stone.

Contact: poolsidebycgt.com



ProDBX

DBX has released the new DistributorConnect feature in its Pool Builder Software. It directly integrates with SCP and Heritage to pull in live pricing and availability for pool products. This feature allows users to update all pricing in the DBX software with one click.

Contact: prodbx.com



Pul Products

The new Pul Kollekt LR-1 Slot Return is a 200gpm purpose-built high flow return for applications that require a high volume return with minimal water surface disruption. It can be mounted in the floor or the wall to blend in with surrounding finish.

Contact: pulproducts.com/return-fitting



Raypak

The Crosswind V is a vertical discharge heat pump pool heater designed with a smaller footprint and lighter weight. This reduces install time and labor costs to the homeowner. It fits on standard equipment pads and industry standard 2-inch water connections are conveniently accessible.

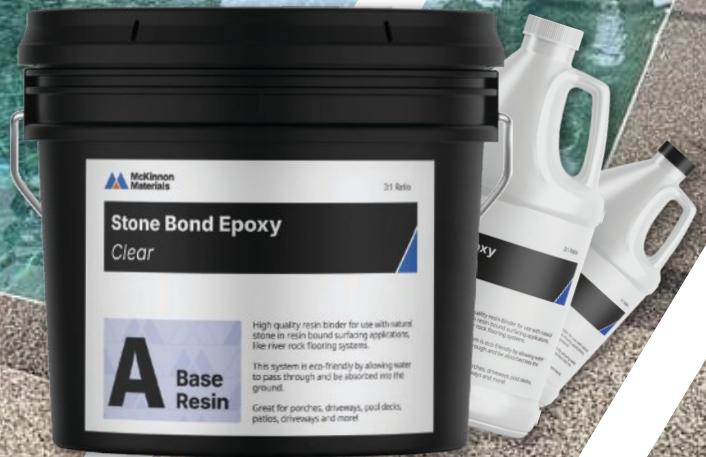
Contact: raypak.com



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Contact: rbretailandservicesolutions.com/rb-smart-pay



RENOLIT

The new VOGUE Collection includes four reinforced membrane designs that are printed with a unique relief and texture. Made of 80mil thick, commercial grade, reinforced PVC with Class C slip resistant properties, these designs offer a commercial grade color selection and texture.

Contact: renolit-alkorplan.com/collections/vogue



ReThink Pool Care

The Daily Dose is formulated to proactively treat pool water daily to keep ahead of problems. The Daily Dose will precisely dispense dissolving Pure Pack products during the day. At night, it automatically refills with pool water. The Daily Dose works with Pure Pack concentrates.

Contact: rethinkpoolcare.com



Sensorex

The new Pool Plus line of electrodes feature the Salt Ring Reference System — a visual indication of sensor life. This crystallite structure visibly alerts users when the sensor needs replacement, eliminating downtime due to unreliable readings and sensor failure caused by depleted electrolytes.

Contact: sensorex.com/pool-spa



SKIM360 Products

For 2025, the SKIM360 Floater has a thicker metal frame and deeper 3-inch nets to make skimming faster and easier. The unit features zero pole weight, unlimited directional control, stays positioned at the waterline regardless of direction of travel and drastically reduces repetitive motion injury.

Contact: skim360products.com



Skimmer Saver

The Skimmer Saver is designed to keep debris out of the skimmer, enabling continuous use of the pool pump. It prevents pumps from burning up from having too many leaves in the skimmer.

Contact: skimmersaver.com



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Contact: skinmicroplaster.com



SPAZAZZ

The Spazazz Cold Plunge Treatment Collection is formulated to optimize and maintain water quality and are carefully crafted to enhance hydration, stability, and cleanliness. The collection includes ELEV8, REGUL8, and RAD18. This is a complete, easy-to-manage solution for plunge pool care.
Contact: spazazz.com



Splash-A-Round Pools

Aqua Lounge Spas is an affordable, entry level, easy to install, well equipped spa. Standard features include Bluetooth speakers, LED color changing lights, a standard floor drain with easy side cabinet outlet drain valve to make maintenance simple. A stainless-steel frame encases the composite spa cabinet.
Contact: splasharoundpools.com



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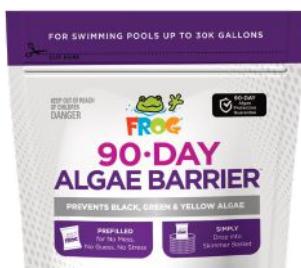


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The Outdoor Solar Shower is an outdoor shower that requires just a garden hose to operate. No plumber or electrician is needed. Hook the garden hose directly to the shower and let the sun heat the water up. Then use both hot and cold features. It's simple to install and simple to use.

Contact: sunneday.com



SwamCam

The new dual-camera SwamCam Pool Camera System has two cameras synced to one pool alarm monitoring system that uses AI to prevent accidental drownings. Both cameras can be Armed/Disarmed at the same time either from the app or the keypad. This new system can cover the area around larger pools or monitor a pool and a hot tub.

Contact: theswamcam.com



Tara Pool & Outdoor Products

The Tara Pro Rewards program lets pool dealers earn points through the Tara Pro app by scanning product labels on their pool liner, safety cover and sun shades. Users can also earn points by referring others, sharing project photos, taking surveys and more. Points can be redeemed for rewards. The app is available on Apple and Android.

Contact: tarapools.com

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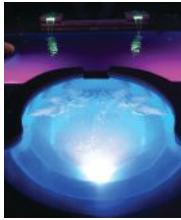
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For more information, scan the QR Code above.



Thursday Pools

The new fiberglass Grand Spa is designed for inground installation. The spa can be installed flush with the deck, alongside the pool with a spillover effect or even can be raised as a stand-alone spa giving builders various installation options.

Contact: thursdaypools.com



Trek Pools

Trek Pools' Shipping Container Pools now are available in larger sizes, with some as wide as 12 feet and as long as 40 feet.

Contact: trekpools.com



Tubtek

The ChemBag is specifically designed to hold hot tub chemicals and supplies. It has five adjustable, internal compartments to fit any chemical brand bottle, including large 5-pound bottles. It is made from heavy-duty, marine-grade materials and features a magnet-hold carrying handle for easy transport.

Contact: tubtek.co

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VacDaddy

The VacDaddy 2.0. updates include a variable speed power supply; new, larger filter bags; shallow water adapter; vac to waste kit; VacCaddy carry bag; remote on/off switch; aluminum adapter pole; and more.

Contact: thevacdaddy.com



Water Tech Corp.

New Water Tech Precision V10 provides a convenient, high-power cordless and hose-free cleaner with enhanced features: a Shallow Water Adapter attachment, enabling it to better clean shallow areas like steps and sun shelves; a tamper-proof motor-box and battery assembly, eliminating need to swap out, charge, and transport additional batteries.

Contact: watertechcorp.com



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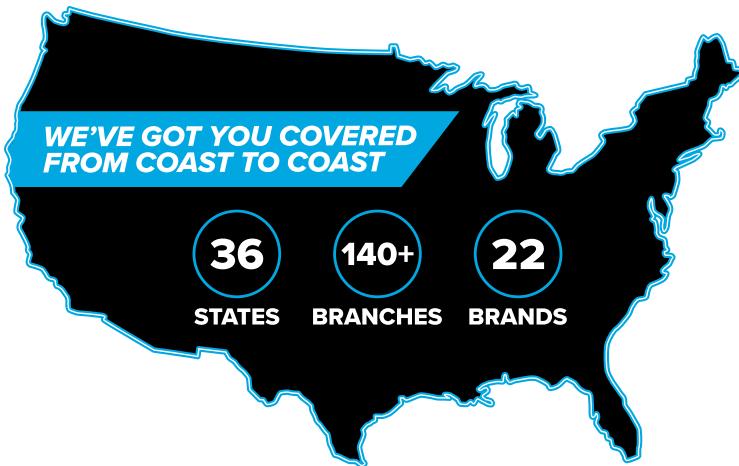
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Wrmth Corp.

The WAV Lounge Chair is a comfortable, outdoor heated chair that is temperature controlled using a smart device. Wrmth chairs use minimal electricity and connect to standard household power outlets. Several chairs can share a single circuit. WAV chairs can be connected to each other to form love seats or bench combinations.

Contact: wrmth.com



Xylem

The new Barrier Ti Ultraviolet System meets the NSF-50 3-log certification for inactivation of Cryptosporidium in a single pass. A variable power mode delivers the exact UV dose when needed. The system can be turned down to low power setting during off peak hours.

Contact: xylem.com

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About Those Virtual Assistants

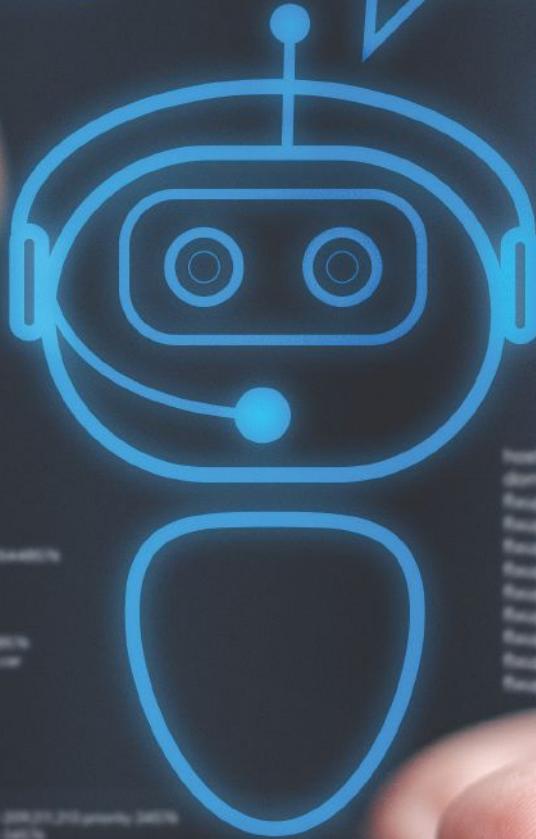
SEEKING TECHNOLOGICAL WAYS TO REDUCE WORKLOADS, MORE COMPANIES TURN TO CHATBOTS.

BY REBECCA ROBLEDO

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CAN I
HELP YOU?



In facing difficulties finding good help, many companies have turned to technology to help manage their workloads.

With the introduction of AI, company websites become a key opportunity to automate certain tasks while boosting website functionality so visitors feel more engaged.

This especially became important during the COVID boom.

“Differentiating tire kickers from real qualified leads was our focus,” says Pam Vinje, president and CEO of Small Screen Producer, a web marketing company focused on the pool/spa industry.

Enter chatbots.

Once found only on the websites of monoliths such as Amazon, these platforms utilize an automated system to hold an initial conversation with customers or prospects, perhaps answering questions or scheduling face-to-face appointments. They pop up on the screen and ask the user needs help.

These tools have not only become accessible to smaller companies, but also have evolved in sophistication, causing more pool and spa firms to take advantage of them. Used astutely, they can save your company time and make it easier for website visitors to engage with your company. Applied inappropriately, however, they can prove frustrating for potential customers.

Here, experts discuss this technology and provide advice on implementing it to maximum benefit.

What they do — and what they don't

To best utilize this technology, users should understand their purpose and limitations.

Chatbots are not meant to completely replace human interactions. They can answer more complex questions than before; however, a person will be required at some point to go over the finer details. Additionally,



chat bots will not close sales, but have evolved in their ability to jump start the process.

Chatbots perform like something of a traffic cop or gatekeeper. They can relieve staff of some phone-answering duties by providing more generic information (although they can answer more complex questions than before), or gathering cursory data from the client then directing them to the best professional to address their needs. Not only can they help sift out tire kickers, but they can gather information on serious prospects, making for a quicker, easier sales call when that does happen.

Chatbots also can enliven a website and make it more useful.

“Forever, websites have been built like brochures: You click on a website, and you’re looking at hot tub models, but there’s no way to convert a sale,” Vinje says. “We are trying to create the website as a 24/7 sales machine.”

This helps keep customers on the site longer. “Chat really helps capture leads and visitors that otherwise would have bounced from your site,” says Olga Barrocas, senior product manager for Local IQ, the marketing solutions division of Gannett.

Chatbots come in different forms. Do-it-yourself chatbot platforms are available for companies to install on their own and operate for a monthly fee. They’re generally easy to install for those accustomed to website upkeep, Vinje says. They often just require the application of a code on the back end.

Older versions that user work flows — meaning that succession of ever-more-specific multiple-choice ques-



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tions to help it hone in on what you need — often rely on human backup to type in the answers, Barrocas says, requiring more time and expertise to manage.

More sophisticated systems use natural language processing, which allow customers to type in a question and respond with a fully formed answer. These are becoming more common among small businesses.

Expectation management

In their effort to save time, more consumers prefer to delay making human contact with a company, instead using automated services, says Scott Reynolds, founder of The Get Smart Group, a digital marketing agency that specializes in the pool/spa industry, based in Angels Camp, Calif.

While chatbots appeal to that tendency, they also can become very

frustrating if expectations are not managed, he adds. A visit can turn sour very quickly if the user expects a human response, only to realize they're communicating with a bot that can't answer their specific question.

Experts suggest immediately disclosing to the user that they are communicating with a bot. Handle this in the greeting. "Right out of the gate, say something like, 'I'm the ABC Pools chatbot, and I'm here to answer your common questions,'" Reynolds says.

This becomes even more important — not less — as chatbots become more sophisticated and better simulate human communication.

"If you're not explicit upfront that they're talking to a chatbot, the moment they figure it out, they could get annoyed," Reynolds explains.

You can even include a photo or drawing of a robot, rather than a human, to help convey this, Barrocas adds.

At some point, most customers will need to be handed off to a human — often at their request. When this happens, use the opportunity to collect their information. More importantly, when promising to send their information to the staff, make clear when they can expect to hear back. Otherwise, the user will expect a fairly immediate call, Reynolds advises. If they don't hear back quickly,

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they can become angry.

“If the [user] wants to talk to a person, we ask for their name, phone number and email address and say, ‘We will forward this to someone who will get back to you within 24 hours,’” Reynolds says as an example. “That seems to break that cycle of anger.”

This also presents a good opportunity to inform potential customers if it will take a while to receive their products. Whether it’s construction backlogs or supply-chain issues, let them know if they’ll need to wait for their products.

Platform of choice

When choosing a chatbot platform, look for one that will integrate with your customer relationship management (CRM) system, Reynolds suggests, so you can maximize its usefulness.

This way, the bot can send gathered information to the CRM as it triggers a notification for the next action, whether it be setting an appointment, or emailing brochures or other materials that will help the consumer in the meantime.

The market has become a bit fragmented when it comes to chatbot options for small businesses to incorporate, Reynolds says. Some are connected to a payment system, or are built into a CRM or as part of another platform. And none seem to carry all the available features a business would want. So be discriminating when making your choice.

“You could have three of the nine features you want, but you could never have them all,” Scott Reynolds says. “If I’m evaluating chatbot solutions, I want to make sure more than one person on my team can connect, that it can connect with my CRM and that it has both a desktop and mobile device application, so when a human is required we can get involved relatively quickly.”

Human touch

In the few years since it’s become part of daily conversation, AI has grown by leaps and bounds in its abilities.

This has shown itself in chat- (continued on page 66)

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Product Profiles: Commercial Equipment



Ranger 2 Pool Lift

The Ranger 2 Pool Lift by Aqua Creek Products is a high-quality, affordable ADA-compliant lift designed to provide safe and independent access to pools and spas.

With a 350-pound weight capacity, it offers a sturdy and reliable solution for users needing assistance entering and exiting the water. The lift operates via a simple, user-friendly handset, allowing for smooth and controlled movement in and out of the pool. Its durable, powder-coated stainless steel construction ensures long-lasting performance, even in harsh aquatic environments.

The Ranger 2 is also a versatile option, compatible with a variety of anchoring systems, making it easy to install in different pool deck configurations.

Technical support is available by calling 888-687-3552.

The Ranger 2 is supported by a 5 year limited warranty.

Contact: Aqua Creek Products | aquacreekproducts.com



Hydramatic Automatic Safety Cover

The motors of Aquamatic's Hydramatic covers run on hydraulic pressure rather than electricity. That means one-fourth the moving parts, no lubrication, and ropes that self-adjust, says Tom Dankel, company vice president.

The Hydramatic's modular design takes only four bolts to assemble, making installation simple. Another time-saver is Aquamatic's patented cable compensator, which automatically aligns both sides of the cover as it extends and retracts. "Technicians are constantly telling us, 'I started your system up, and it worked right away with no fuss,'" Dankel says.

Every Aquamatic cover meets the ASTM F1346-91 safety standard and is custom-fitted down to the half-inch. Consumers can choose from 11 standard colors and six designer colors.

Manuals, brochures and promotional videos are available.

Contact: Aquamatic Cover Systems | aquamatic.com



Boutique Series — Porcelain Tile

The new Boutique Series — Porcelain Tile features distinctive art glazes and a unique look designed to provide an upscale aesthetic for a pool or home.

The tile is available in matching 6x6 and 3x12 in both field and relief profile.

"The versatility to mix and match sizes and relief and field to create your unique look is the best feature of this product," says Missy Kent, project estimator for Artistry in Mosaics. "This is Artistry's first porcelain tile add to our product line and the feedback and overwhelmingly positive."

All Artistry products are frost proof and are suitable for indoor, outdoor, wet or dry applications.

For technical support and/or warranty information, go to artistryinmosaics.com/industry-resources-and-warranty or call 877-777-1393 for more information.

Contact: Artistry In Mosaics | artistryinmosaics.com



Fiber Shield (FSV-20)

Fiber Shield (FSV) is a 100% vinyl-ester-based barrier coat designed to replace traditional skin coats, providing protection against osmotic blistering while reducing manufacturing time.

FSV creates a durable bond between the acrylic shell/gelcoat and bulk fiberglass layers, forming a barrier that prevents blistering — even under prolonged exposure to high heat and varying pH conditions. FSV is engineered for application without glass, offering two key advantages:

1. Enhanced blister resistance — FSV sprays on evenly, filling tight radii without creating air pockets.
2. Faster production — FSV eliminates the need for rolling or sanding, streamlining manufacturing and accelerating build times. A single operator can spray a spa or pool in about five minutes, and it is ready for bulk lamination just 40 minutes after application.

Contact: Composite Technologies International | compositetechnologies.com



Coverlon Swimming Pool Safety Covers

Coverlon's commercial pool covers are made from an industrial grade black fabric. This material's durability and safety features make Coverlon Covers well suited for swim clubs, community pools and hotels.

The commercial grade fabric is recommended for commercial pools but is also available for residential uses.

The covers come with a 20-year warranty.

Contact: The Cover Co. | coverlon.com



TerraLock Mulch Glue

TerraLock is a non-toxic and environmentally friendly mulch glue designed to keep landscape features in place. It creates a strong barrier and locks down a landscape against rain, snow, sleet, and wind up to tropical storm force.

It can help to reduce erosion, and I can be used on gravel, including pea gravel; mulch, including rubber mulch; stone, straw; and shells.

This special water-based, cross-linked acrylic formulation can last up to 3 years, and is safe for plants, pets and wildlife.

TerraLock Landscape Glue dries completely clear in 6 hours, and is easy to apply by either filling up an HDX pump sprayer or a small spray bottle.

Contact: FGCI/Super Epoxy Systems | fgci.com



REMORA PRO Kit

The REMORA PRO Kit is designed for the pool pro. The kit includes a portable 21-inch vacuum head with a carry handle, Smart Switch to monitor power going to/from the motor, dual-speed motor, 25-foot premium floating power cord, wearable battery pack, a 10 amp battery charger, two easily interchangeable 18Ah LiFePO4 lithium-ion batteries, and one standard and superfine vacuum bag.

Contact: Hammerhead Patented Performance | hammerheadvac.com



Heritage Pool +

HeritagePool+ and the HeritagePool+ Mobile App gives users instant access to products, pricing, and tools.

The app makes repeat orders fast and frictionless — frequently purchased items are always front and center, making reordering simple.

Users can set up lists for full pool equipment pads, from pumps and filters to automation, fittings, and valves. These shopping lists also can be exported for fast and easy job quotes. When it's time to order, just add the items to the cart, enter a job site address for delivery, or choose an express pickup for grab-and-go convenience.

New for 2025: In-app push alerts keep users informed with real-time updates on order status, pickup readiness, and deliveries. Also new is Poseidon AI, a smart virtual assistant capable of providing product recommendations, tutorials, branch info, and more.

Contact: Heritage Pool Supply Group | heritagepoolplus.com



DECK-LOC No-Drill Anchoring System

The LOOP-LOC DECK-LOC No-Drill Anchoring System is an innovative solution designed specifically for composite decks.

This system allows users to secure pool covers without the need to drill unsightly holes into the deck. By simply turning the clamps, the DECK-LOC anchors lock securely under the deck boards in seconds, ensuring a firm and reliable hold.

The system is crafted from marine-grade stainless steel for durability and resistance to harsh weather conditions. Additionally, the patented design is engineered for composite decks with 3/8-inch board spacing, making it a specialized solution for preserving the look of outdoor spaces. Removing the anchors for storage is just as simple, leaving the deck unscarred and flawless.

Contact: LOOP-LOC | looploc.com



The Aqua Staircase

The Aqua Staircase is Merlin's solution to an easy entry into an aboveground pool.

This staircase is an easy-to-assemble system thanks to the rotational molding technology manufactured from top quality PE resins. This molding technology also creates a smooth liner-friendly, bottom edge.

With a white PVC handrail and resin deck flange, the Aqua Staircase is a sturdy step system made with safety in mind. The Aqua Staircase comes with the option to add an additional handrail for added safety.

Technical support can be found through merlinindustries.com or 609-807-1000

This product comes with a one year warranty.

Contact: Merlin Industries | merlinindustries.com



Floating Wireless Bluetooth Speaker with Multi-Light Display

The waterproof (IPX7 rated) Floating Wireless Bluetooth Speaker is designed for outdoor and poolside entertainment, and can withstand submersion in up to three feet of water.

The speaker answers calls without leaving the pool, plays music, and has seven colors to choose from. It can be synced with another to create an even better sound experience. It's easy to charge, and designed to provide great audio quality.

"The ability to answer calls and talk hands-free through the speaker without ever leaving the water is a game-changer for summer days," says Andrea Bernard, executive vice president at Poolmaster. "Plus, the vibrant colors at night create an amazing atmosphere, making every swim even more enjoyable."

Poolmaster products have a one year warranty against manufacturer's defects.

Contact: Poolmaster | poolmaster.com



The 1.50-Inch Mini Pool Plant

The 1.50-inch Mini Pool Plant consists of a standard 1.50-inch Carrousel Pump and 31-inch U-Blend Mixer mounted onto a skid frame to make it one complete unit.

The Pool Plant is bolted together and measures approximately 48-by-38-by-56-inches and 600 pounds. This model is offered in pneumatic, electric, and hydraulic. It can be used for pool plaster, artificial rockwork, waterscapes, and deck coatings.

The pumping system is easy to clean with just running a sponge ball and water through the system. The U-Blend mixer was especially designed with easy clean up in mind. The mixer uses Square-Drive Technology to enable the operator to remove the mixing blades with no tools in order to wash the blades. This speeds up cleanup time and the longevity of the equipment.

Contact: Quikspray | quikspray.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.

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



Raypak E3T 3-Phase Electric Commercial Pool and Spa Heater

Raypak’s E3T 3-Phase electric commercial pool and spa heater includes a more robust controller with an easy-to-use and informative user interface.

“The E3T 3-Phase controls system is both intuitive to the contractor or facility manager, and it provides optimal performance with additional built-in features,” says Justin Reyes, Raypak’s associate marketing manager.

These built-in features, such as Flow Protection, Load Detection, Low-Temp Operating Mode, Quiet Operation, and 50/50 Mode, enhance operation and performance. The units are easy to use from installation to servicing, and include better onboard diagnostics.

In addition, Reyes notes that the E3T 3-Phase is “the perfect retrofit heater for locations looking to switch from gas to electric. Its compact size makes it easy to install multiple to match the BTU range needed.”

Contact: Raypak | raypak.com



Custom Sun Shades

Shade Escapes Custom Sun Shades provide effective and attractive sun protection for outdoor spaces such as restaurant patios, playgrounds, parks, and backyard areas.

These shades are made from breathable fabric that allows air to flow while still offering reliable protection from the sun. They can be custom-designed to fit a wide range of spaces, making them a flexible option for both residential and commercial use.

The material blocks harmful UV rays and helps create a cooler, more comfortable environment underneath. With a variety of colors and designs available, they can easily complement existing spaces while improving comfort and safety.

Shade Escapes Custom Sun Shades come with a 1-year warranty.

Contact: Tara Pool & Outdoor Products | tarapools.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



Precision V10 Cordless Hoseless Pool & Spa Cleaner

Water Tech Corp's New Water Tech Precision V10 is an enhanced version of the company's popular Precision 2.0 Pool Cleaner. It's designed to provide a high-power cordless and hose-free clean with enhanced features to improve the speed and quality of pool cleaning.

The Precision V10 now offers a proprietary Shallow Water Adapter attachment, enabling it to better clean shallow areas such as steps and sun shelves.

Additionally, updates include a tamper-proof motor-box and battery assembly that eliminates the need to swap out, charge and transport additional batteries.

"This unit weighs less than 12 pounds but will withstand the toughest jobs from pool-to-pool and will last multiple seasons with minimal maintenance," says Guy Erlich, president of Water Tech Corp. "Best of all, it has a run time up to 2 hours of continuous operation."

Contact: Water Tech Corp. | watertechcorp.com

Product Profiles: Sanitizing Equipment



Beatbot AquaSense 2 Pro

The AquaSense 2 Pro is a five-in-one cleaning system that tackles every part of a pool, from water surface skimming to waterline scrubbing, floor cleaning, wall scrubbing, and water clarification.

The unit features Beatbot's exclusive ClearWater Clarification System, which automatically and evenly dispenses a natural, skin-safe, and eco-friendly clarifier derived from recycled crab shells. It's formulated to remove dirt, oils, and metal residues, preventing scum buildup and discoloration. Easily activate or schedule the system via the app to ensure the pool water stays clear and fresh with minimal effort.

The cleaner is equipped with Beatbot's exclusive surface parking system. Once it finishes its cleaning cycle or when the battery drops below 15%, the robot autonomously returns to the water's surface near the pool edge and automatically releases water to float, making retrieval lighter and effortless.

Contact: beatbot.com



Oxeo VP ORP Controller

CCEI USA's Oxeo VP automated controller is a connected, peristaltic chlorine/bromine chemical feed that automates chemical regulation.

The OXEOP VP measures ORP and adds an oxidizer to the pool water if the ORP is below the defined limit value. Oxeo VP automatically adjusts the ORP of the water.

The OXEOP VP is equipped with a color changing, LED light that changes according to the pool's water chemistry — changing from green, to yellow and red — to provide a quick visual indication if the water chemistry is balanced or falls out of the accepted levels for sanitized pool water.

Controller settings can be made directly on the device or via smartphone using Wi-Fi and Bluetooth connections. An intuitive interface lets users quickly connect with the device. The application also provides a more precise display on the smartphone.

Contact: CCEI USA | ccei-pool.com



Zip Chlor

ProTeam Zip Chlor sanitizing chlorine granules consists of a rapid-dissolving, stabilized chlorinating granule formulated to keep pool water clean and clear.

This product offers a high percentage of available chlorine and can be used for daily chlorination or after heavy bather loads. The Zip Chlor granules are UV protected and completely soluble so they go to work immediately.

"Both consumers and service professionals love the fact that the product is granulated and dissolves very quickly in the pool water, making the application very easy," says John Bokor, Haviland's director of sales. "In addition, Zip Chlor also acts as a powerful algae killer."

Zip Chlor is compatible with salt chlorine generators. Made in USA.

Contact: Haviland Pool & Spa/
ProTeam | proteampoolcare.com



Pool FROG

Pool FROG is a complete sanitizing system formulated to create cleaner, clearer, softer water that uses up to 50% less chlorine, compared to the minimum EPA recommended chlorine level of 1.0 ppm, says Loralee Erickson, King Technology's marketing communications manager..

Pool FROG combines a low level of chlorine with FROG Minerals to create fresh mineral water. The pool water is cleaner because it kills bacteria with minerals and a low level of chlorine. Minerals help keep the pH balanced and condition the water for a softer feel.

Cartridges are prefilled to make maintenance easy.

Pool FROG is EPA registered, and carries a 10-year limited warranty extension on Cyclor; satisfaction guarantee on replacement parts.

Contact: King Technology
| frogproducts.com



PoolPro

PoolPro is a comprehensive high-performance tool designed to simplify pool and spa water quality control for the pool professional.

“PoolPro provides fast, on-the-spot, lab-accurate water quality analysis for precision chemical control,” says Heather Petrig, Myron L’s technical writer. “It’s very easy to use and accurate.”

Both PS6 and PS9 PoolPro models feature innovative user-friendly features and functions that make it easy to manage parameters critical to disinfection, water balance, system maintenance and compliance: conductivity, mineral/salt concentration, TDS, ORP/free chlorine equivalent, pH, and temperature.

The PS9TKB adds the ability to perform in-cell conductometric titrations that provides a convenient way to determine alkalinity, hardness and LSI in the field. All required reagents and equipment are included in the PS9 titration kit.

Contact: Myron L Co. | myronl.com



Salt Water Cell Cleaner

Effective continuous sanitization is vital for ensuring a well-maintained swimming pool environment. Saltwater pools rely on chlorine generators, which utilize an electrochemical process involving the interaction of salt with electrically charged plates to produce chlorine. Through this process, salt cells can become less efficient over time due to buildup from calcium carbonate, calcium phosphate, and calcium sulfate scales on the electrolytic plates. This can drastically impact the efficiency of the generator and potentially shorten its lifespan.

Natural Chemistry’s Cell offers a convenient way to restore a generator’s cell performance by effectively removing scale formations in just 15–30 minutes.

Following scale removal, the used solution can be conveniently discarded into the pool water.

Contact: Natural Chemistry | naturalchemistry.com



Poollife NST System

The Poollife NST System includes everything needed to oxidize, sanitize and remove algae from the pool.

The NST Prime Sanitizer uses a proprietary slow-dissolving cal hypo technology, which clarifies without adding any cyanuric acid (CYA) to the pool water. It’s formulated to eliminate bacteria, contaminants and algae without overstabilizing for clear water that’s ready for use, all summer long.

The system includes:
Poollife NST Prime Tablets
Poollife NST Purify
Poollife NST Patrol

For technical support, call 866-476-6538.

Contact: Solenis | poolife.com

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TIMING IS EVERYTHING



Online



AI is making it possible to hand more and more tasks off to technology. While this article discusses chatbots, that also applies to other forms of communication, including phone calling and texting.

No matter what mode of communication, companies should be upfront about the fact that customers and prospective clients are interacting with an automated entity rather than a human being.

In addition to that, Ali and Scott Reynolds say timing is important when deciding to incorporate technology.

Generational differences should be considered, says Ali Reynolds, CEO of The Get Smart Group, a digital marketing agency that specializes in the pool/spa industry, based in Angels Camp, Calif. There isn't enough data to know how these technologies are received by consumers of different ages at this point. "My feeling is that, if my business is important enough to you, a real person should be calling," she says. "... But I think there is a younger generation of people who are more open and curious about it."

16:30

Consider your clientele and how you think they would feel receiving calls, texts or emails from an automated system. Don't only be led by your own fascination in the technology

"Just really pay attention to whether the savings and innovation are moving your bottom line or are they just something fun to have that might alienate potential customers," adds Get Smart Group Founder Scott Reynolds.

16:33

Delivered



Type your message...



(continued from page 52) bots, which are evolving everyday. A couple years ago, when chatbot interactions involved that series of multiple-choice questions, staff had to input the answers to each of those questions.

With newer platforms, companies need only feed the system with its own website, as well as brochures from its company and those of their manufacturers. Newer AI systems can process and synthesize that information to form answers to clients' questions.

"It's very conversational," Reynolds says. "The user can just ask a question without having to pick one of your predefined questions, and the chatbot will reply using natural language, as opposed to predefined answers."

But no matter how sophisticated these systems become, the human touch must still be factored in at key points, says Get Smart Group CEO Ali Reynolds. For their customers, Get Smart still encourages companies to bring staffers in at sensitive points — when a customer is new or if an existing client has a problem that needs to be resolved or other delicate or potentially anxiety-inducing situation.

Ali Reynolds talks about one of its customers. "Their goal is to eventually automate the sales process," she explains. "But even they have to eventually talk to every person they sell to just to make sure [the order includes everything they need]. There's still a human touch that happens, even if the person bought the kit themselves without a human interaction in the first place."

When using these systems, have a clear and specific process for passing off from AI to human staff. Make clear which of your staff should step in and define the steps in the process. Remember: One of the goals is to move the process along as quickly as possible, otherwise you've lost a big advantage of the technology.



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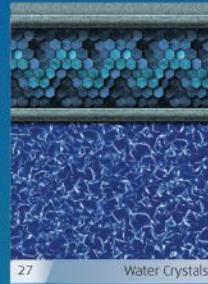
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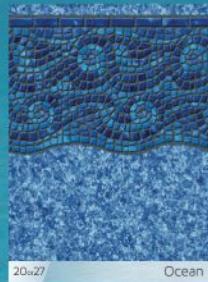
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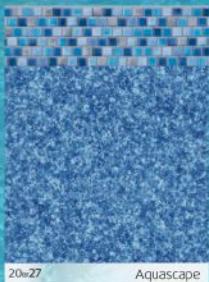
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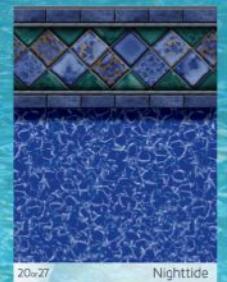
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