

What technology do you see impacting your business?

General

- Multiple platforms for customer communication – balance/juggle with small team.
- Expense for the technology to support a more virtual world.
- Video cameras and large screens.
- Wireless capability is still a problem in several rural areas.
- Industry progress will be hindered if we do not adapt and welcome technology.
- Being creative in overcoming travel restrictions (to office, to customers, to supply chain, etc.).
- Looking for ways to get the same exposure for new or upcoming products that we used to see/have a chance to touch at conventions/tradeshows.
- Would like to see more products certified for PFAS and the 70-ppm performance limit lowered to reflect the lower MCLs adopted by some states.

ZOOM

- Zoom video conferencing is here to stay and Zoom fatigue is a real issue.
- Use of Zoom or virtual client visits is expected and to be expected moving forward, though demonstrations may not always be as effective compared to in-person.

Customer

- Whole house RO systems are gaining popularity and smart technology continues to grow as well.
- More customers expect that their equipment will be monitored virtually now.
- Technology is changing strategies used to sell to customers and training sales team.
- Rather than going on trips and vacations, people are spending time on home improvement and buying water systems.
- Trying to do as much over the phone and internet as possible, but when you must be in the home, make sure to wear PPE. Oftentimes the homeowner does not use proper PPE and distancing.
- Need to embrace technology if we want to be leaders in the field.
- Seeing a lot of consumer interest in modified water – alkaline, hydrogen, deuterium-depleted – and its claims. Would like to have more peer-reviewed science to either support or refute the claims.
- Apps that show dealers when systems are low on salt help dealers plan service calls. Younger generation of consumers seem to like the apps that also show how much water they are using.

Security

- Increasing technology prevalence also leads to an increase in security concerns.
- Security threats/phishing – training for employees, used 3rd party training modules for flexibility of training on their own time.

Employees

- High-tech equipment has dealers looking for new skill set when hiring technicians.
- Virtual trainings have been very effective – perhaps as effective or more so than in-person and at a fraction of the cost, can be given in multiple shorter sessions rather than crammed into a few days which increases information retention.
- A lot of the company working from home, must work through issues with technology and internet connectivity, younger staff seem to be better equipped to work effectively in a virtual environment.

- Motivation for self-training is difficult.
- Internally host weekly trainings to go over products. With staff training done virtually there is an opportunity to be more personal one-on-one.
- More training on new technology needed which requires time.
- Busier than ever, hard to find time to train on new technology.
- Receive virtual training from manufacturer on how the dealer can give trainings about the product to consumers. The training is framed in the COVID world of social distancing, possible video conferencing instead of home visit, etc.

Communication

- Extra communication is needed, and the new technology helps.
- You cannot overcommunicate.
- Use technology to help you communicate with customers in the way that ***they*** want to be communicated with / to.
- Customers do not want to wait on hold especially with working from home, kids at home, etc.
- Use chat functions for quick responses.

Selling

- Pandemic has taught us a lot about “virtual connections” and using virtual channels to sell products
- Sales tactics in a COVID world: Sales demos on the driveway, do not enter the home until actually performing the installation.
- Safety conversations with the customer on their comfort-level.
- Virtual sales appointments are becoming trendy in some areas; in others, customers still want the face-to-face experience. Had a lot of resistance from the industry for virtual appointments pre-pandemic but becoming more frequent. Onsite evaluations can still be done if the customer is willing to use their phone camera. This gives the salesperson the opportunity to educate the customer while simultaneously conducting the onsite eval.
- Tip: For a successful service reminder, have the customer sign a reminder postcard at the time of the sale. Save the postcard in a file until it is time to send out the reminder, then send the postcard with the customer’s signature. They are less likely to throw it out if their signature is on it.

Social Media

- Leveraging social media to engage with followers and ask what they want.
- Social media marketing has been increasingly important. The Facebook Boost feature was specifically called out.

How do you deliver Customer Service in a World of change and uncertainty?

General

- Need both transparency and authenticity, be concise in explaining what you know and what is happening to your customer, what the customer is imagining is typically much worse.

Customers

- Customers expect us to educate them on their water and their water treatment system.
- Consumers still want a human connection; this is a differentiator from online retailers. Give the customer options (call/video conference/product drop off or pick up/in-house visit etc.).
- Trying to give customers as much choice and flexibility in how they do business with the company.
- Customers are doing more research. This has been good and bad. Good in that consumers are more informed, bad in that they are often looking for the wrong things. Customer may have read all about lead issues after hearing about it in the news but lives in an area where lead is not an issue.
- Generational differences had been driving some of these changes and COVID has simply accelerated them. For example, younger generations do not want a face-to-face sales pitch, prefer a virtual one. Phone calls are also less desired, text message and email are becoming more the standard.
- Strong equipment maintenance programs are a necessary part of building a level of trust with consumers.
- In the end, the sale is the customer's story, we need to respect their decisions and wishes about their buying experience to make sure they are comfortable.
- Customers now prefer to pick up items rather than having someone come to the house; one company invested in Wi-Fi connected lockers. The customer gets a code and goes to the locker when notified of their item having been placed there. This service is likely to continue after the pandemic.
- Meet outside on a patio with the customer.
- Technology has led to greater transparency; customers can track service vehicles for example.

Communicate

- Communication is KEY: if the customer knows you are taking precautions, they are more likely to be comfortable with letting service/installation techs into the home.
- Openly communicate with the customers when service is delayed due to broken supply chain issues and/or high-volume demands.
- With the different methods of communication – email, text, etc. – information can get scattered. Employees need be disciplined about entering it into the CRM.

Employees

- Communicating with and training our staff has never been more important than today.
- Trust employees because of your education and training. This will lead to empowered employees who can provide customer service with confidence (less circling back for permission).
- Communicate and confirm employees understand the goal and the 'why' of the company, helps generate innovation and creativity within those constructs to serve the values of the company.
- When most communication is not in-person it does take more time, can lose informal conversations, takes practice to become a more proactive communicator.
- When training or retraining a team have a plan and own it. Ask questions during training to truly understand their situation because you cannot observe as much virtually.
- With increasing political tensions, it is important to train employees to keep their politics away from the customers. In particular, masks can be seen as used to make political statements. One solution is to provide employees with masks with the company logo and turn a potential problem into a marketing opportunity.
- When talking with customers in the home or on the phone, techs need to stay "neutral" and leave out any opinions or topics that are not water focused.

Safety

- Took a while to adjust to new hygiene protocols, such as gloves and masks.
- Masks continue to be a challenge for installers working in cramped, poorly ventilated areas for extended periods of time. It is important to make sure they take breaks when they need them.
- Some things with the pandemic take you by surprise. For example, an employee goes on vacation to a state that is on the quarantine list. The employee must isolate for 2 weeks upon return and must use their vacation time for that as well. If no PTO is left, then leave would be without pay.
- Staff members voiced the largest concerns about going to houses, especially in states where people are flocking to for their quarantines (to leave areas with high COVID-19 incidences). In some instances, consumers are not honest about their potential exposures which increases employee concerns and in one case led to an employee quitting. Additional precautions were implemented for office staff (air purifiers, hand sanitizer). Increased sick days, utilizing FFCRA when possible, and encouraging them to stay home if unwell.
- Provide expectations to customers: wear a mask and keep your distance, but customers in their own home often are resistant to this. Can be difficult to know how to handle this.
- Employee and customer health are first, supporting testing for COVID when needed, taking temperatures every day; daily health check procedures.
- Sanitation before entering the home.
- In-home deliveries only for elderly customers or those who need it, otherwise leave product on front step, garage, etc.
- Wear a mask regardless if the homeowner is present and/or wearing a mask.
- Use a script that helps make sure the tech will be safe and lets the customers know what the company/tech will be doing to keep them safe.

HR Issues/Workers Comp

- Lot of unknowns regarding how the employer protects themselves from claims of wrongful termination or workers comp related to COVID.
- Keeping proper and thorough documentation for company policies, changes to company policies due to COVID-19.
- Navigating HR issues are difficult for dealers without dedicated HR staff.
- Workers Comp for someone who gets sick with COVID on the job? No, covered under FMLA and Care act.
- Homeschooling and shortages in childcare are creating hiring issues, especially for admin positions. Companies are adapting by hiring part-time positions and offering flexible hours for staff. Customers are also having issues with this and companies are learning to schedule around school hours for families with children.
- Trying to keep employees distressed and finding ways to work with them. Adapt work schedules, try to accommodate when you can, but it is very difficult especially when the specific individual is the one who has to provide the service.
- Flexible hours, flexible roles.
- Now that marijuana is legal in some states, what happens when an employee comes to work under the influence? Do we need to be careful with this, as it might be an ADA issue? On the other hand, could be a problem if the employee has to drive a truck. If there's a medical reason for the marijuana use, then need to make accommodations/changes to job requirements.