

# NEW DEALERSHIPS

## TOOLS

WQA offers a variety of materials and services to help new dealerships become productive faster

By Mark Rowzee

**S**tarting a new dealership must seem like a whirlwind of activity with no end in sight. Owners and managers are focused on so many operational tasks. At this point, not everything has become “systematized,” in part, because the business hasn’t progressed through a complete “cycle” of events.

Obviously, the immediate focus has to be on getting employees and sales up to speed. The sooner the business develops cash flow, the sooner it can be weaned from the start-up reserves. The tireless managing functions at this stage may include hiring a mix of new and seasoned employees, handling their varied training needs, developing and disseminating advertising, and day-to-day office operations. Reinventing the wheel is not top of the list for those charged with this evolution from the ground up.

Anything that can make employees more productive quickly, is welcomed. Over the years, the Water Quality Association (WQA) has developed some great tools that can help a water treatment dealership become productive faster.

### STAFFING

Attracting the right employees requires you to know what the benchmark pay scales are for similar positions in the local business region. In some fields this can be a difficult parameter to know in advance.

Periodically, WQA’s Member Services Committee authorizes publication of the Compensation in a Dealership survey. The survey contains demographic salary data on what and how different positions in dealerships are being paid. Are they commissioned? At what rate? How many employees does a typical dealership have? The breakdown ranges from department managers to salespersons and equipment service technicians. The survey can be a wealth of information for dealerships of any age.

The most recent survey was completed in late 2004. Earlier years’ surveys are also available for comparison.

Another tool that can help simplify the search process is the association’s job search website, [www.h2ojobs.com](http://www.h2ojobs.com). The site has been available for almost two years and it is designed to specifically service the water quality improvement industry. The site benefits new dealerships because it targets the appropriate market. Job ads posted on the site can be used to attract new or experienced applicants, they are cost-efficient and offer dealers a broad reach during their staffing search.

### INCREASING SALES

WQA also publishes many useful tools that can help your sales force. Brochures describing water problems and appropriate remedies can be used in the home, at home shows, or anytime employees are talking to the consumer. Some of the topics covered by the series are corrosion, lead in water, water hardness, reverse osmosis (RO) and more. The pamphlets help the consumer become better informed on a variety of issues—contaminants and treatment technologies—and lend an ever-valuable third-party perspective and credibility to product pitches.

Publications also help your sales force answer some of the more difficult objections or technical issues they may encounter.

### TRAINING NEEDS

One of the areas in which WQA can best benefit new dealers is in its training material offerings. For new employees, there are basic videos and workbooks that can help them become productive by understanding treatment processes such as RO or ion exchange on a basic level. Getting new dealers acquainted with the technologies quickly can get them in the field doing filter changes or other basic service functions. This, in turn, gives them the on-the-job learning that benefits us all. These video-based tools are also useful to

bring your support/office staff “up to par” on what you sell.

Increasing the knowledge of your office staff accomplishes many things. First, armed with a little understanding of the treatment technologies, they can better direct calls to the right person, or even answer basic questions themselves, freeing up time for department personnel to be doing their real tasks. Front-office staff that can help the customer quickly and efficiently can also differentiate you from the competition and build word-of-mouth business.

One association benefit that does multiple duty in dealerships is the WQA Professional Certification program. Obtaining WQA Certification for your employees not only increases employee learning, it makes them better representatives of your company. Participating in certification shows your employees and the public that you value and invest in your people. Above all, the program promotes continued learning. In addition, WQA offers logos and information that you can use to market the certified status of your workforce to consumers to differentiate you from the local competition. These logos can be used in print ads, or on business cards for example.

To further promote employee learning, WQA has made many materials available in a variety of formats. Beyond videos, there are online courses for self-study, textbooks and certification kits, and even audio series on CD and tape. The audio sets are particularly useful in maximizing employee time while driving. Their “windshield time” no longer has to be “wasted time.”

Also available are a variety of tools for verifying employee learning. Many study quizzes are offered in print or online.

### DAY-TO-DAY

Advertising research and business planning can be made easier with access to some



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of WQA's marketing studies. These studies reveal market trends and consumer attitudes towards the products you sell. This can help you focus your outreach efforts, creating more efficient expenditures.

The Cost of Doing Business Survey offers additional benchmarking information, and WQA's Publication department also has a Uniform Chart of Accounts designed to help "departmentalize" your business to provide managers and owners a means of knowing which aspects of the business are profitable, and which are not.

The WQA website, [www.wqa.org](http://www.wqa.org), has the "Find a Water Professional" feature, enabling you to find manufacturer and dealer members of the association, thus broadening your support network for products and services crucial to

dealership success.

### FINAL THOUGHTS

Last, but not least, the WQA offers new dealers a place to associate. By attending the tradeshows, going to seminars, and becoming active on task groups, new dealers be able to network with hundreds of professionals in the same field. They will be able to talk to experts on any and every subject they may encounter early in the life of a dealership. Furthermore, dealers will be able to establish business relationships that will stay with them well into the development and growth of their business. *wqp*

### About the Author

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