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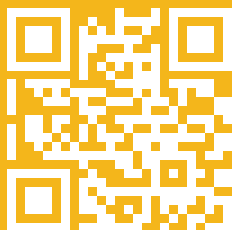
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POOL & SPA
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Winter brings unique challenges for hot tubs, where insulation, vapour barriers, and sealing technologies play a critical role in preventing heat loss and waterlogging. Discover how design improvements and maintenance practices keep covers efficient, durable, and ready for the coldest months.

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HOW TO REACH US

30 Leek Crescent, Suite 201, Richmond Hill, ON, L4B 4N4; (905) 771-7333

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Smarter Tools, Stronger Business

The busy season may be winding down, but the real work is just beginning. Fall is a crucial time for strategy: reviewing what worked, fine-tuning operations, and setting plans in motion for the year ahead. With high fuel costs, supply chains still unpredictable, and hiring challenges lingering, smart service is not just a competitive advantage but a business necessity.

In this issue, we highlight smarter ways to manage everything from pool automation and hot tub covers to invoicing and chemical control. These tools aren't about replacing what works; they're about making your work more efficient, accurate, and profitable.

Start with Mike Fox's article on page 24 about adding pool automation to your client offerings. "From automated lighting and temperature adjustments to remote scheduling and leak detection," Fox writes, "today's cloud-based systems let homeowners enjoy convenience and control while helping pros optimize energy use and reduce callbacks." It is essential reading for builders and service teams aiming to improve their automation offerings.

Efficiency also plays a big role in how businesses manage weekly chemical invoicing. In a detailed article on page 18, Peter Wasmer of ProValet encourages professionals to move away from flat-rate billing and adopt automation instead. "With today's technology," he says, "there is no reason to leave money on the table." His explanation of how modern invoicing tools enhance transparency, build customer trust, and safeguard margins is vital reading, especially as budgeting season approaches.

Also in this issue, Lisa Kennedy (page 8) provides a clear overview of how hot tub covers affect both performance and protection during Canadian winters. She outlines key factors including snow load capacity, vapour barrier design, waterlogging risks, and how cover maintenance influences efficiency, safety, and long-term durability.

And while we're thinking long-term, be sure to read Martin Grenier's article on chemical controllers on page 14. Whether managing residential pools or commercial facilities, understanding sensor calibration, automation protocols, and dosing thresholds is more important than ever as pools are increasingly monitored remotely.

Lastly, on page 40, we highlight a new splash pad designed specifically for children with special needs. This vibrant, sensory-rich space demonstrates the power of inclusive aquatic design, serving as a reminder of the real-world impact this industry can have when creativity meets community.

From automation and invoicing to covering installs and improving accessibility, this month's issue provides practical tools to help you work smarter, so you can finish the year strong and prepare for even greater success in 2026.

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Jason Cramp
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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Cold-weather Cover Failures

Why Vapour Barriers and Seals
Demand Closer Attention



By Lisa Kennedy

When temperatures plummet and snow blankets

the landscape, insulation failures and heat loss can cause more than just discomfort; they may lead to skyrocketing energy costs, equipment wear, and long-term structural issues. Whether in residential structures or outdoor amenities such as hot tubs, maintaining thermal efficiency in sub-zero climates requires a well-informed approach to insulation, vapour barriers, and sealing technologies.

One often overlooked but highly illustrative example of winter heat loss challenges is in the hot tub cover. Hot tub covers are essential for safety, maintaining water temperature and reducing evaporation, and are particularly vulnerable to the combined effects of moisture and cold. Understanding why they fail gives an understanding of how to prevent this.

The mechanics of heat loss and waterlogging

Heat loss in cold weather occurs primarily through conduction, convection, and radiation. In outdoor environments or unconditioned spaces, the greatest culprit is conduction, where heat from a warm surface (e.g. hot tub water) transfers to a colder medium (e.g. air or snow). Moisture accelerates this process dramatically, especially when insulation becomes saturated with water. Although this conduction tends to accelerate during colder periods, this process may also occur in more favourable conditions.

Once insulation absorbs moisture, its effectiveness can be reduced by up to 90 per cent. In practical terms, a waterlogged hot tub cover or a poorly insulated hot tub becomes a thermal bridge, funnelling heat directly out of the protected space. Further, it significantly increases the cover's weight, making removal cumbersome each time the user wants to access the tub.

Why hot tub covers fail, especially in winter

Hot tub covers are typically constructed with a core of expanded polystyrene (EPS) foam, enclosed in a vapour-resistant barrier and a weatherproof vinyl or polyester exterior. Over time, some of these components can degrade.

Vapour barrier breach

The vapour barrier is often a plastic layer around the foam core, which is usually sealed in some way, such

as with heat. Repeated exposure to steam, freeze-thaw cycles, and the chemicals from the water can cause micro-tears and a breakdown of the plastic, allowing moisture to infiltrate.

Seal failure

The seams around the cover's hinge or edge are common failure points. In freezing temperatures, these joints contract, leading to gaps where warm, moist air escapes and cold air—or water—enters.

Condensation cycles

Even without external leaks, the interior surface of a hot tub cover can accumulate condensation from warm water vapour. In cold weather, this condenses inside the foam, and repeated freeze-thaw cycles exacerbate the damage, creating internal fractures and pathways for more moisture.

Loss of structural integrity

Waterlogged foam becomes heavy and sagging under its own weight. This reduces the cover's ability to form a tight seal around the hot tub, compounding heat loss and water absorption into the foam.

Engineering solutions and ideas

To address these challenges in hot tub covers, engineers are turning to advanced systems, including:

1. Multi-layer vapour barriers—Newer designs incorporate thicker or multilayer barriers instead of a single plastic wrap. Advancements in material science have led to the use of newer non-porous plastics, which offer improved durability and resistance to moisture.
2. Enhanced underside for improved durability—Some covers have metalized films (e.g. Mylar) on the underside to help reduce vapour transmission and reflect radiant heat back into the water or interior space.
3. Drainage holes—Strategically placed drainage holes allow any infiltrated water from natural condensation to drain or evaporate before it can damage the structure.
4. Closed-cell foam (CCF) insulation—Closed-cell polyurethane foam (CCPF) or extruded polystyrene (XPS) offers higher resistance to water absorption compared to traditional EPS. These materials have tighter cellular structures, limiting the ability of moisture to penetrate and

Opposite page:

Top: Closed-cell foam insulation resists water absorption better than expanded polystyrene (EPS), preserving thermal efficiency.

PHOTO ©IRINA FOTO/
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Bottom left: Insulation failures in cold climates funnel heat out of hot tubs and drive up energy costs.

PHOTO ©MARTYNELSON/
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Bottom right: Condensation cycles in freezing weather cause internal fractures in hot tub cover foam.

PHOTO ©ALEXANDER
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Left: Waterlogged hot tub covers lose structural integrity, becoming heavy and less effective at sealing heat.

PHOTO ©MICHELGUENETTE/
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Right: Vapour barrier breaches and seal failures allow condensation and freeze-thaw cycles to saturate foam insulation.

PHOTO ©OTTOBLOTTO/
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Above: Regular inspection of vapour barriers, seals, and hinges helps prevent long-term cover failure.

PHOTO ©WELCOMIA/
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fill voids. However, XPS foam does not meet current ASTM standards, so it cannot be used on a certified cover.

Best practices for winter maintenance

Even the most advanced materials need maintenance to remain effective:

- Inspect seals and vapour barriers around foam regularly for signs of chemical breakdown such as cracking or shrinkage, especially after heavy snow or ice buildup. Any suspected damage to the plastic should be replaced or repaired to prevent further long-term damage.

- Snow removal from the spa cover should be performed exclusively using a soft-bristle broom. The use of shovels or other rigid tools is strongly discouraged, as these can accidentally damage the cover's outer vinyl material, including the stitching, or puncture the vapour barrier, leading to premature cover failure.
- Store covers properly when not in use. Avoid placing them directly on snow-covered ground.
- Use a thermal blanket (floating foam or solar cover) underneath the main cover to reduce condensation and heat loss.
- Reapply approved protective coatings to vinyl surfaces to resist UV degradation and cold cracking.
- Avoid chemical damage by maintaining proper water chemistry within recommended parameters. If sanitizer or pH levels deviate significantly, temporarily remove the cover to prevent exposure to concentrated off-gassing. Additionally, periodically ventilate the spa—ideally every two to three days—to release trapped moisture and chemical vapours, minimizing the risk of vapour barrier failure due to prolonged, chemical-rich, condensation exposure.
- Ensure a proper fit. The cover should sit evenly and securely on the spa shell. Any gaps, whether



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Left: Snow removal must be done with a soft-bristle broom to prevent damage to the vapour barrier.

PHOTO ©JBVINCENT/
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Right: Hot tub covers are essential for safety, maintaining water temperature and reducing evaporation.

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from misalignment, warping, or improper hinge sealing, will allow heat and vapour to escape, increasing energy consumption and the risk of moisture damage to the foam core. Flapping or “winging” covers during windy conditions also accelerate wear and tear.

- Use a cover cap during extended periods when the spa is not in use or in harsh weather conditions. This extra layer shields the main cover from UV exposure, precipitation, and debris, significantly extending its lifespan.

Conclusion: Beyond hot tubs

The principles learned from the lifecycle of a hot tub cover are applicable across a wide range of cold-weather insulation challenges, from wall assemblies in buildings to outdoor plumbing and HVAC enclosures. Proper design, material selection, and proactive maintenance are essential to preventing waterlogging and preserving thermal integrity. In an age of rising energy costs and environmental awareness, the investment in high-performance insulation and vapour protection is not just smart but necessary.

Maintaining a high-quality hot tub cover and following proper care practices are critical to ensuring its longevity, energy efficiency, and overall performance during even the coldest winters. 🌊



Lisa Kennedy is the vice president of dealer channel sales at Core Covers, bringing over two decades of expertise in the pool and spa industry. Her journey began in 1999 as a customer service representative at Beachcomber Hot Tubs, based at their Oakville development centre. She quickly demonstrated her leadership potential, advancing to become the assistant to the national sales manager. For 20 years, Kennedy played a pivotal role on the management team at The Cover Guy, helping drive the growth of this international e-commerce leader in the hot tub industry. In 2024, she embraced a bold new chapter by joining Core Covers in a senior sales leadership role, where she now leads dealer channel strategy and growth initiatives. She holds a diploma in business and law, and security from Niagara College, underscoring her solid academic foundation. She also serves as vice president of the Pool & Hot Tub Council of Canada (PHTCC), where she contributes her time and insights to advancing the industry. With her strong background in sales, deep roots in customer service, commitment to volunteer leadership, and a passion for the industry, Kennedy is exceptionally well-equipped to lead her team toward continued success.



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ORP and pH Control

By Martin Grenier

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Controllers use a bypass system that directs a small sample of pool water into a container housing the ORP and pH sensors.

A Service Pro's Advantage

Swimming pool oxidation-reduction potential (ORP)/pH controllers have been around since the mid-1970s, but were very large and expensive, so they were typically found only in municipalities. The greatest innovations came in the early 1990s, when controllers became powered by microprocessors instead of analog technology.

Simple automation systems with ORP and pH controllers have come a long way. They are now smaller, simpler, and easily connected with apps—allowing customers to ensure their swimming pool water chemistry remains in balance to prevent issues with sanitation or damage to pool equipment or even the pool's construction. However, it is important that pool professionals have a clear understanding of what ORP and pH measure. Being able to provide a simple explanation to clients is

important when selling these units, as well as explaining how to understand the measurement levels when consumers are operating and reviewing the measurements on their connected phone app.

Understanding oxidation-reduction potential (ORP)

ORP measures the oxidizing properties of any sanitizer present in the body of water. Most controllers use a bypass system that takes a small sample of water out of the plumbing and directs it into a small container that houses the sensors. When the chlorine is actually able to oxidize, the sensors generate a millivolt reading, which is expressed as an ORP measurement. If the chlorine is not free and available, the millivolt reading will not be generated.



ORP is a qualitative measurement which is constantly changing in outdoor pools primarily due to varying CYA levels and sunlight intensity. It is important to remember and explain to clients that the ORP measurement changes throughout the day because it is affected by factors such as pH, cyanuric acid, combined chlorine, and salt-chlorine generators. Essentially, ORP is a moving target, so having a simple system that reports or shows the safe "range" of ORP is important. Simpler ORP controllers will show the results as green (good), orange (moving out of range), and red (out of range) to make it easy to interpret.

It is important to remember that the "P" in ORP stands for potential. ORP provides a measurement of the chlorine's potential ability to oxidize and, therefore, sanitize at a particular moment in time. ORP is not an actual measurement of sanitizer; rather, it is a measurement of the chlorine's ability to oxidize. Chlorine is constantly being chemically tied up with factors such as phosphates, high-bather loads and pH fluctuation. Therefore, most controllers and feeders measure ORP and pH in a body of water and dose accordingly.

ORP measures the water's ability to oxidize and depends on pH when the primary sanitizer is chlorine. This is one of the reasons that pools should be equipped with both an ORP and a pH controller/feeder. Cyanuric acid levels can affect the readings taken by an ORP sensor, and even sunlight affects ORP readings. If observed closely, there tends to be a distinct pattern of rising and falling of ORP at both dawn and dusk on outdoor pools. The ORP will

always go up at dusk, as the sun goes down, because lower UV levels degrade the chlorine, so the chlorine no longer needs to combine with cyanuric acid to protect itself from the UV coming from the sun. Chlorine is more available when no longer exposed to UV; therefore, it has a greater potential to oxidize because it is not tied up with cyanuric acid.

Conversely, the ORP readings go down at dawn or as the sun rises and the UV rays start hitting the pool water, causing the chlorine to combine with cyanuric acid to protect the chlorine, but at that time, the chlorine is less "free," meaning it has a lower oxidation potential at that moment in time. This does not mean the chlorine cannot do its job, because it will break free as needed to oxidize and sanitize. The ORP measurement is valuable in that it signals pool owners and pool professionals about what factors might inhibit the chlorine's ability to oxidize.

Is it the high bather load that has introduced high levels of organics, such as sunscreen? Perhaps the chlorine is tied up with phosphates introduced from the source water? Or is it the sudden introduction of large amounts of pollen?

Automation benefits

Using ORP controllers is the most cost-effective solution to measure sanitizer levels. ORP helps identify how the sanitizer in the water is working and helps determine the factors that might be making the sanitizer less effective at keeping the pool water clean. By understanding how these readings are generated and the factors that affect the readings, service techs and pool owners can better

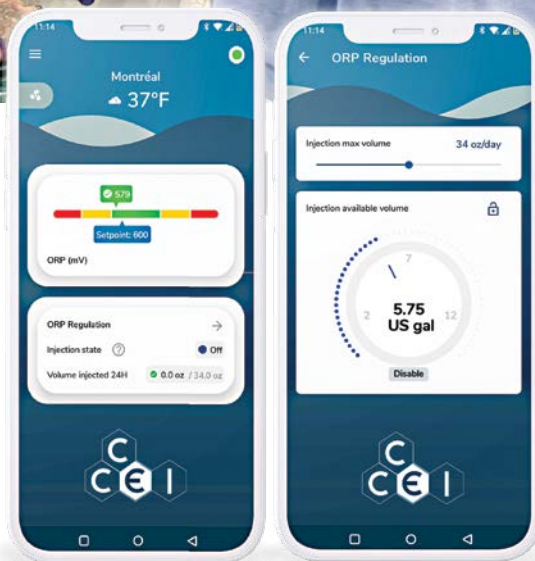
Left: ORP readings are affected by pH, cyanuric acid, combined chlorine, and salt-chlorine generators.

Right: Most controllers and feeders measure both ORP and pH in the pool water and adjust dosing accordingly.



Above: Automation systems provide real-time data that allow service professionals to identify issues such as pH imbalance before they escalate.

Below: Simpler ORP controllers display safe operating ranges as green, orange, or red for easy interpretation.



adjust their water chemistry using an automation system with an app on their phone.

Using the latest automation technology with convenient smartphone apps allows pool technicians and owners to monitor and dose pool water to obtain the cleanest, clearest water for swimmers, save chemicals, and help protect pool equipment and surfaces.

Pool professionals agree that automation systems can help avoid problems that increase a pool's operating costs. While automation does not replace regular service, systems such as chemical controllers and feeders ensure all systems function correctly between service calls.

Service professionals can enhance the service they provide. By having more access to real-time equipment status and remote access, they can get information ahead of time so they can make their service calls more efficient and effective. In addition, with monitoring services, service professionals can provide customers with a higher level of personalized, premium service that goes beyond standard expectations—offering upselling opportunities and building strong customer relations.

Automation systems provide valuable data, enabling pool service professionals to identify issues, such as pH imbalances, before they escalate. This proactive approach gives pool professionals a competitive advantage by allowing for more specific discussions with clients rather than general inquiries about backyard conditions.

Offering simple ORP/pH automation systems

Pool automation, including ORP/pH systems, helps boost customer satisfaction and excitement about their pool. These systems simplify pool maintenance and make operating other components easier, even remotely with phone apps. Automation enhances the backyard experience, providing everything from optimal water temperature to chemically balanced and sanitized water chemistry.

Understanding how these controller systems function and explaining what the controllers measure is an integral part of empowering customers with the new apps they will be downloading to their smartphones.

Offering and installing simple automation systems helps modernize pools for customers while differentiating a business from competitors. Simple automation systems with ORP and pH controllers are now smaller, simpler, and easily connected with apps—making them a game-changer for pool and spa professionals. In addition to upgrading pools, automation fosters customer loyalty by empowering clients with greater control and enhancing their sense of ownership over a more modern pool experience. 🌊



Martin Grenier is the Canadian commercial sales manager for CCEI, a manufacturer of automation and controller systems in the United States and lighting systems in Canada, Mexico, Europe, and Africa. The company's head office is located in France. Grenier has more than 10 years of experience in the swimming pool industry, having worked for Hayward for over seven years and held other positions in retail and distribution. He can be reached at mgrenier@ccei-pool.com.

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Crystal Clear Profits

Best Practices for Weekly Chemical Invoicing

Middle: In today's economy, where chemical prices and labour costs continue to rise, accurate tracking and billing are essential to protecting margins and profitability.

Right: Providing customers with clear, itemized invoices builds trust by showing exactly what they are paying for, eliminating surprises and confusion.

Pool and spa service company owners probably know the ever-sinking feeling of absorbing the rising cost of chemicals and supplies every month. They have thought about charging for them separately, but ignore that in favour of keeping prices steady and their service dependable. Plus, it seems like charging for chemicals and supplies is more trouble than it is worth. However, the stark reality is that the all-inclusive approach quietly crushes margins. Chemical prices continue to climb, shaving profits. So, the strategy of bundling these costs into one flat monthly fee risks losing money—especially when prices spike.

Industry data: What the numbers reveal

According to the 2025 State of Pool Service report published by Skimmer, just 20 per cent of pool companies use a “plus chems” model where chemicals are billed separately. The majority, more than 54 per cent, charge one flat monthly fee that includes chemicals regardless of price fluctuation.¹

A 2024 Service Industry News survey adds more insight.² For one, there are clear regional differences. In some areas, companies are more likely to bundle chemicals into a flat rate, while in others businesses tend to bill separately. Commercial pools see even bigger swings. In some regions, only



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about 13 per cent of companies include chemicals in their flat rate, while in others the figure is closer to 60 per cent. The industry is all over the map, but it is

clear that too many pool service companies are eating costs they should not be.

Despite the financial downside, most pool service companies bundle chemicals into a flat monthly rate for the simple reason that tracking and invoicing chemicals can be a logistical and administrative nightmare.

The problem: Costs eating away at profits

If given the choice, many owners would like to charge separately for chemicals and extra supplies. It just makes sense since they would not be paying out-of-pocket for the increasing cost of chemicals.

Historically, the challenge has been that technicians would have to track what they use during each service call. Then, someone at the office would have to sort through all those notes and update the invoices manually. And when margins are tight, the last thing a business entrepreneur

needs is extra administrative work using up valuable hours in an already busy day. The devil is in the details, and managing those can be expensive. That is why companies typically stick to the flat-rate model, even when they know it hurts profits.

Is there a better way? Automating chemical and supply invoicing

The good news is that technology has come to the rescue. Modern software takes the headache out of chemical invoicing. With the right platform, technicians simply enter what they used into an app during their normal service visit. For example, a technician might use liquid chlorine, a quart of acid, and add a new skimmer basket. The technician follows their everyday workflow, enters the chemical usage amounts into an app on their phone, and then the software system takes care of calculating the billable charges and adding them to the customer's monthly invoice—all automatically.

There is no extra paperwork, no complicated billing questions, and no more missed charges.

Everything flows naturally into the next billing cycle, itemized for the customer and accounted for by the business.

Consider this familiar analogy. Think about how one pays for new brakes on their truck. Labour is billed by the hour and each part is billed individually. The person does not expect the mechanic to give them a flat fee for everything, no matter what parts or fluids were used. Pool service should work the same way. Yet every week, service companies lose money because chemical costs go untracked. The real problem is not customer pushback; it is the lack of a dependable, automated way to capture the data and invoice accurately for it in a timely fashion.

Customer perception: Transparency builds trust

Most business owners overlook the simple fact that customers typically do not mind paying for chemicals separately as long as they know exactly what they are paying for. A clear invoice builds trust. When

Opposite page:

Above: During routine service visits, technicians can simply record the chemicals and supplies they use, with billing handled automatically by the system.

Below: Modern software allows technicians to log chemical usage on their phones, automatically adding the charges to customer invoices without extra paperwork.

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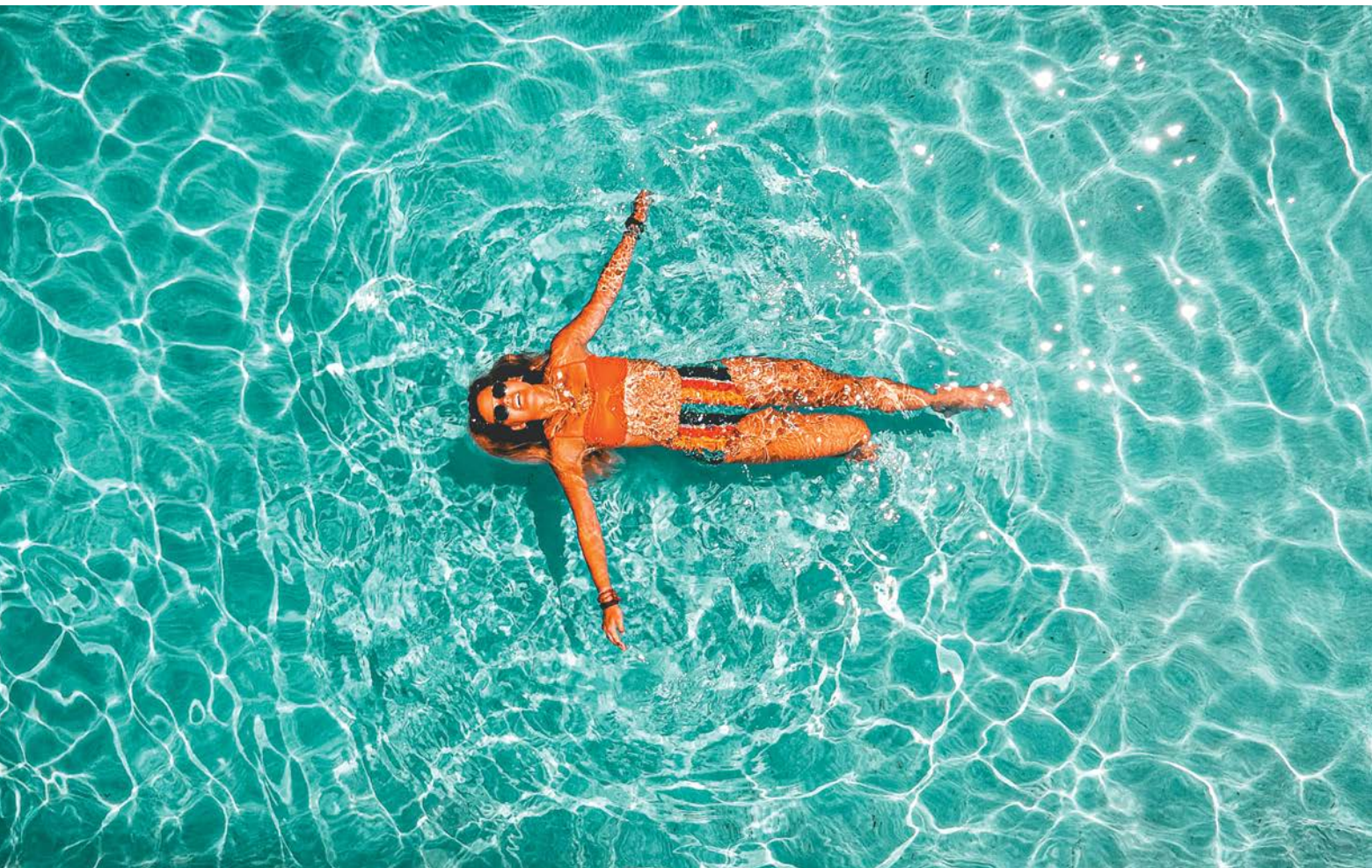


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Customers are generally comfortable paying separately for chemicals when charges are clear and transparent, allowing them to enjoy their pool with confidence.

customers see itemized charges, they know they are not being overcharged. Invoice transparency improves customer satisfaction because there are no surprises.

Technology makes the invoicing process hands-free by automatically tracking service data, aggregating charges, and invoicing so that customer billing is seamless and straightforward. Companies keep their margins healthy, and customers stay informed.

Protecting margins in a changing economy

The bottom line is that chemical prices fluctuate, fuel costs go up, and labour shortages drive wages higher. In today's dynamic environment where costs keep climbing, staying profitable requires tracking every expense accurately.

Software automation helps provide consistent margins, streamlines operations, and contributes to stronger decision-making because it is clear where money comes in.

The takeaway here is that the pool service industry has relied on simple flat-rate billing at the cost of profitability. With today's technology, there is no reason to leave money on the table. The process is easy: technicians log usage in seconds, the right system invoices the details automatically, and customers know exactly what they are being charged for every step of the way. It is a win-win all around. 🙌

Notes

¹ Refer to getskimmer.com/stateofpoolservice

² Review the survey at serviceindustrynews.net/2024/05/31/2024-pool-service-pricing-survey-results/



Peter Wasmer is a Naples, Fla.-based serial entrepreneur and founder of ProValet, bringing more than 25 years of experience helping small business owners streamline operations and grow with confidence.

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The Business Case for Pool Automation

By Mike Fox

Evening lighting transforms a backyard pool into a serene space, demonstrating customizable automation features.

IMAGE EDITED USING
CHATGPT (DALL-E) USING A
PHOTO COURTESY LATHAM
POOL PRODUCTS INC.

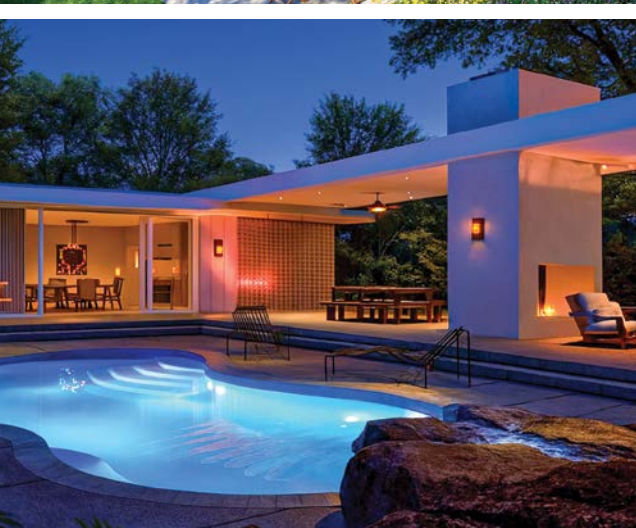
As a pool industry professional, staying ahead of the curve with the latest technology is key to offering clients the best possible ownership experience. From chemistry management to remotely opening and closing covers, pool automation is one of the fastest-growing aspects of the industry, providing homeowners with convenience, efficiency and cost savings—all at their fingertips.

By integrating automation into your product offerings, pool and spa businesses can help clients optimize their pool's performance, simplify maintenance, and enhance their overall enjoyment, while boosting their bottom line. Here is how to position pool automation as a must-have upgrade for today's tech-savvy pool owners.

Why should clients consider pool automation?

Automated systems allow pool owners to control all aspects of their pool from the convenience of a switch or mobile device. As with other smart home technologies, these options offer a variety of benefits to owners, including:

- **Reduced energy costs and extended equipment lifespan**—By programming pool equipment to run during off-peak hours, homeowners can lower energy bills and reduce wear and tear on their pumps, heaters, and filters.
- **Simplified maintenance**—No more guesswork or manual adjustments. Cloud-based apps allow pool owners to monitor and maintain precise



pool chemistry from the convenience of a smartphone.

- **Enhanced safety and control**—For families with children or rental property owners, automation can regulate access and control pool functions remotely, ensuring safe and appropriate usage.
- **Customized pool experience**—From automated lighting and water features to temperature adjustments and party modes, automation allows for a fully personalized and enjoyable pool environment.

All of these conveniences can be delivered via an advanced cloud-based system that gives pool owners total control of their pool from anywhere, optimizing water quality, temperature, and energy use in real time.

An advanced cloud-based system intelligently adjusts heating, chilling, and filtration cycles by analyzing historical performance and weather conditions. This saves owners money while keeping the pool perfectly prepped for every swim.

With automated chemistry management, smart lighting integration, and leak detection alerts, these

systems provide smart, hassle-free control. Some companies even produce them in a mini size for homeowners looking for a more cost-friendly option.

By educating customers on these advantages, pool and spa businesses can position themselves as trusted experts and help customers make informed decisions about upgrading their pool systems.

What can be automated?

Today's pool automation technology extends far beyond just controlling the pump and filter. The latest systems provide seamless integration across multiple pool features, including:

- **Pump, filtration, and heating systems**—Automatically schedule run times for optimal energy efficiency.
- **Lighting and ambiance**—Program multi-colour LED lighting effects to set the mood for any occasion.
- **Water features**—Control fountains, waterfalls, and bubblers with a single tap.
- **Chemical monitoring and dosing**—Maintain perfect water balance with automated pH and chlorine regulation.

Above: A modern backyard pool with integrated spa highlights how automation creates both relaxation and efficiency.

IMAGE EDITED USING CHATGPT (DALL-E) USING A PHOTO COURTESY LATHAM POOL PRODUCTS INC.

Top left: Automated systems streamline maintenance while enhancing enjoyment of this residential pool.

PHOTO COURTESY LATHAM POOL PRODUCTS INC.

Bottom left: Smart lighting and water controls turn this pool into a striking nighttime retreat.

IMAGE EDITED USING CHATGPT (DALL-E) USING A PHOTO COURTESY LATHAM POOL PRODUCTS INC.



Integrated automation manages safety covers, lighting, and water features with ease.

PHOTO COURTESY LATHAM POOL PRODUCTS INC.

- Security and access—Set limits on pool use for safety and remote control for vacation mode.

With a cloud-based pool management system, pool owners can take their experience even further. Imagine setting a “party mode” that activates a synchronized light and music display or a “vacation mode” that maintains pool chemistry while homeowners are away. The possibilities are endless.

How pool professionals can leverage automation

For builders, installers, and service providers, pool automation is more than just a convenience—it is a valuable upselling opportunity that enhances customer satisfaction and long-term retention. Here is how to integrate it into your business strategy:

- Present automation as a standard feature—Position smart controls as an essential component of any modern pool package.
- Educate homeowners—Walk clients through the benefits of automation during consultations and highlight long-term cost savings.
- Provide upgrade paths—Many automation systems are modular, allowing homeowners to start with basic controls and expand over time.

- Use automation to streamline service contracts—Remote monitoring capabilities can alert service providers to issues before they become costly repairs, improving efficiency and customer loyalty.

For today’s homeowners, convenience is king—and pool automation delivers exactly that. By embracing automation in their business, pool and spa businesses can provide clients with a smarter, more energy-efficient and enjoyable pool experience while driving higher-value sales and long-term customer relationships. 🌊



Mike Fox is the vice president of product, fiberglass and autocovers for Latham, The Pool Company, and has 15 years of experience in the pool industry. He previously served as North American director of sales for fiberglass pools, as well as regional sales director and product director for fiberglass pools. Earlier in his career, he was director of commercial finance.

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Staycation Central

Sustainable Kitchens Go Poolside

By Amy Bortz
and Steve Easley

Investment in the home's outdoor living spaces has accelerated ever since the pandemic. Homeowners continue to rethink how they enjoy and use their backyards—pools, hot tubs and saunas, gaming and entertainment areas, and high-end kitchens. A luxury kitchen that complements the pool and other backyard amenities provides new opportunities to enjoy the outdoors.

What was once a backyard nook outfitted with a gas or charcoal grill has evolved into an integral extension of the home's cooking centre, perfectly complementing the pool. Benefitting from new integrated designs and specialized, high-end products, the outdoor kitchen has become a must-have for many homeowners.

The new products found in these kitchens are not simple grills and coolers. They are sophisticated, fully-appointed cooking and cooling appliances, offering the same level of functionality as their indoor counterparts. These kitchens create a perfect backdrop for everything from daily meals to intimate gatherings, staycations, and entertainment centres for poolside events.

Why go eco-friendly in an outdoor kitchen?

Building a sustainable outdoor kitchen goes beyond environmental awareness—it also delivers value to homeowners, helping future-proof the home. As cities and states introduce legislation to curb fossil fuel consumption, including outdoor appliances such as grills, homeowners and designers are increasingly turning to electric options.

Many states and provinces are taking proactive steps to limit greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuels. This has prompted bans on gasoline-powered lawn equipment and encouraged the adoption of cleaner alternatives for outdoor appliances. In some urban settings, open flames are outright banned and electric appliances are the only viable option. Due to changes such as these, opting for electric or renewable energy-powered outdoor kitchen appliances is both environmentally responsible and a valuable home investment.

Sustainable outdoor kitchen appliances

The centrepiece of the outdoor kitchen is always the grill, and for homeowners wanting to go green, it is the logical place to begin. Historically, switching from gas or propane grills to electric options led to lacklustre performance, leaving many disappointed with the cooking results. However, today's electric grills have come a long way.

For example, consider a 762-mm (30-in.) electric grill specifically designed for high-end outdoor kitchens. It operates at 240V, has a maximum temperature of 371°C (700°F), and features thermostatic control. This grill offers performance comparable to a traditional gas grill while maintaining the intended flavour and cooking experience.

Additional sustainable cooking options enhance the grill's functionality. An optional stainless-steel griddle accessory can prepare a variety of meals on the electric grill. Additionally, a cooktop designed for outdoor kitchens features an electric side cooker

Opposite page:

Top: A luxury outdoor kitchen and poolside retreat extends the home's living space, creating an eco-friendly hub for cooking, entertaining, and relaxation.

IMAGE EDITED USING CHATGPT (DALL-E) USING A PHOTO COURTESY STEVE EASLEY & ASSOCIATES

Bottom: Sustainable appliances complement today's eco-friendly luxury outdoor kitchens.

PHOTO COURTESY FIRE MAGIC



Left: Electric infrared heaters make outdoor living more comfortable in the winter.

PHOTO COURTESY STEVE EASLEY & ASSOCIATES

Middle: Options like an electric grill deliver uncompromising taste and an authentic cooking experience.

PHOTOS COURTESY FIRE MAGIC

Right: New sustainable products, such as an advanced induction cooktop, make luxury outdoor kitchens more usable.

suitable for outdoor entertaining. The 1,800-watt cooktop heats quickly, operates efficiently, and offers precise temperature control ranging from 66–232 C (150–450 F).

Look for outdoor kitchen appliances made from high-quality, long-lasting materials, such as 304 stainless steel. It is also important to research products with a strong warranty. This offers peace of mind knowing the company will stand behind the quality of its products. Regular cleaning and covering of cooking equipment will keep outdoor appliances looking better for longer.

Advanced electric options such as these can achieve the perfect sear for steaks, while handling a wide variety of other cooking duties—all while being completely eco-friendly.

Powering the poolside kitchen

An outdoor kitchen is comprised of more than just a grill. Most homeowners will incorporate additional

features, including refrigerators, warming drawers, infrared heaters, lighting, and entertainment devices such as TVs and high-end sound systems. To make these features sustainable, it is vital to think about how they will be powered. Solar panels installed on the home are a reliable, proven solution for reducing a home's reliance on fossil-fuel-based energy sources, easily providing the power needed for these outdoor appliances.

It is important to be familiar with local codes for installing electrical equipment near pools and water features. Codes frequently vary from one region to the next, so passing inspections and meeting all safety regulations requires localized knowledge.

Another opportunity to support a sustainable outdoor kitchen is to assess the energy mix of local utility companies. Opting for a provider that incorporates renewable sources, such as wind or solar, into its energy mix will help ensure the entire home, including the outdoor kitchen, is contributing





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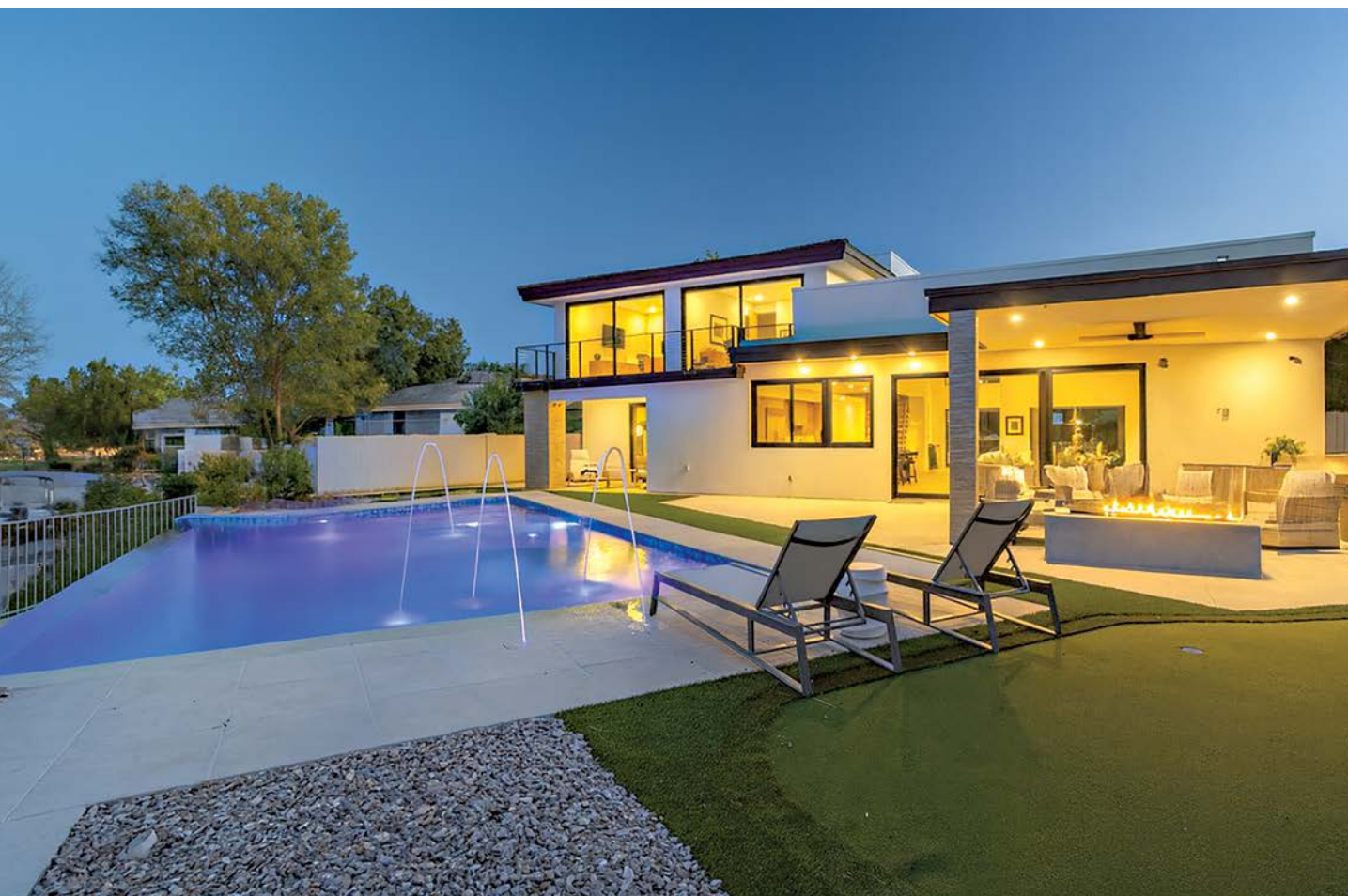
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Left: Electric or renewable-energy appliances make outdoor kitchens eco-friendly and a smart home investment.

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Right: By designing an outdoor retreat with everything from pools to fully equipped kitchens, homeowners can enjoy vacation-like relaxation in the comfort of their own backyards.

to a more sustainable future. Be sure to consult a licensed electrician to ensure there is adequate room in the breaker box for the additional circuits.

Staycations: Eco-Friendly backyard escapes

With the rising popularity of backyard kitchens that complement luxurious pools, the concept of staycations has gained popularity. More homeowners are investing in their outdoor spaces as an alternative to long-distance travel, which reduces the energy footprint of vacations requiring planes, trains, or automobiles.

By designing an outdoor retreat with everything from pools to fully equipped kitchens, homeowners can enjoy vacation-like relaxation in the comfort of their own backyards. Staycations are an eco-friendly alternative to the traditional getaway.

A popular trend in backyard design that both builders and interior designers are embracing is the orientation of as many exterior elements as possible toward the pool. This makes the pool the centerpiece

of the backyard and elevates the convenience of serving poolside guests from the outdoor kitchen.

Conclusion

Creating a sustainable outdoor kitchen requires thoughtful choices and a long-term perspective. By focusing on durable materials, renewable energy sources, electric appliances, and energy-efficient designs, homeowners can create outdoor spaces that are both luxurious and environmentally responsible.

With a little planning—as well as a healthy amount of collaboration between pool builders and outdoor kitchen designers—homeowners can turn their backyard into an eco-friendly oasis that meets all their cooking, entertaining, and relaxation needs while reducing their environmental impact. Whether for everyday meals, gatherings, or staycations, a green outdoor kitchen that complements the pool will serve as a hub for both enjoying a bit of nature and preserving it for years to come. 🌿



Amy Bortz is the vice-president of marketing for Fire Magic, creating and implementing strategic marketing programs for the company. For more than 85 years, Fire Magic has set the bar for both high-performance outdoor cooking and exceptional design with its luxury line of grills and accessories.



Steve Easley, the principal of Steve Easley & Associates, is an internationally recognized construction consultant who specializes in educating the building industry to design and build homes that are energy efficient, long-lasting, healthy to live in, and sustainable. He has more than 30 years of industry experience, including conducting building science seminars around the world for industry professionals.

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Taking Stock

Smarter Inventory Management for Pool & Spa Pros

By Rachael Pritz

IMAGE CREATED USING
OPENAI'S DALL-E/CHATGPT

In today's unpredictable market, maintaining strict inventory control is vital for pool and spa businesses. Accurate, up-to-date tracking helps prevent overstocking or understocking, supports cash flow, and boosts operational efficiency during peak seasons. As demand fluctuates and supply chains remain variable, real-time inventory access allows for quicker decisions on purchasing, promotions, and customer service.

Consider a common summer situation: demand for chlorine, pool shock, algaecides, and pH balancers increases sharply. If a retailer relies on weekly chlorine tablet shipments and a delay of five to seven days occurs—due to manufacturing problems, weather, labour shortages, or fuel disruptions—the result is stockouts, unhappy customers, and lost sales. These problems are especially damaging when customers need immediate water treatment to keep pools safe and operational.

Store-to-store transfers

If one location is low on chlorine but others still have stock, real-time data allows for quick decisions to transfer goods between stores before a shipment is delayed.

Proactive reordering

With real-time inventory visibility, the retailer can detect unusual stock depletion more rapidly.

Must-haves for an effective inventory management system

A reliable system should support cycle counts, logistical planning, and multi-location tracking. Look for the following features:

System integration

Software should connect smoothly with key business platforms such as accounting systems, point-of-sale



TABLE 1

Feature / Factor	Real-time Inventory Tracking	Tracking Using Manual Spreadsheets
Accuracy	Automatically updates inventory when a sale, return, or restock happens	Manual data entry presents a high chance of human error
Time efficiency	Saves hours with automation	Time-consuming, especially with multiple SKUs
Stock visibility	Instant view of stock levels across all locations	Limited visibility, especially for multi-location businesses
Customer satisfaction	Prevents overselling, enables quick fulfillment	Risk of promising out-of-stock items
Integrations	Connects with point-of-sale (POS), e-commerce, and accounting tools	No direct integrations—manual updates are required
Alerts and automation	Low stock alerts, automatic reordering	No built-in alert system
Scalability	Easily scales with business growth	Becomes unmanageable as inventory grows
Audit trail and reporting	Tracks changes with time stamps and user logs	Limited history and traceability
Mobile access/cloud sync	Accessible anywhere	Usually stored locally, making it harder to collaborate

tools, and order management software. Integration reduces errors and saves time.

A technician uses a part on a job, but it does not get deducted from store inventory because it is written on paper or not in a connected system, causing inaccuracies.

Overcome this by using integrated management software that connects to point-of-sale (POS) and accounting platforms. If the tech deducts inventory in real time using a mobile app, then the store inventory is properly accounted for.

Industry vendor connectivity

Access to vendor catalogues, inventory availability, and order status in real time before placing an order helps avoid delays and stockouts.

Real-time vendor integration allows the pool retailer to:

- Instantly verify supplier inventory
- Place and track the order without calling or emailing

Search and reporting tools

The ability to search inventory by department, vendor, product type, or description—and generate customized reports—supports smarter forecasting and sales planning.

- Fast-moving inventory report
 - Purpose: Identifies top-selling items (e.g. chlorine tablets, shock, test kits, algicide) by SKU, vendor, or category.
 - Value: Helps ensure popular items are reordered before they run out, reducing stockouts and rush orders.
- Low stock/reorder point report
 - Purpose: Flags products that have reached or fallen below their reorder threshold.
 - Value: Prevents loss of sales and customer dissatisfaction due to out-of-stock items.
- High margin item sales report
 - Purpose: Highlights best-performing products in terms of profit, not just volume.
 - Value: Focuses marketing or upselling efforts on high-margin SKUs (e.g. robotic cleaners, UV systems).

Limitations of spreadsheet-based tracking

Spreadsheets remain common in the industry but lack the automation and responsiveness required to manage seasonal, complex inventory. Manual data entry increases the chance of errors and hinders real-time visibility, especially during busy months. Dedicated inventory software streamlines operations and supports the following: (See Table 1)

On this spread:

Middle: Seasonal demand spikes, such as chlorine shortages, highlight the risks of stockouts and lost sales.

PHOTO COURTESY
AQUA-TECH POOL SPA BATH

Right: Integrated systems connecting POS, accounting, and order management reduce errors and improve inventory accuracy.

PHOTO COURTESY RB RETAIL
& SERVICE SOLUTIONS



Top: Vendor integration provides real-time access to catalogues, availability, and order status to avoid delays.

PHOTO ©PERFECT ANGLE IMAGES/COURTESY RB RETAIL & SERVICE SOLUTIONS

Bottom: Moving away from manual tracking methods, such as paper notes, helps avoid inaccuracies and potential blind spots in stock management.

PHOTO COURTESY ALL SEASONS POOLS & SPAS INC.

Ensure stock availability

Real-time tracking helps ensure the availability of high-demand items like chemicals, pumps, and accessories. Avoiding stockouts during peak seasons prevents lost sales and customer frustration.

Prevent overstocking and understocking

Live inventory data helps businesses find the right balance. Overstocking ties up capital and storage space, while understocking can lead to missed opportunities.

Improve cash flow

Excess inventory decreases liquidity, while shortages cause revenue loss. Real-time tracking helps maintain optimal stock levels that boost cash flow.

Reduce shrinkage

Accurate tracking helps identify discrepancies between recorded and actual stock, flagging issues such as damage, loss, or theft. This improves

inventory accuracy and supports operational transparency across teams.

For example, consider a scenario where a pool company's accounting team notices that chlorine tablet sales have remained flat over a six-week period, yet inventory levels are decreasing faster than expected. A routine usage versus sales report—comparing product outflow from the warehouse and service vans against POS transactions—reveals a shortfall of 15 buckets (11 kg [25 lb] each), representing about \$1,100 worth of unaccounted product at wholesale cost. In this situation, each bucket removed from the warehouse is matched to either a retail sale or a documented service use. Several buckets have been signed out by service technicians but never recorded on job tickets. In this scenario, two technicians are taking extra product, and one is reselling chlorine to private clients. The business catches a shrinkage issue hidden within the service fleet—a common blind spot. By integrating inventory tracking with service management tools and reinforcing accountability, the loss is stopped and operational discipline is strengthened.

Support sales and promotions

Inventory data helps schedule timely promotions by spotting overstocked items and ensuring high-demand products are not discounted unnecessarily.

- Inventory report shows excess of a seasonal or slow-moving product (e.g. pool floaties).
- Promotion type:
 - “Buy One, Get One 50% Off”
 - “End-of-Season Clearance – 30% Off While Supplies Last”
- Result: Clears shelf space, recovers capital, and avoids dead stock.

Run a “Splash Sale” on slow-moving pool toys that were taking up valuable display space. By bundling them with best-selling chlorine, they cleared out the inventory within a week.

Why this matters for pool and spa retailers

Pool and spa businesses manage large SKU volumes across retail, construction, and service sectors. Real-time tracking improves on this complexity better than static spreadsheets. Seasonal unpredictability creates additional challenges—demand for products like algacides or pumps can suddenly increase with

weather changes. Manual systems are not designed to handle these shifts quickly enough, raising the risk.

In disaster scenarios like hurricanes or floods, speed and visibility are everything. Real-time inventory management enabled this business to:

- Act hours—not days—faster than competitors
- Make better use of existing stock
- Avoid lost sales during critical moments

Businesses relying on spreadsheets or disconnected systems:

- Were unaware of how low their inventory levels were for key items (e.g. pumps, vacuums, shock).
- Placed orders too late—vendors were already backlogged.
- Missed the opportunity to transfer products between locations before roads were fully closed.

Special-order and custom products—such as custom liners, safety covers, or spas—require accurate tracking to prevent delays or errors. Real-time systems help ensure these orders stay on course.

Manual tracking using spreadsheets, emails, or paper tickets introduces several failure points:

- Orders with vendors may not be correctly logged in the POS or customer relationship management (CRM)
- Staff might forget to update expected delivery dates
- Customers call for updates, but accurate information cannot be provided
- Incorrect items—like wrong spa sizes or liner colours—may be ordered or delivered
- Products arrive, but customers are not notified, or worse, they sit in the warehouse for too long

Service businesses must carefully manage parts and products used in the field. Real-time tracking technology enables stock to be monitored across multiple locations or different service vehicles—something manual systems are not designed to handle efficiently.

To effectively manage inventory across mobile service units, the following best practices can be implemented:

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The image shows a black Taylor Xpress Flex water testing kit. It includes a black base unit with a digital display and a 'PUSH HERE' button. On top of the unit are four white test vials with colored caps: orange (labeled 1), teal (labeled 2), blue (labeled 3), and pink (labeled 4). A small bottle of Taylor Xpress Flex test solution is also visible.

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The Taylor logo features a stylized water drop icon to the left of the word 'taylor' in a lowercase, sans-serif font.

Treating each service van as a mini-warehouse improves tracking of parts and reduces shrinkage.

PHOTO COURTESY
UNDERWATER POOL
MASTERS INC.



TABLE 2

Tool Type	Why It Is Used	Why It Is a Problem
Spreadsheet Software (e.g. Excel, Google Sheets)	Easy, free, familiar	● No real-time syncing across teams or locations ● No alerts, audit trails, or automatic updates ● High risk of human error or duplication ● Not scalable for field or multi-site operations
Accounting software alone (e.g. QuickBooks without inventory modules)	Already used for finances and invoicing	● Does not track physical movement of stock in real time ● Updates only after sales, not during transfers ● Lacks mobile access for field technicians
Messaging apps or email	Quick way to ask, "Do we have this part?"	● No searchable record or audit trail ● Easy to overlook or misinterpret ● Not linked to actual inventory counts or reorders

- Conduct regular van cycle counts
 - Schedule weekly or biweekly physical inventory checks of each service vehicle
 - Compare expected versus actual stock to identify discrepancies, loss, or unrecorded use
- Track inventory transfers
 - Require technicians or warehouse managers to document all product transfers:
- Warehouse to van
- Van to van
- Van to customer job
- Ensure transfer logs are timestamped and linked to specific users to maintain accountability

- Assign each vehicle its own inventory location
 - Treat every service van as a "mini-warehouse" within the inventory system
 - Track the movement of products in and out of each vehicle
 - Generate accurate usage reports by technician and location
- Use mobile-friendly inventory tools
 - Equip technicians with barcode scanners or mobile apps
 - Log materials used on-site
 - Trigger inventory deductions in real time
 - Use barcode scanning to reduce manual entry errors

Beware of apps that fail to track inventory

Some apps provide useful billing, scheduling, or route management tools but lack inventory tracking features. Others may offer "free" inventory tools with limited functionality unless upgraded. Many do not integrate with industry vendors, which complicates order management. Businesses should select a system that offers robust tracking capabilities, integrates with industry vendors, and supports multi-location operations to address their specific inventory management needs.

Commonly used tools that fall short for inventory tracking

Some pool and spa businesses continue to rely on general-purpose tools for inventory tracking. While

familiar and convenient, these tools often lack the functionality needed for real-time, multi-location inventory control. (See Table 2)

Real-world example

Consider this common scenario: A customer calls to check availability on a specific pool pump. With real-time inventory, staff can check instantly and reserve the item. The data might be outdated with a spreadsheet, risking a lost sale or a poor service experience.

While a spreadsheet may be sufficient for small operations in the short term, it quickly becomes a limitation as the business expands. Real-time systems provide a clear competitive advantage in a seasonal industry with complex inventory demands and mobile service fleets.

Inventory tracking enhances customer satisfaction

Knowing exactly what is in stock helps staff provide quick, accurate information. Customers value

prompt responses, timely updates, and informed alternatives. This enhances the shopping experience and fosters trust.

As seasonal demand changes swiftly, a real-time system reduces the burden on staff and improves operations. Investing in an automated inventory system is a practical step toward better service and increased profitability for any business aiming to stay responsive and efficient. 🏊



Rachael Pritz has been active in the pool industry for more than 20 years, which has provided her with all-encompassing expertise in the trade. She worked at a local pool store while pursuing a master's degree at the University of Pittsburgh, Pa. With her technical skills and industry knowledge, she joined the launch of RB Retail & Service Solutions in Pittsburgh in 2003. She can be reached at rachael@rbcontrolsolutions.com.



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Cooling Off Together

How Splash Pads Create Inclusive Communities

By Sylvia Bucklew

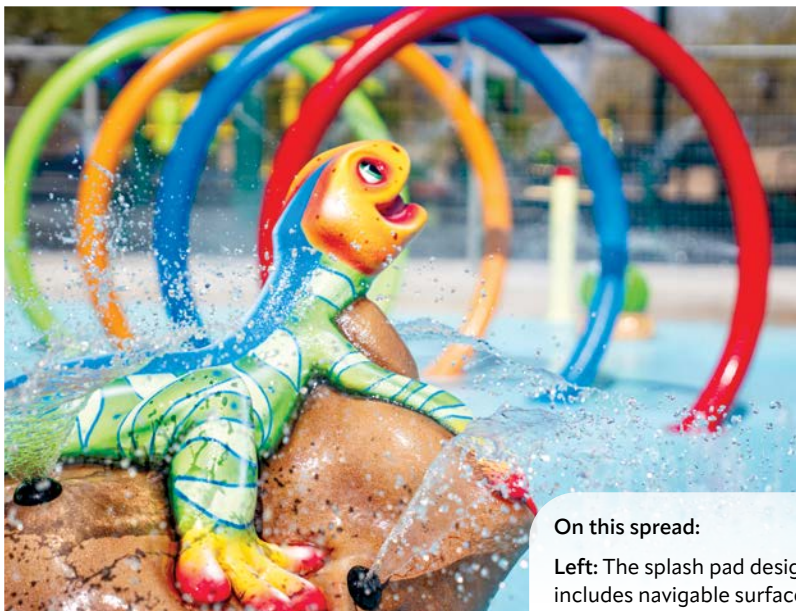
PHOTOS COURTESY
TOWN OF SAHUARITA

An inclusive splash pad now anchors the enhancements to Anamax Park, giving families and residents a welcoming place to cool off and play together. Designed for people of all ages and abilities, the new feature reflects a commitment to accessible recreation and the growing demand for inclusive public spaces.

This addition comes as part of ongoing development in the Town of Sahuarita, located just south of Tucson, Ariz., which has expanded by more than 780 per cent over the past two decades, and is now home to nearly 38,000 residents.

Recognizing this need, the town enhanced its largest and oldest recreational space with a new feature for families and residents to enjoy—the town's very first splash pad.

With no standing water and a wide range of spray effects, splash pads are known as one of the most inclusive forms of aquatic play, offering a welcoming experience for users of all ages and abilities. Splash pads are also valuable additions in communities that experience intense summer heat and frequent heat warnings, offering residents a safe and refreshing way to cool down.



On this spread:

Left: The splash pad design includes navigable surfaces for strollers, wheelchairs, and walkers to ensure full accessibility.

Top right: Cactus-shaped aquatic play elements provide thematic features that enhance the splash pad's interactive design.

Bottom middle: Children engage with desert creatures like lizards and rattlesnakes incorporated into aquatic play features.

Bottom right: Themed play elements, including animals and flowers, spark imagination and encourage interactive fun.

The design of the Anamax Park splash pad emphasizes accessibility. The installation includes water and spray features, usable by all ages, fostering inclusive play. All surfaces are navigable by stroller, wheelchair, or walker, and the space welcomes individuals with sensory, auditory, behavioural, or physical challenges to play either alongside others or independently.

Engaging play elements

The splash pad features a variety of themed aquatic play elements designed to spark imagination and encourage interactive fun. Children can engage with desert-inspired creatures such as a gila monster,

lizard, rattlesnake, and scorpion, as well as playful elements shaped like a cactus and desert flower. These are paired with additional aquatic features such as rock-like structures that create rainfall effects and a tall cactus centrepiece that towers over the play area. These themed splash pad elements are complemented by a variety of additional play features, including coiled water sprays, worm-like sprayers, solar-inspired spinners, and shimmering water screens, that add multi-sensory engagement through spray effects and dynamic motion. The overall look and feel of the space draws direct inspiration from the Arizona desert, with playful nods to local wildlife and natural landscapes that give the splash pad its unique character.



Adding to the interactivity are water cannons that allow users to control the flow by adjusting the angle, along with ground sprays that create a basket-weave pattern across the splash pad surface. For high-energy fun, large overhead dump features release cascades of water from multiple directions, ideal for older children seeking a thrilling soak. A four-bucket

clover configuration provides 360-degree splashes, allowing more participants to join in the experience.

Incorporating features like water curtains, misters, and bubblers can provide a variety of tactile experiences that can be enjoyable for people with sensory processing disorders. Cognitive and developmental stages in each child develop their ability to process sensory experiences differently. It is therefore important to have zones with lower water use that progress through a sequencing path. Many elements are available that make play sequencing an engaging attraction. One can start with a range of bubblers and water-weaving features to create visually interesting patterns, which draw users into the splash pad without the fear of being confronted with a lot of water all at once.

Inclusive play recognizes the need for different “zones” within the splash pad, ensuring safe enjoyment for users of all ages in both independent and interactive ways. Some areas are designed for full soaking, others for light splashing, and zones with water cannons cater to high-energy participants such as teenagers. Along the edges, quieter spaces are available for those who prefer solitary play.

Sustainable water systems

Water is a finite resource in many communities. To support conservation, this particular splash pad is equipped with a recirculating filtration



system that ensures efficient water use, reliable distribution, and consistent performance across all aquatic play features.

This system not only promotes sustainability through water reuse but also enhances the safety and functionality of the aquatic play space. The recirculation system ensures that all splash pad features maintain adequate water pressure while conserving water.

In the past, many cities chose flow-through systems, also known as single-pass or drain-to-waste designs, when constructing public water features, partly because their upfront costs were lower than those of recirculating systems. Today, with greater emphasis on water conservation, more municipalities are converting to recirculating systems to reduce overall water use.

Splash pads with recirculating systems operate much like pools, using chemicals, filters, and pumps to maintain water quality. Water is supplied to the play area from a holding tank sized at approximately four to five times the system's flow rate.

In addition to the pumps, filters, chemical feed, and sanitation elements needed to treat the water, recirculation systems include:

- A main drain to collect all water and send it to the tank and/or waste
- An underground water reservoir tank prefabricated and pre-plumbed

The installation also requires a lockable utility cover to keep equipment away from patrons.

Inclusive fun for everyone

This project was a collaborative effort between the Town of Sahuarita, Altitude Recreation, Water Odyssey, and AquaWorx, all working together to bring this new amenity to life. A splash pad or water play area can serve as a gathering place for people of all abilities, ages, and backgrounds to relax and connect through the joy of water. Beyond offering fun and adventure, the inherently inclusive design of a splash pad also supports the diverse physical and cognitive needs of the community. The Anamax Park splash pad is more than a place to cool off; it symbolizes community growth, creativity, and inclusive play for the town's residents. 🏊



Sylvia Bucklew is a marketing professional with seven years of experience in the aquatic play equipment manufacturing industry. She has played a key role in showcasing innovative aquatic play projects and supporting projects that bring interactive, inclusive aquatic experiences to communities, resorts, and recreation centres.

On this spread:

Top left: Rock-like spray features create rainfall effects and tactile water interactions across the splash pad.

Bottom left: Large overhead dump features release cascading water for high-energy play and thrilling soak experiences.

Middle top: Water cannons allow users to control spray direction, adding interactive and high-energy play opportunities.

Middle bottom: Ground sprays create a basket-weave pattern across the play surface to enhance dynamic water effects.

Middle right: Zones with lighter sprays and gentle bubblers support sensory play for users with processing challenges.

Right: The splash pad operates with a recirculating filtration system to ensure efficient water use and sustainability.



Avoid Costly Digital Marketing Mistakes

Common Pitfalls that Hurt Pool and Spa Retailers

By Merilee Kern,
MBA

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The digital marketing industry is predicted to reach \$807 billion by 2026, and due to its far-reaching impact and numerous advantages, it has become a crucial aspect of modern business strategies. In essence, digital marketing offers unparalleled opportunities for businesses to connect, engage, and convert customers in ways that were impossible with traditional marketing methods. Its dynamic nature and ability to adapt to evolving trends make it essential to a successful modern business strategy.

“Unfortunately, digital marketing mistakes are relatively common across various industries and business sizes,” says serial entrepreneur and digital marketing authority Philip F. Smith, a five-time Inc. 5000 award honoree, author, and consultant. “While some companies have well-structured and effective digital marketing strategies, others may struggle for various reasons. Some may not even know they are falling far short, resulting in avoidable opportunity loss.”



According to Smith, the following are six costly yet avoidable digital marketing mistakes that are all too common:

Funnel fails

Suppose a company does not concentrate on the entire marketing funnel and only worries about driving traffic to the website, email marketing content, or sales conversions. In that case, the funnel will not be optimized and less efficient than it could be. Or, worse, it could fail altogether and not generate revenue while squandering fiscal and human resources. This happens more often than one might think.

Revenue generation solves most business challenges, yet many business owners mistakenly believe that simply generating leads will ensure success, assuming the rest of the sales process will naturally fall into place. However, for a sales funnel

to be effective, every aspect must be optimized to maximize conversions and improve efficiency.

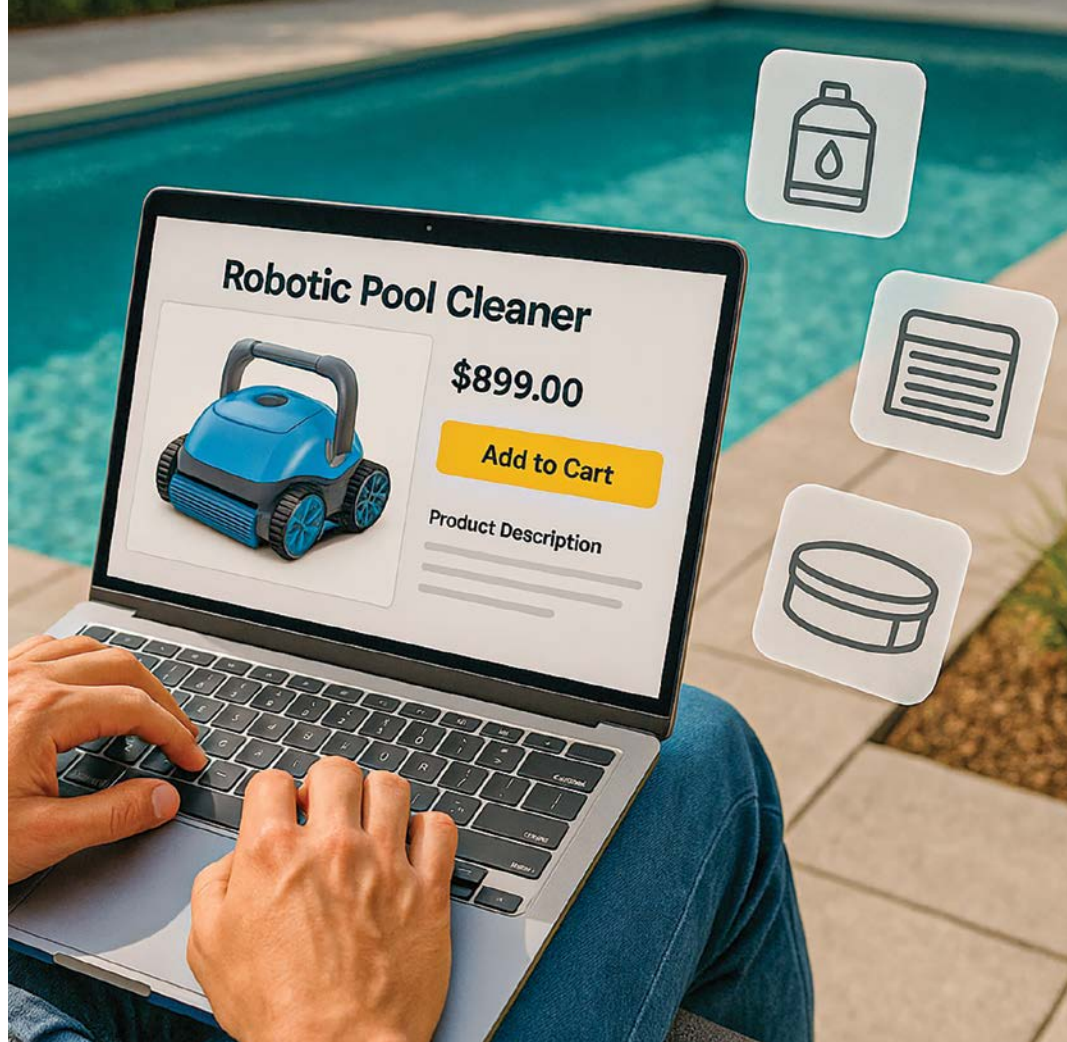
Key considerations for optimizing a sales funnel include ensuring the value proposition is clear and compelling. Visitors should immediately understand how a product or service addresses their needs or solves their problems. This means clearly communicating the benefits of energy-efficient pumps, automated sanitation systems, or luxury hot tubs for pool and spa retailers. Customers should instantly see how these products enhance their backyard experience, save money on energy, or improve water quality. Additional factors include streamlined landing pages, compelling calls to action, social proof through testimonials, responsive design, and exit-intent popups.

Poorly monetized leads

At first, the idea of promoting ancillary products or services to leads or existing customers may seem

Failing to optimize every stage of the sales funnel can waste resources and reduce conversions.

Monetizing leads with complementary product offers maximizes revenue and enhances customer experience.



unusual. However, even the largest companies, such as Amazon, Best Buy, and Walmart, leverage this strategy to monetize their traffic and increase revenue by offering complementary products or services from other businesses.

Consumers have multiple needs, and capitalizing on their captured attention presents a valuable opportunity. By strategically promoting related and synergistic offerings that align contextually with their interests, businesses can enhance customer experience while driving additional revenue. For pool and hot tub retailers, this could mean upselling water treatment products, automation systems, poolside furniture, or even maintenance service packages when a customer purchases a new spa or pool equipment.

A company can also send emails or texts to database leads to promote other services. It does not have to be someone they are speaking to directly. Many lead generation companies generate a lead for a specific product or service and promote other services immediately via multiple monetization strategies. This can also be accomplished using a dynamic lead form.

Depending on the answer to a question prompt, other differing questions will continue to appear to help filter and qualify the lead for other products or services. That lead will then be placed into a specific email or short message service (SMS) sequence promoting other products or services. For example, if a customer purchases a robotic pool cleaner online, a follow-up email could promote water care products, extended warranties, or exclusive seasonal discounts on pool heaters. This is a powerful automated way to monetize leads from a 360-degree point of view.

Ignoring target audience segmentation

Failing to identify and segment a target audience accurately can result in wasted resources and ineffective marketing efforts. Understanding audience demographics, preferences, and behaviours allows businesses to tailor marketing messages and strategies for greater resonance. Investing in thorough audience research and developing detailed buyer personas can help mitigate this risk and improve overall campaign effectiveness.

For instance, targeting first-time hot tub buyers with educational content on spa maintenance can build trust and drive sales. At the same time, pool builders may respond better to promotions on bulk chemical purchases or automation systems. Tailoring messaging ensures that each audience segment receives the most relevant content and offers.

Neglecting mobile optimization

With the growing reliance on mobile devices for online browsing and shopping, neglecting mobile optimization can be costly. A website and marketing materials that are not mobile-friendly risk driving away potential customers due to a poor user experience. Ensuring that a website is responsive and that emails, ads, and content are easily accessible and readable on mobile devices is essential for maintaining engagement and conversions.

For pool and spa businesses, this means ensuring mobile users can easily book service appointments, browse products, and make purchases without frustration. A slow-loading site or a checkout process that is not mobile-friendly could cause potential customers to abandon their purchase and seek out a competitor instead.

Not tracking and analyzing data

Failing to track and analyze digital marketing efforts can lead to wasted resources and missed opportunities for optimization. Without data-driven insights, businesses cannot determine which strategies are effective, where their audience originates, or how users engage with content. Implementing proper analytics tools, monitoring key performance indicators (KPIs), and regularly reviewing data are essential for making informed decisions and improving campaign performance.

For example, if website analytics reveal that most traffic comes from organic search but has a high bounce rate, a pool or spa retailer might need to refine their product pages or add more engaging content like how-to videos on pool maintenance or spa care. Data insights help refine strategies for better customer engagement.

Staffing stumbles

Companies often hire the wrong employee for digital marketing, which is a highly specialized sector. Regarding the trade, most people know just a few



marketing strategies. They might be good at Facebook ads, search engine optimization (SEO), Google, YouTube, or email marketing, but the company mistakenly thinks that is all they need to know to make a digital marketing endeavour work.

For pool and spa retailers, this mistake could mean hiring a generalist who knows social media but lacks experience in e-commerce optimization or local SEO—key aspects for driving foot traffic to a retail location or boosting online sales. Finding professionals with industry-specific marketing expertise ensures better results. Such thinking is a huge mistake, as all facets of the digital marketing-driven sales funnel

Top: Audience segmentation ensures each group receives relevant content, from hot tub buyers to pool builders.

Bottom: Neglecting mobile optimization risks losing sales when customers cannot easily browse or book services.



need to work together for any digital marketing campaign to work—and certainly to maximize possible outcomes. From driving traffic to a landing page to conversion optimization to sales videos, to email and SMS, to long-term marketing strategies and everything in between, everything must work in concert as a well-oiled machine. Beyond the systemic aspect, the content needs to be aptly strategized, written, and displayed. The problem is that finding one person who knows how to execute all aspects of an entire marketing funnel is hard.

Surprisingly, many marketing agencies also fall into this category of only concentrating on a handful of marketing strategies, convincing business owners that it is sufficient to achieve goals. Generating and maximizing digital marketing revenue demands a holistic and comprehensive approach from properly trained tacticians.

According to Smith, here are a few other factors that contribute to the prevalence of digital marketing mistakes:

- Rapidly changing landscape: Digital marketing is a dynamic field with ever-evolving platforms, algorithms, and trends. Keeping up with these changes can be challenging, leading to mistakes when strategies become outdated.
- Lack of expertise: Not all businesses have dedicated digital marketing experts on their teams. This can lead to mistakes in areas such as ad targeting, content creation, SEO, and social media management.
- Limited resources: Small businesses and startups often have limited marketing budgets and resources. As a result, they might make mistakes due to a lack of investment in proper tools, training, and research.
- Misunderstanding the target audience: If businesses fail to understand their target audience's preferences, behaviours, and needs, they can create ineffective campaigns that do not resonate with potential customers.
- Overlooking analytics: Neglecting data analytics and not monitoring key performance indicators can lead to wasted resources and missed opportunities for optimization.
- Rushing campaigns: Hasty execution without proper planning and testing can result in errors and subpar outcomes.
- Ignoring user experience: Poor website design, slow loading times, and lack of mobile optimization can drive away potential customers.

- **Inconsistent branding:** Inconsistent messaging and branding across different digital channels can confuse customers and weaken brand identity.
- **Misallocation of budget:** Allocating resources to ineffective channels or overspending on one channel while neglecting others can lead to inefficient spending.
- **Copying competitors:** Replicating competitors' strategies without factoring in a unique value proposition can result in uninspired and ineffective outcomes.

While many of these mistakes are prevalent, it is important to note that businesses can learn from their errors and continuously improve their digital marketing strategies. Regularly reviewing campaigns, staying updated with industry trends, investing in education and training and seeking professional advice and campaign oversight can help minimize the occurrence of these mistakes and enhance the overall effectiveness of digital marketing efforts.

As digital marketing evolves, pool and spa businesses must stay ahead by leveraging influencer

partnerships, enhancing local SEO strategies, or adopting emerging technologies like AI-driven customer engagement tools.

Ultimately, avoiding these mistakes can help digital marketers maximize the effectiveness of their campaigns and achieve better results for their business overall. As digital marketing is an ever-evolving field, staying up-to-date with the latest trends and best practices is mission-critical for sustained success. 🦋



Merilee Kern, MBA, is a brand strategist, analyst, and media personality covering industry innovators across B2B and B2C sectors. She is the founder and executive editor of *The Luxe List* and host of *Savvy Ventures* on FOX Business and Bloomberg TV, offering insights on business trends, brands, and market disruptors. Contact her on LinkedIn at www.linkedin.com/in/MerileeKern.

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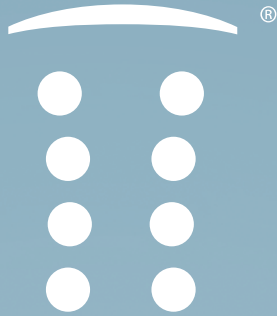


Designed and built by Riptide Inc. in King, Ont., this 260 m² (2,800 sf) backyard masterpiece

elevates family fun to resort-style living. At the centre of the space is a vinyl-lined steel wall pool, roughly 19.5 x 15.2 m (64 x 50 ft), featuring a splash pad, sunken bar, lazy river, and island lounge. The pool boasts amenities such as laminar jets, rainfall curtains, illuminated bubblers, and in-pool seating for games like volleyball or basketball. A bridge spans the lazy river, leading to a central island with a sunbed cabana and landscaping. A large waterslide descends into the deep end. At the same time, an 2.4 x 3 m (8 x 10 ft) hot tub nearby provides a tranquil spot for evening relaxation, with integrated lighting to extend the experience into the night. Riptide Inc., in collaboration with CityWide Landscaping and Grant Custom Stone, integrated smart controls, LED lighting, and high-performance filtration for smooth operation. This immersive aquatic playground is designed for all-day fun and peaceful evenings. 

—Jason Cramp

PHOTO BY CARMEN BROWN/COURTESY RIPTIDE INC.



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