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VOLUME 49 • NUMBER 7 • DECEMBER 2025

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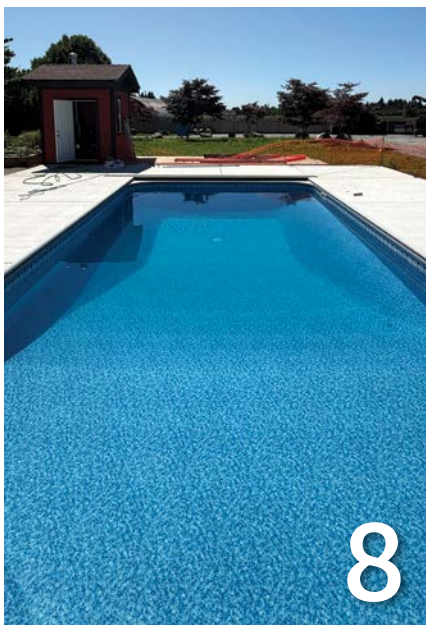
on the cover



What was once a buried backyard relic has been revived into a stunning modern retreat. This fully restored pool, featuring a sleek automatic cover that combines safety, efficiency, and style, showcases how craftsmanship and technology can bring a forgotten treasure back to life in beautiful form.

PHOTO COURTESY FRASER VALLEY POOLS

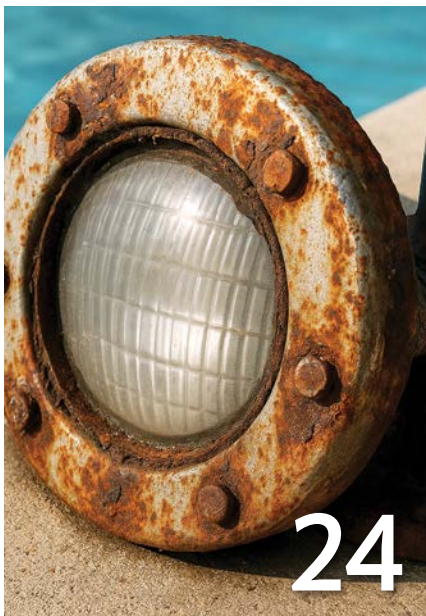
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Reinvention Through Insight

As another pool season comes to a close, many businesses are looking ahead—re-evaluating their strategies, investing in their teams, and building resilience for 2026. But this is also a time to take stock of how the rules are changing. Emerging technologies, rising customer expectations, and shifting margins are forcing the industry to adapt in real-time. Fortunately, this issue provides sharp insights into what's next and how professionals across the country are already pivoting.

On page 14, Dennis Gray delivers a compelling wake-up call in his article “The Great Pool Industry Heist.” In this piece, Gray highlights how mass merchants and online retailers are eroding the stable revenue streams that have long supported local pool and spa professionals. His analysis encourages the industry to rethink business models, rebuild customer relationships, and pursue bold new “game-changing” strategies to strengthen long-term profitability.

Technology is another driving force reshaping the business landscape. In exploring the digital future of pool retail (page 32), Rachael Pritz explains how companies are balancing physical stores with online platforms by installing systems that integrate point-of-sale (POS), inventory, and online service booking into a seamless customer experience. What was once optional is now becoming essential; this story provides a realistic view of digital transformation for companies of all sizes.

However, as equipment becomes smarter, some risks still remain hidden: the corrosion that is invisible to the eye. In this article (page 24), Terry Arko takes a deep dive into the long-term threats posed by galvanic and microbial corrosion in pool systems. The article reminds readers that regular inspection and proper water chemistry are essential, especially in saltwater systems.

In “Motivating Summer Staff” (page 40), Lisa Kennedy looks at how service leaders are building stronger teams—one technician at a time. Her advice on peer mentoring, onboarding, and incentive structures can help any business improve culture and retention during a time when skilled labour is hard to find.

Finally, we celebrate the winners of the 2025 Readers' Choice Awards (page 52), where professionals from across the industry cast their votes for this year's top products in pool construction, maintenance, spa accessories, and more. Congratulations to all who were recognized!

There is plenty to explore in this issue, and even more to reflect on. As the season turns, we hope this edition sparks new ideas and supports your next steps—whether you are evolving your business model, investing in technology, or simply looking for inspiration.

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Jason Cramp
EXECUTIVE EDITOR

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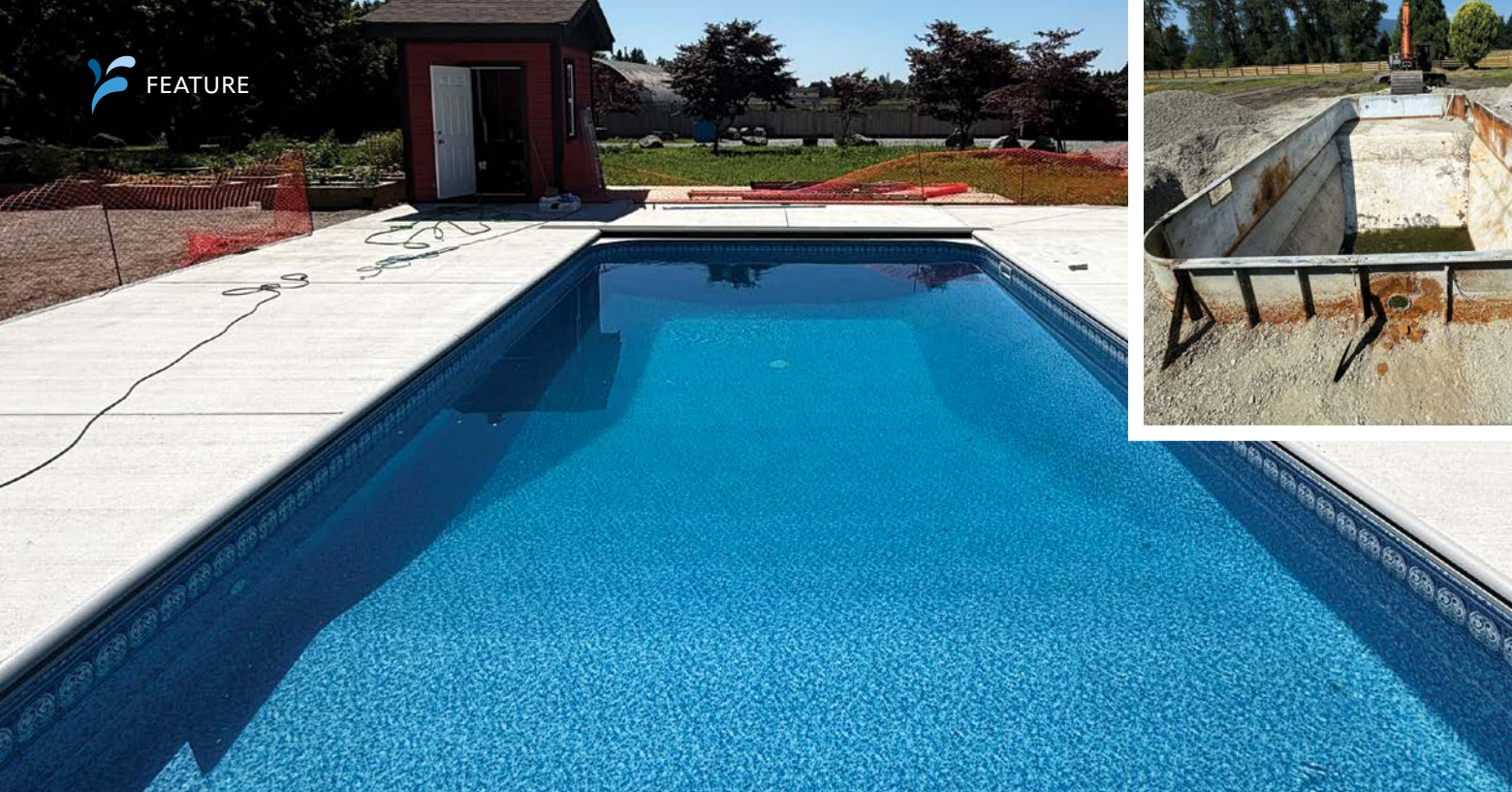


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The Pool Beneath the Lawn

Backyard Discovery Inspires Full Renovation

By Rick Larson

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PATROL AND FRASER
VALLEY POOLS

Top right: Excavation began to uncover the original steel-walled pool buried beneath layers of dirt and debris.

When Graham Price, owner of Fraser Valley

Pools in Langley, B.C., arrived at a recently purchased home for what seemed like a routine pool renovation consultation, he did not expect to learn about the project's unusual backstory. The homeowner had found a buried swimming pool in the backyard—completely filled with dirt and forgotten underground.

Price, who typically focuses on vinyl liner replacements, had been referred by a previous client and could not resist taking on the unusual challenge.

"I was called in to give an estimate of what it would take to get the pool operational again and, of course, to upgrade it with new stairs, an automatic pool cover, and all the modern conveniences," says Price. "I was skeptical at first, but once we sat down and discussed the project, they liked my ideas, and I was excited to uncover this hidden pool."

Initial evaluation

By the time Price arrived to provide an estimate, the homeowner had already begun uncovering what lay beneath the backyard.

"When we arrived initially, I could see that the pool was a steel wall, traditional shaped pool and after reviewing the situation, we decided the pool structure was fine, even though we did need to re-skin the steel walls as corrosion and other damage caused from unearthing the pool."

As the layers of dirt were cleared away, the scale of the project became clear. Price explained to the homeowner that they would need to build a new pump room, along with a complete overhaul of the plumbing, both around the pool and between the pool and pump room. Additionally, the pool walls and floor needed renovation along with modernizing



the pool with steps, installing a new liner, adding an automatic pool cover and new decking.

"This was truly a full renovation job," says Price.

Step by step renovation

The renovation required building a new pump room, replacing all the plumbing, and extensive sheet metal work to renovate the pool's original steel walls. Price ordered sheet metal, cut each piece to size, and repaired the existing structure where needed.

"The pool walls were in pretty rough condition, so it actually took quite a bit of effort to get the pool walls back into shape," says Price. "I had new sheet metal made and relined the interior."

The steel walls were repurposed, cleaned, and reinforced, turning the job into an actual rescue of the pool's original structure.

The pool itself measured 4.9 x 9.8 m (16 x 32 ft) and was approximately 2.4 m (8 ft) deep, and had "old-school" exterior plastic, white steps. After renovating the walls, Price suggested adding interior steps, which they placed in the shallow-end corner to improve accessibility, and modernized the pool's esthetic.

After repairing the pool walls, the floor also needed to be patched, repaired, and resurfaced.

"The floor was concrete, but when the homeowner used a backhoe to dig out the dirt, it left some fairly deep gouges," explains Price. "We resurfaced the

Left: As the structure emerged, corrosion and wear on the steel walls revealed the scope of restoration required.

Middle: The pool's steel walls were stripped and prepped for re-lining to restore strength and stability.

Right: With structural repairs complete, new plumbing connections and steps were added to modernize the pool's design.

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Above: New sheet metal was custom-cut and installed to reline and reinforce the original steel walls. Once the walls were strengthened, the floor was resurfaced with vermiculite to repair damage and create a smooth base.

Above right: The pool's structure was carefully repaired and levelled, restoring stability before resurfacing began. The automatic pool cover's housing was installed at this time by Pool Patrol.

Right: With the structural repairs complete, the pool area was graded and prepared for the new concrete deck that would frame the restored backyard centrepiece and accommodate the installation of the automatic pool cover system.



entire floor with vermiculite to repair the damage and level everything out, extending the work to where the new stairs were added.”

With the structure restored and the foundation levelled, the pool was finally ready for its finishing touches. What had started as a buried relic was now taking shape as a fully modernized backyard feature.

Once the pool walls, stairs, and floor were fully renovated, the next step was to measure for a new liner. The homeowner was eager to choose a design and selected a classic round medallion tile border paired with a blue floor pattern. The custom-fit vinyl

liner was installed, instantly transforming the pool with a fresh, modern look. Its deep blue tone caught the sunlight, making the water shimmer and bringing the long-hidden pool back to life.

The automatic pool cover

The real game-changer came with the addition of an automatic pool cover. The homeowners already understood the benefits—enhanced safety, reduced evaporation, and less time spent cleaning—and were eager to include one in the renovation. Price recommended a top-of-the-line system that could



be operated with the push of a button. The cover glides smoothly across the water, creating a secure barrier for their young children and pets while also helping to retain heat and keep debris out.

Since this was a complete renovation, adding an automatic cover made perfect sense, particularly as the surrounding deck was being completely re-poured.

"The homeowner definitely wanted an automatic pool cover, which is becoming almost standard for all pools in our area," says Price, who worked with a specialized subcontractor to complete the installation, ensuring the system was seamlessly integrated into the new design.

Allan Horwood, owner of Pool Patrol with locations in Vancouver and Kelowna, B.C., was pleased to collaborate with Fraser Valley Pools on the restoration of the hidden pool.

"It was great to be part of bringing this pool back to the surface and renovating it with an automatic pool cover," says Horwood. "In our area, homeowners are accustomed to seeing automatic covers on nearly every pool, so it made sense that this homeowner wanted one for their newly unearthed pool."

The convenience of being able to open and close the pool at the touch of a button continues to make automatic covers a sought-after feature, especially in Canada, where spring and fall weather is often unpredictable. With an automatic cover, homeowners can open their pools as soon as temperatures rise, extending their enjoyment earlier in the year.

In this part of Canada, the installation of automatic covers has grown rapidly in recent years, a trend Horwood attributes to both energy and water savings.

"Heated pools can lose up to 90 per cent of their heat through the top surface of the water," he says. "No matter how much insulation you add beneath the pool, most of the heat escapes through evaporation and cooler air temperatures. Installing an automatic cover can reduce that heat loss by about 70 per cent, a savings homeowners will see immediately on their heating bills."

After the new concrete deck was completed, Pool Patrol came in to install the automatic pool cover on the newly refurbished pool.

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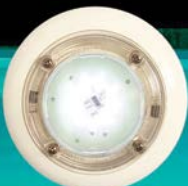
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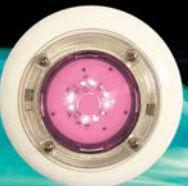
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Above: A new vinyl liner with a medallion tile border gave the restored pool a clean, contemporary appearance.

Middle: The automatic pool cover glides smoothly across the surface, retaining heat and reducing evaporation.

Right: The newly installed automatic cover integrates seamlessly into the deck, offering safety and energy savings.

In the case of this particular pool, installing the automatic pool cover came with an added challenge, the pool's corners were not square but featured a larger radius.

"Typically, pools with square or near-square corners are best suited for automatic covers," says Horwood. "But we used a system designed specifically for vinyl-liner pools, which allowed us to accommodate the larger radius corners without any issues."

Price says that co-ordination between teams was key to keeping the project on schedule.

"Pool Patrol was great with communication and timed their pre-pour installation of the auto cover box perfectly with the rest of our renovation," he says. "After their portion was complete, we handled the backfilling, compaction, concrete work, and liner installation. Once the pool was filled, Allan and his team returned to finish installing the automatic cover."

Horwood adds that his team provides pool professionals with a detailed checklist outlining each step of the process to ensure smooth co-ordination and clear expectations throughout the installation.

The homeowner chose a dark grey fabric for the automatic cover, giving the pool a sleek, contemporary appearance.

"The cover looks fantastic, and the homeowner is very pleased," he says.

With the automatic cover installed and final details complete, the transformation was nearly finished. What began as a buried relic had become a fully restored, modern backyard centrepiece, complete with a sleek new deck, custom liner, and innovative automatic pool cover technology designed for convenience and safety. The collaboration between Fraser Valley Pools and Pool Patrol ensured every

element came together seamlessly, from the structure and systems to the finishing touches.

The grand reveal: Backyard oasis complete

After working on the pool and backyard throughout the summer, the homeowner completed the landscaping and added a beautiful deck over the initial concrete base. What was once a buried pool beneath an overgrown lawn is now a stunning backyard oasis featuring every modern convenience. The new deck provides a perfect frame, while the automatic cover adds both safety and sophistication.

The project became more than a renovation; it was a revival. A forgotten feature of the property was brought back to life through craftsmanship, creativity, and collaboration. The success of this transformation stands as a testament to the expertise of Fraser Valley Pools and Pool Patrol. It is proof that with the right vision and skill, even a long-lost treasure can be brought back to the surface, more beautiful and functional than ever before.

The story of this rediscovered pool is a reminder of how modern innovation can enhance classic design, creating something truly special. Once a buried secret, this hidden gem will now be the centrepiece of countless happy memories for years to come. 🌿



Rick Larson is the western regional sales manager for Automatic Pool Covers Inc., of Westfield, Ind. He has more than 20 years of experience in the pool and spa industry and is based in Colorado. He can be reached at rlarson@apc-mfg.com.

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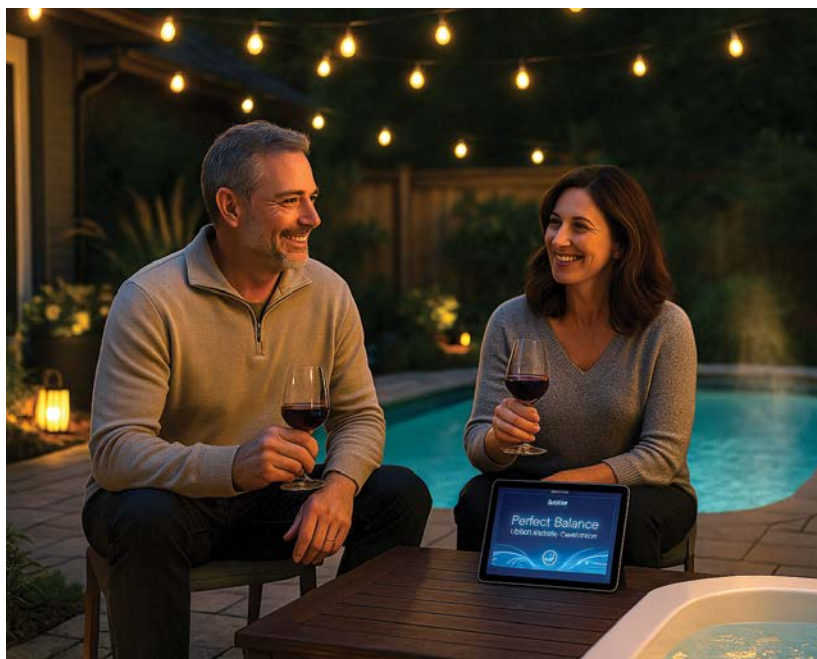


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Professionals Built the Market—Now It is Time to Take It Back

and the team prepares for the weekend rush. The team spent Thursday night training on the new hydroxyl fusion systems. The service trucks are loaded, and the water lab is calibrated. A typical dealer may invest tens of thousands of dollars each quarter in inventory, training, and marketing to create demand for backyard living.

stores, and large online discounters, or more recently, omnichannel retailers that dominate the market.

The pool and spa/hot tub retailer created the demand. Its staff helped solve their problems and built the relationships. Yet, the recurring revenue flows to others.

The great Canadian pool, swim spa, and hot tub market shift—where mass merchants and online giants capture the recurring revenue that sustains local businesses, while industry professionals continue to bear the full costs of keeping the industry alive.

To understand the current reality facing Canadian backyard leisure professionals, it is necessary to

Right: The industry built a Trojan horse by allowing its once-exclusive systems to become commodities.



them to attract consumers into their weekly shopping routines.

The consequences for independent pool and spa businesses are significant. Their success relies on three essential pillars: new water sales, service and repairs, and recurring revenue. That third pillar—the steady stream from chemicals, parts, and supplies—is not merely a profit source; it is the foundation of business stability. It can transform a decent year into a profitable one, sustain operations when new installations decline, and help fund local employment and community activities.

And increasingly, that revenue is being lost in plain sight.

The economic devastation extends further. When customers purchase from a local, independent Canadian business, 66 cents of every dollar remains in the community, generating jobs, supporting local sports teams, and funding charities. In contrast, when they buy from big-box stores, only 11 cents of the purchase price stays local. Online discounters contribute an even smaller amount—a mere eight

confront some uncomfortable facts. For every dollar of recurring revenue earned from customers developed and supported by local pool and spa retailers, mass merchants now capture two. These large retailers have transformed water care products—the foundation of the industry's business model—into loss leaders, deliberately underpricing

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cents.' This situation represents not only unfair competition but also the extraction of community economic resources on an industrial scale.

The industry has been here before (and it won)

Here is what the mega-merchants do not want the public to remember: the pool and spa industry has already beaten them once. Flash back to 1975, mass merchants flooded the market with extremely low-priced calcium hypochlorite after the industry pros had endorsed it and established the market. Customers were leaving the pro channel in large numbers, causing industry retailers to suffer as a result. This situation sounds familiar.

However, Canadian pool and spa professionals did not give up. They launched what the author calls the industry's first moonshot—a bold, audacious reinvention that seemed impossible until it ultimately was not.

Pro-only manufacturers and the “I have had enough” professional backyard leisure specialists formed an unprecedented partnership to decommo-ditize water care. They championed and promoted the replacement of calcium hypochlorite with a science-based, systems approach by introducing the three-step water care system—simple water chemistry, effectively programmed. This initiative was not just a product launch; it represented a declaration of war against commoditization. Manufacturers committed to exclusive professional distribution, while dealers

dedicated themselves to education and expertise. Together, they transformed water care from a race to the bottom into a professional service that only dealers could provide.

They pioneered computerized water testing, turning stores into laboratories of expertise. They developed personalized water prescriptions, ensuring that each customer interaction became a consultative experience rather than simply a transaction.

Most importantly, they shared a new narrative. Water care was no longer about chemicals; it focused on maximizing “problem-free, swimmable days.” They made themselves indispensable.

The results? By the year 2000, they had dramatically reversed the bleeding, reclaiming dominant market position from what had been a devastating collapse. The industry did not merely survive; it dominated.

The industry built a Trojan horse

The industry acknowledges its mistakes and understands the importance of taking responsibility for them.

Despite introducing a brilliant three-step system, it has remained unused for over 50 years. While the industry became complacent, the world changed. Amazon emerged, big-box stores got sophisticated, and consumers grew comfortable with purchasing everything online. As a result, the once-innovative system became a commodity that anyone could copy and replicate at a lower price.

Essentially, the industry built its own Trojan horse and invited the competition right through the gates.

Today, the market share pendulum has swung dramatically back toward mass merchants—a painful reversal that mirrors the crisis of the '70s. These opportunistic businesses are not only capturing chemical sales but also targeting the equipment market. They sell to professionals at “dealer pricing” while simultaneously marketing directly to customers at prices that match the professionals' costs. They are not partners; they are predators.

The hidden crisis: Where did all the women go?

There is another uncomfortable truth the industry must face. In the '80s, women were a significant force in the retail workforce—not just present, but thriving as champions of relationship-based selling,

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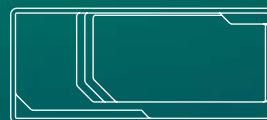
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customer education, and loyalty building. Walk into any successful pool store during that era, and one would find women at every level: managing water labs, leading sales teams, and building the recurring customer relationships that sustained these businesses through seasonal fluctuations.

Today, that presence has collapsed dramatically. Women have largely exited the industry. It is not a coincidence that this decline coincides with the collapse of the industry’s recurring revenue model.

Women did not leave because they were unable to perform the job. They exited because the industry failed to evolve, failed to create inclusive environments, and failed to provide them with seats at the decision table where they rightfully belonged. Their relational strengths and ability to build trust and community were not just advantageous traits; they served as competitive advantages. By neglecting these qualities, the industry disarmed itself.

The second moonshot: A strategic blueprint for recovery

The industry is no longer playing by the rules of mass merchants, and it is time for the second moonshot. This time, the industry possesses capabilities its predecessors could only dream of.

1. Deploy science that cannot be copied

This is not about incremental improvements; it is about transformation. Mineral fusion technology is

redefining water as a wellness resource. Hydroxyl radical systems—the most powerful natural oxidizers—deliver drinking-water quality without harsh chemicals. These are not products that mass merchants can easily stock on their shelves. They demand expertise, explanation, and education. They demand the guidance of knowledgeable industry professionals.

When customers experience water that feels silky, does not irritate the eyes or skin, and enhances their overall sense of backyard wellness, price becomes secondary. Competing with big-box retailers on cost alone becomes unnecessary, as customers will value the results that only a more advanced approach to water care can deliver.

2. Harness artificial intelligence (AI) for training

Millennials and Gen Z employees do not learn from binders; they learn from short, visual, and interactive content (*i.e.* TikTok and YouTube). Providing accessible, on-demand knowledge gives staff the tools they need to succeed—right in the palm of their hand. Imagine a new employee using a mobile device to instantly access expert guidance on water science, problem identification, troubleshooting protocols, product features, benefits, and step-by-step directions.

This same intelligence can extend to in-store “We Have Answers” kiosks, where both customers and staff can receive expert information within seconds. Team members no longer need to memorize which phosphate remover pairs with a specific sanitizer system—the AI assistant knows. Nor do they need to recall the exact process for treating pink slime versus white water mould; it is right there on their screen, with photos, videos, and guided instructions.

This is not a futuristic concept. It is now available exclusively to professional dealers. While big-box stores struggle with entry-level staff who may lack even basic knowledge of water chemistry, industry professionals have the opportunity to develop teams that operate like water care scientists, equipped with the expertise of the industry’s leading minds at their fingertips.

Training is evolving from annual events to always-on micro-learning. Every customer interaction becomes a teaching opportunity. Every challenge becomes solvable. Each team member—whether newly hired or highly experienced—can

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3. Rebuild with diversity as a strategy

Expanding gender diversity in the workforce is not about being politically correct; it is about performance and progress. Creating flexible scheduling that accommodates parents, establishing clear advancement paths, and placing women in decision-making roles where their perspectives influence strategy, not just execution.

Companies with diverse leadership teams can outperform homogeneous ones by as much as 35 per cent.² This is not charity; it is a competitive advantage.

4. Reframe the entire conversation

The industry must stop selling chemicals and start selling outcomes. Customers do not purchase chlorine for the product itself—they buy it to ensure their daughter's birthday pool party is perfect. They do not want a pH increaser; they want relief for their arthritis in the hot tub. They do not buy algaecide; they want their backyard to be the envy of the neighbourhood.

Mass merchants sell products. Industry professionals sell experiences—dreams, health, and family memories. That distinction must be made impossible to ignore.

The professional's advantage

The future belongs to dealers who deliver what can be called Pure WOW 2.0:

- Performance that astounds—water so perfect it meets drinking standards, delivered through technologies mass merchants cannot fathom.

- Style that resonates—positioning backyard experiences within the \$4.42 trillion global wellness economy, not the commodity chemical business.³
- Substance that endures—proven science, measurable results, and the expertise that turns first-time buyers into lifelong advocates.

In the '80s and '90s, dealers routinely followed up with every customer after a sale—much like a physician's office checking on a patient's recovery. They asked, "Did the algaecide work?" "Is the water crystal clear?" "How does the new mineral system feel?" These follow-up calls transformed a simple transaction into a relationship, a product into a solution, and a dealer into a trusted advisor.

The degree to which this discipline still exists serves as a measure of professional strength. If this practice has faded, it likely signals that other small but critical "Pure WOW" procedures have also disappeared—habits that once distinguished specialty retailers from commodity sellers.

The good news is that this can be reignited immediately. Start calling. Start caring. Start proving that substance is not just in the product—it is in what happens after the sale.

This is not about competing with mass merchants; it is about rendering them irrelevant.

The choice is yours: Victim or victor

Today, the industry stands at a crossroads much like it did in 1975. The situations feel overwhelming, the competition appears unbeatable, and the economics seem stacked against independent professionals.

Yet this generation holds advantages its predecessors never had: proof that moonshots work, with access to technologies once unimaginable, and tools that previous leaders could only dream of. Most importantly, the industry possesses the very playbook that once defeated mass merchants—and it can do so again.

Large retailers are counting on complacency. They are betting that professionals will remain on the defensive, cutting prices and watching margins evaporate. They are betting that businesses will quietly accept decline as inevitable.

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Independent dealers face a defining choice—remain victims of market disruption or rise as innovators and leaders.

champion. Convert one customer from commodity chemicals to premium science. Then build from there.

This is the industry's Apollo moment

In 1969, humanity looked to the moon and said, "We are going there." It seemed impossible. The technology was nascent, the risks were enormous, and the skeptics were loud. Yet the mission succeeded—because when faced with the impossible, humans find a way to make it possible.

The industry's moonshot is not about reaching space; it is about reclaiming its own space. It is about taking back the recurring revenue that rightfully belongs to the professionals who create and sustain it. It is about proving that Canadian independent dealers are not just survivors—they are innovators, competitors, and leaders.

Mass merchants may believe they have already won. They assume the future belongs to them. They are mistaken. Independent professionals are more than retailers—they are scientists, problem solvers, and guardians of summer memories and backyard dreams.

Now is the moment for the industry to remind both the marketplace and its professionals of what that truly means. The moonshot begins today. 🦋

Notes

¹ For more, read "Small Business, Big Impact: Small Retailers' Local Contributions" article on the Canadian Federation of Independent Business (CFIB) website. Visit cfib-fcei.ca/en/research-economic-analysis/small-retailers-local-contributions?

² See the report by McKinsey & Company titled "Diversity matters even more: The case for holistic impact," December 5, 2023. For more, visit mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/diversity-matters-even-more-the-case-for-holistic-impact

³ Refer to "Research Report-The Global Wellness Economy: Looking Beyond Covid," a report published by Global Wellness Summit. Read the report by visiting globalwellnesssummit.com/press/press-releases/research-report-the-global-wellness-economy-looking-beyond-covid



Dennis Gray, founder and chief troublemaker of Backyard Brands Inc., has more than 40 years of experience developing and marketing advanced water care technologies. A former BioLab group president, he now leads Backyard Brands' mission to create high-performing, sustainable water care solutions for professional dealers across North America.

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By Terry Arko

AI-GENERATED IMAGES
(CHATGPT/DALL·E)

The Hidden Corrosion Threat

How Small Chemistry Shifts Can Damage Big Investments

Everyone has a general understanding of corrosion, whether they are aware of it or not. Rust on metal surfaces is a type of corrosion. When iron-containing metals are exposed to oxygen and moisture, a chemical reaction occurs. The reaction is an oxidation process that forms iron oxide, more commonly known as rust. What may not be known is the extent to which rust is damaging to metal. The reddish, brown, flaky coating that forms will weaken

and degrade the metal over time. In swimming pools, all the necessary ingredients for metal and cementitious surface corrosion are present. The key factors of corrosion are:

- Oxygen
- Water
- Salts
- Acid
- Temperature



Most accepted chemistry values include balanced calcium hardness, pH, and total alkalinity (TA), as per best practice ranges. One standard to ensure corrosion prevention is to have a minimum calcium hardness value of 150 parts per million (ppm). A recommended target for calcium in plaster pools is 350 ppm or 250 ppm in vinyl or fiberglass surfaces. The minimum recommended pH is 7.2, with an ideal target of 7.5. TA should be maintained at a minimum of 60 ppm, with a target of 90 ppm for optimal water balance. If these targets are used as a baseline:

- Calcium—350 ppm
- pH—7.5
- TA—90 ppm

Regularly testing and balancing pH, calcium hardness, and alkalinity helps prevent corrosive water conditions identified by the Langelier Saturation Index (LSI).

Managing pool chemistry is crucial to prevent the water from becoming corrosive. The Langelier Saturation Index (LSI) is a widely used tool for determining the corrosivity of water.

A basic understanding of water chemistry can serve as a guide in determining the optimal values to prevent damaging corrosion of equipment or surfaces.

Along with the following:

- Cyanuric acid (CYA)—45 ppm
- Temperature—29 C (85 F)
- Total dissolved solids (TDS)—500

In this scenario, with these values, the water is considered balanced and non-corrosive, showing an

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Above: Technicians inspect pool equipment to detect early signs of internal corrosion, which can result from unbalanced chemistry or high dissolved solids.

Right: Corrosion inside pumps and fittings often begins when water chemistry shifts out of balance, leading to oxidation and metal degradation over time.



Other forms of hidden corrosion

- Velocity or erosion corrosion from oversized pumps or undersized plumbing. High velocity and turbulence strip away protective layers in metal piping and on heat exchangers.
- High cyanuric acid (CYA) levels can contribute to increased total dissolved solids (TDS), which can increase corrosion.
- High salinity makes the water more conductive and thus more corrosive. In pools equipped with salt chlorine generators (SCGs), install a zinc anode and adjust the Langelier Saturation Index (LSI) to achieve the proper target ranges for total alkalinity (TA), calcium hardness, and pH. The addition of borate in saltwater pools can also act as a protectant against aggressive water, as borate allows for a higher calcium level while keeping the pH from rising too high.
- Trichlor tablets in the skimmer. The pH of trichlor is 2.8 to 3.0, indicating an acidic form of chlorine. Trichlor tablets are erosion tablets that dissolve with contact in water. There are just a few gallons of water in a skimmer well. Trichlor tablets dissolved in these few gallons while the pump system is off create an acidic solution that, when the pump turns on, will be the first thing passing over the pump, filter, heater, and other equipment. 🏊

LSI of 0.01. However, when the temperature is lowered to 24°C (75°F), the LSI shifts to -0.06, indicating that the water has become slightly corrosive.

This is just one example of some of the hidden causes of corrosion in pools.

How high TDS and unbalanced targets lead to corrosion

Pure water has an extremely low conductivity of electrical flow. Since there are little to no dissolved solids, there is a greater resistance to electrical flow in pure water. The presence of dissolved solids will lower the resistance of water and increase conductivity (the potential for greater electrical flow). Therefore, high TDS will lead to a corrosive environment in the pool. Any increase in dissolved salts or impurities in the pool will accelerate the electrochemical corrosion reaction. High TDS can also decrease the efficacy of chlorine, requiring increased amounts of sanitizer to achieve the proper level. Increased chlorine use may also contribute to corrosion.

Using the same LSI example, if TDS increases from 500 to 1,000 ppm, the LSI shifts from a balanced 0.01 to a corrosive -0.04. As TDS levels rise, the potential for corrosion increases. Adjustments can be made to the LSI to help maintain a balanced water level; however, these adjustments must remain within acceptable target ranges. Incorrect parameter ranges may produce a balanced LSI reading, but still create other water quality issues.

As noted, higher TDS levels contribute to corrosion; however, changes in TA or pH can sometimes mask the issue, resulting in a balanced LSI despite elevated TDS. True water balance depends on evaluating all test values in conjunction with the LSI to ensure hidden corrosion risks are not overlooked.

In general, TDS in pools should be maintained as close as possible to the level of the original fill water. For example, if the fresh fill has a TDS of 500 ppm, the pool water should be maintained at a similar level to minimize the potential for corrosion.

Galvanic corrosion

In 1981, the Statue of Liberty was in a severe state of degradation. The outside copper skin of the statue was so corroded that some spots were as thin as a sheet of paper.

What caused this severe breakdown of Lady Liberty was a phenomenon known as galvanic corrosion. It can also pose a threat in swimming pools, especially those with salt chlorine generators (SCGs).

Galvanic corrosion can occur in standard swimming pools when TDS builds up to a very high level. As TDS builds up, the electrical conductivity of the water increases. The occurrence of a high mineral solution, coupled with an increase in electrical capacity, is known as electrolysis. Swimming pools with high TDS that are near any strong electrical potential, such as transformers or high-tension wires, can have metals within the pool that begin to corrode and turn black.

In pools using a saltwater chlorine generator, galvanic corrosion can be a significant threat. Salt pools incorporate a good level of salt in the water. Typically, 3,500 to 4,500 ppm of sodium chloride. This salinity contributes to a higher TDS.

Also, SCGs have titanium and ruthenium-coated cells. These are two noble metals commonly used for their strong resistance to corrosion and oxidation. In an SCG, sodium chloride is converted into chlorine through the process of electrolysis. An electrical charge is sent that splits the sodium chloride molecule into two ions. The sodium ion has a positive charge, and the chloride ion has a negative charge. There are two cells of noble metal within an SCG; one is the anode with a positive charge, and the other is the cathode with a negative charge.

Now that the sodium chloride has been split into ions of opposite charges, the positive sodium ion goes to the negatively charged cathode, and the negatively charged chloride ion goes to the positively charged anode.

Copper is another metal used for piping, heat exchangers, rails, and light rings. Copper is also a noble metal due to its corrosion-resistant properties. However, in the case of a salt generator with high TDS and electrolysis, copper, being the least noble of the metals, will act as a sacrificial anode. This means copper will corrode first.

Most pools have lights, and the light ring is typically made of brass or copper. If the system includes a heater, the heat exchanger is often made of copper or another type of metal. This creates a highly concentrated solution of sodium chloride in contact with three different metals, and when combined with an electrical current, the potential for corrosion increases significantly. This is the perfect storm for galvanic corrosion. In this case, copper will corrode, and fixtures will appear black and discoloured. In fact, the key determinant of galvanic corrosion is the discolouration of metal parts.

So, what can be done to prevent galvanic corrosion in a saltwater pool?

The use of a simple zinc anode inserted into the skimmer or installed into the plumbing. The zinc anode will protect the other metals from corrosion because zinc becomes the sacrificial anode rather than the copper, and zinc corrodes without causing any staining or detriment to the pool. Using a good metal sequestering product can help to remove any metal oxides that can lead to discoloured water and fixtures. Zinc may also be used in standard pools to prevent galvanic corrosion resulting from high TDS water near potential electrical sources, such as transformers and high-voltage lines.

Improper carbonate alkalinity based on CYA level

Another source of hidden corrosion in pool water is related to the TA and CYA levels. CYA is a buffer as part of TA, which primarily acts to prevent the pH from decreasing. When calculating LSI, it is the carbonate and bicarbonate alkalinity that is relevant. With levels of CYA exceeding



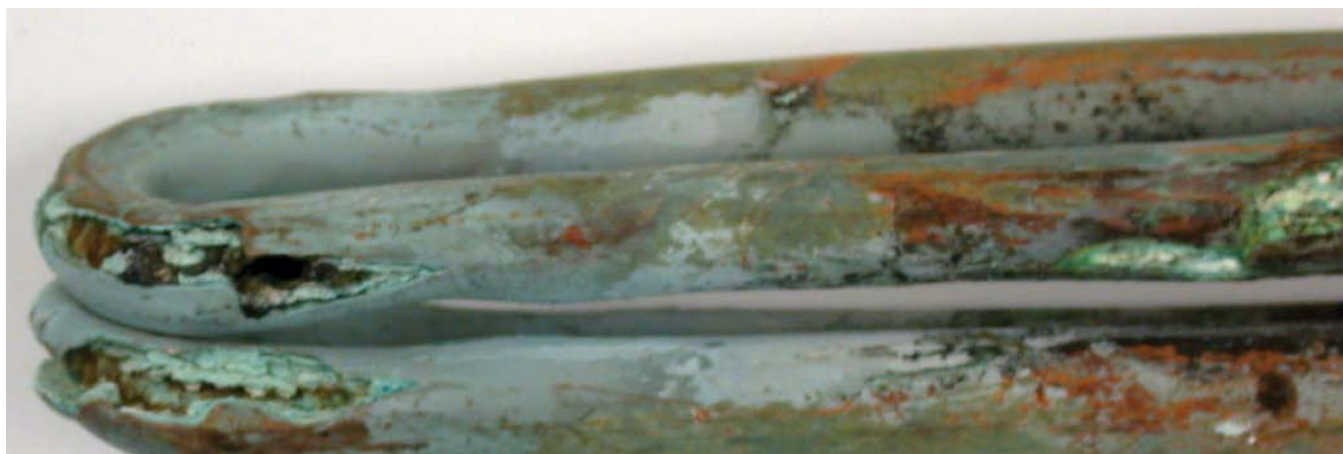
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Top: Heat exchangers are particularly vulnerable to galvanic corrosion when exposed to high total dissolved solids (TDS) or improper grounding.

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HASA POOL INC.

Bottom: Rust and surface pitting on ladders and fittings indicate prolonged exposure to corrosive water conditions caused by poor chemical balance.

AI-GENERATED IMAGE
(CHATGPT/DALL-E)

60 ppm, the measured alkalinity can consist of carbonate alkalinity and cyanurate alkalinity.

When calculating LSI, it is only the carbonate alkalinity that is a concern since CYA is not involved in the solubility of calcium carbonate. It is advised to determine the TA and the CYA levels. Then, the CYA level divided by three should be subtracted from the TA test result. This is an estimated method for ensuring that there is sufficient carbonate alkalinity to resist corrosion.

Example calculation: TA test 90 ppm
CYA test = 60 ppm divided by 3 = 20
90 – 20 ppm = 70 ppm

According to the LSI, the water is more corrosive than if 90 ppm were used to calculate. For instance, imagine if the TA test is at 100 ppm and the CYA level is 300 ppm.

CYA 300 divided by 3 = 100
100 – 100 = 0 carbonate alkalinity

In this case, there will be definite corrosion of metal in the system. This is one of the reasons why the acceptable recommendations for CYA are 30 to 50 ppm.

The role of water temperature and corrosion

Temperature can be a hidden source of corrosion, especially when there is a lack of understanding of how temperature affects water balance and the LSI. Cold water is more aggressive to cementitious surfaces and metallic equipment. There are two main reasons for this:

First, as water temperature decreases, it causes the pH to become unstable because it also causes the TA to drop. TA is the buffering capacity of the pH, so a low TA result means that the pH will be unstable and can potentially spike up and down. In normal operational pool temperatures, with proper TA, the majority of alkalinity should be in the bicarbonate form (buffer)—the ability to hold onto dissolved carbon increases in cold water. Carbon dioxide in cold water will yield higher levels of carbonic acid, which lowers both TA and pH. This will lead to increased corrosion as the pH level drops and the bicarbonate alkalinity buffer is depleted.

Secondly, calcium carbonate and calcium hydroxide are two types of calcium species that become more soluble in cold water. When calcium carbonate dissolves in water, the water becomes corrosive. The LSI is based on the saturation of calcium carbonate. Water will be more aggressive when calcium is in the soluble (dissolved) state. This is where hidden corrosion can sneak in. A test can be conducted, and the soluble or dissolved calcium will be registered on the test. The assumption is that

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Properly covered and winterized pools are less prone to temperature-related corrosion, which can develop when cold water destabilizes alkalinity and pH levels.

since the hardness level is good, everything is fine. This is where LSI can prove to be an especially useful tool. When water is cold, LSI needs to be interpreted in relation to the temperature first. Then, calcium may be raised accordingly if it is not possible to raise the temperature. While tests may show acceptable levels of calcium, it is essential to note that colder temperatures cause the calcium carbonate to dissolve as a solid into a more soluble form. This, in a sense, fools the water, causing it to react as if it is undersaturated.

To become more saturated, water will pull calcium from cementitious surfaces, such as plaster, grout, and metals. A lowering of water temperature by just 15 degrees lowers the LSI by 0.1. If there was a perfect LSI of 0.0 in a pool and the temperature went down 30 degrees, the perfect LSI ends up at a corrosive level of -0.3. In colder winter temperatures, the calcium level can be adjusted to fall within the target range of 450 to 500 ppm, meeting the water's demand for calcium saturation. In many cases, due to winter and early spring rains or snowmelt, the higher calcium levels will be diluted out before it is time to open the pool.

Improper grounding

Stray currents and electrolysis from improper grounding can also lead to galvanic corrosion, especially in pools equipped with SCGs. When stray electrical currents take an unintended path through pool water and connected metal parts, destructive corrosion of equipment can occur.

Improper grounding also poses a risk of electrocution to swimmers. Improper bonding can also cause corrosion of lights, handrails, and ladders. All metal parts should be bonded to the bonding grid. If there are broken or missing connections, then there

will be no path of equalization for electrical potential. This too can be a source of unintended corrosion and electrical shock in the pool.

Another source of electrical interference can be high-voltage power lines or a transformer located near the pool. These can introduce stray voltage into the pool grounding and bonding system, leading to corrosion and discoloration of metal parts.

If corrosion from any form of unintended electrolysis is suspected, a full professional inspection of all equipment should be conducted by a qualified electrician. If grounding and bonding are correct, a sacrificial zinc anode can be added to the skimmer or installed as an inline component.

The key to corrosion prevention

Proper use of the LSI and careful management of individual water chemistry parameters remain the most effective ways to prevent corrosion in operating pools. Maintaining a balanced water level throughout the year, especially during seasonal temperature fluctuations, helps protect equipment and surfaces from hidden damage. A proactive approach to monitoring and adjusting water chemistry during winter can significantly reduce corrosion risks, ensuring a smooth transition and fewer maintenance issues when pools reopen in the spring. 🌊



Terry Arko is a product training and content manager for HASA Pool Inc., a manufacturer and distributor of pool and spa water treatment products in Saugus, Calif. He has more than 40 years of experience in the pool and spa/hot tub industry, working in service, repair, retail sales, chemical manufacturing, technical service, commercial sales, and product development. He has written over 100 published articles on water chemistry and has been an instructor of water chemistry courses for more than 25 years. Arko serves as a voting member on the Recreational Water & Air Quality Committee (RWAQC) board. He is a Commercial Pool Operator (CPO) course instructor, a Pool Chemistry Certified Residential course teacher for the Pool Chemistry Training Institute (PCTI), and a *Pool & Spa Marketing* Editorial Advisory Committee member. Arko can be reached at terryarko@hasapool.com.

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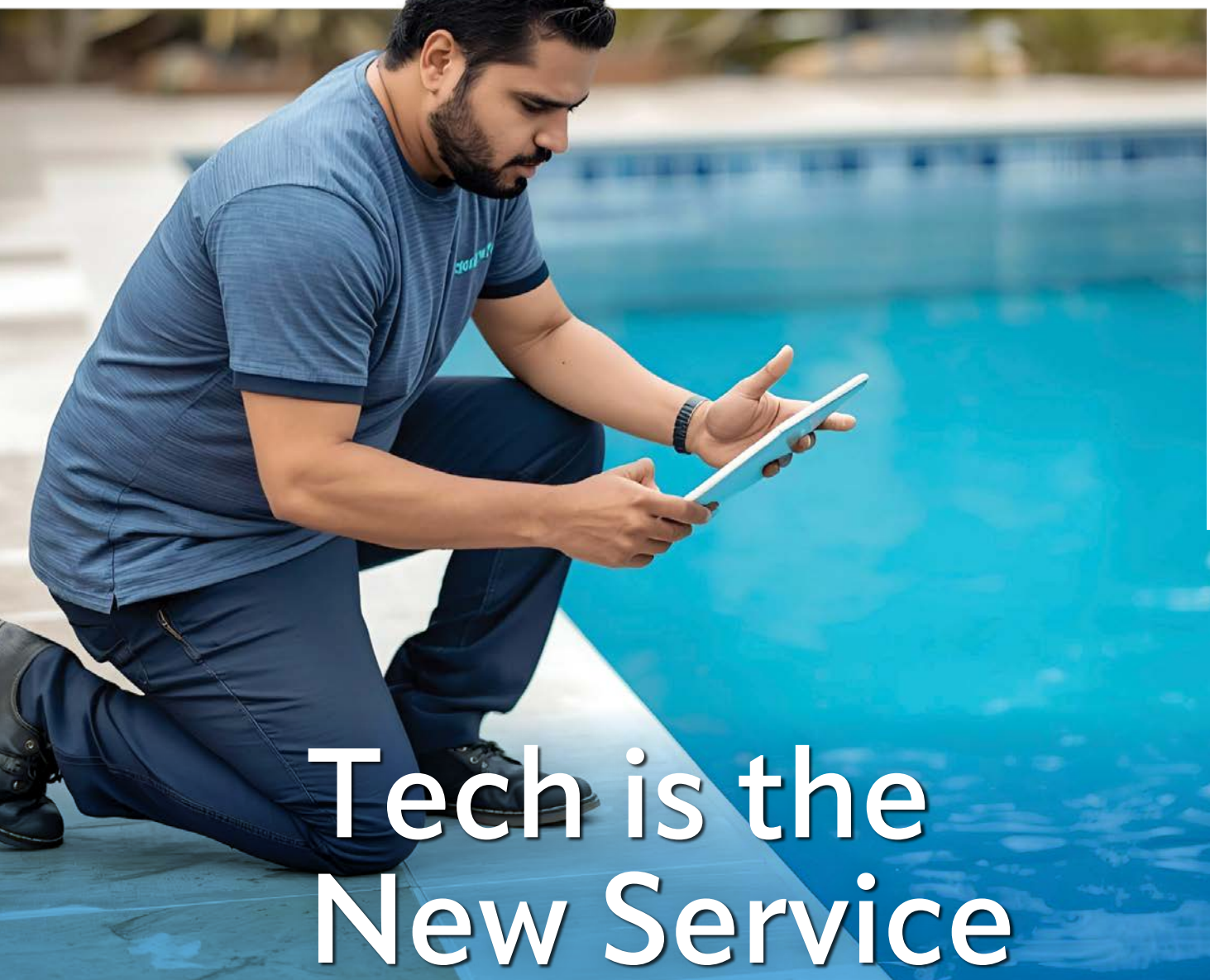
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Tech is the New Service

Digital Tools are Reshaping How Retailers Compete

By Rachael Pritz

AI-GENERATED IMAGES/
COURTESY RB RETAIL &
SERVICE SOLUTIONS

In an industry where trust, expertise, and personalized service are crucial, pool and spa retailers maintain a distinct advantage over big-box competitors. In today's digital-first environment, however, customers increasingly expect a seamless experience—whether browsing a website for chemicals, visiting a store for water testing, scheduling service, or checking inventory for immediate pickup. This is where today's modern retail technology can help ensure these businesses continue to maintain their competitive advantage.

How AI enhances pool and spa retail experiences

Artificial intelligence (AI) has the potential to enhance both online and in-store customer experiences through instant, personalized support. AI-powered chatbots can manage routine inquiries, such as store hours, water test results, or service scheduling, reducing wait times and allowing staff to focus on high-value, face-to-face interactions. In pool and spa retail, these tools could even guide customers through common troubleshooting



Middle: Mobile point-of-sale (POS) technology allows retailers to complete sales and answer questions anywhere in the store.

Left: Modern checkout tools streamline transactions and enhance customer experience through quick, mobile-based sales.

questions, such as cloudy water, and suggest suitable treatment options available in-store.

While broad adoption is still emerging, signs of AI-driven personalization are already visible.

Industry-wide, retailers are beginning to integrate automated water testing systems that instantly generate chemical recommendations linked to in-store inventory or point-of-sale data. Others are

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Cloud-connected software gives technicians real-time access to service records and equipment data on-site.

beginning to incorporate intelligent product suggestions within their e-commerce platforms to refine the checkout experience.

The rapid evolution of retail expectations and technology has made it essential for pool and spa retailers to meet customers wherever they are. Fortunately, today's digital tools empower these businesses to stay ahead of competitors and thrive. From mobile point-of-sale (POS) systems to real-time inventory access, customer data management, instant communication tools, and seamless payments, such technology enables pool and spa businesses to adapt while gaining efficiency, customer loyalty, and profitability.

AI-based analytics can help pool and spa retailers move beyond manual forecasting by analyzing multiple data sources, such as historical sales, service schedules, weather patterns, and even water testing trends, to more accurately predict product demand. For instance, when forecasts indicate a hot, dry summer, predictive systems could anticipate increased sales of stabilizers, algaecides, and replacement parts. These insights help businesses optimize inventory, preventing stockouts during

peak season while reducing excess inventory in slower months.

The rise of mobile point-of-sale and service

Mobile POS has become a game-changing tool for specialty retailers. It enables staff to process sales from anywhere within or outside the store—an advantage in a busy, seasonal industry. This technology eliminates checkout lines, providing customers with the fast and flexible service they expect. Staff can answer questions, recommend products, check inventory, complete sales, and email receipts without leaving the customer's side. With real-time access to customer data, employees can also make informed product suggestions on the spot. Mobile POS provides speed, information, and convenience to create the best possible in-store experience.

Personalizing promotions and outreach

Within the retail sector, AI-enhanced POS systems can take personalization even further by tailoring promotions and product suggestions based on purchase history and timing. Rather than sending generic promotions, retailers can segment customers intelligently, for example, reminding a spa owner to replace filter cartridges at the typical six-month interval. This level of personalization supports convenience and encourages repeat purchases through timely, relevant engagement.

Mobile service technology also supports technicians in the field while saving valuable time in the office. Service staff can easily view scheduled jobs, customer information, equipment profiles, notes, directions, and stored photos. With instant updates between the office and the field, technicians can record water test results, process payments on-site, track truck inventory, and complete physical counts directly from a phone or tablet. The system can even generate electronic service reports, complete with before-and-after photos and test results, for customers. Integrated software ensures that all service and customer information is updated and accessible at any time, from anywhere.

AI could also streamline water testing interpretation, transforming raw readings into actionable insights. While modern testing equipment already provides detailed data on chlorine, pH, alkalinity, and stabilizer levels, AI could instantly

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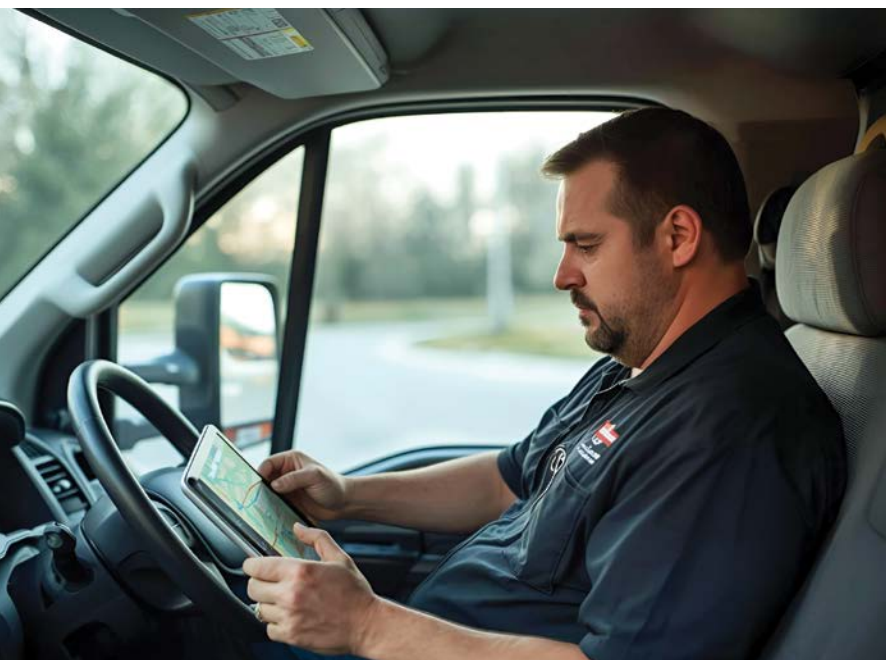
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Above: Global positioning system (GPS)-enabled mobile software helps technicians plan routes efficiently and access job details on the go.

Right: Centralized management software provides full visibility into sales, scheduling, and customer data from any location.

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analyze results, flag anomalies, and recommend corrective actions. For instance, if chlorine levels consistently drop faster than expected, predictive logic could suggest checking for phosphates or higher bather loads, helping technicians make faster, more accurate recommendations.

Maximizing access to everything, from anywhere

For business owners, having instant access to operational information at any time and from any location provides full visibility into daily activities. This same visibility is also essential for staff, enabling them to deliver superior service. Retail and service teams need data on the go to work efficiently and support customers effectively. With remote access, staff can review customer and service history, manage calls and inquiries in the field, and instantly retrieve warranty or purchase records, whether in-store or on-site. Accessing everything from anywhere makes it easier to create a better experience for both customers and employees.

AI-powered monitoring tools could help anticipate service needs before problems arise. By analyzing data from connected equipment or historical service logs, predictive algorithms could identify early signs of wear or inefficiency, for example, detecting a pump drawing higher amperage than normal and alerting staff to recommend maintenance before failure occurs. This proactive approach enhances customer satisfaction and reduces costly downtime.

Communication tools that meet modern expectations

Outdated communication methods are being rapidly replaced by digital tools that meet customer expectations for fast and mobile-friendly interaction. Integrated communication systems within business software help streamline and professionalize these exchanges by offering:

- Text messaging to provide real-time updates and reminders for customers and staff
- Digital contracts and waivers for efficient, paperless agreements
- Email receipts and contracts for professional, streamlined documentation

By adopting modern digital communication tools, businesses can track interactions across staff and channels in one centralized location, enhancing professionalism, improving efficiency, and fostering customer trust.

AI-driven communication tools are poised to elevate customer interaction across channels. Intelligent chatbots, accessible through websites or text messaging, can instantly respond to frequently asked questions such as, “Why is my pool cloudy?” or

“When should I schedule my next service?” These systems help customers find quick answers while reducing staff workload.

By integrating AI into customer communication, retailers can automate routine messaging, deliver timely updates, and even analyze tone and sentiment to identify satisfaction trends. This enhances responsiveness, consistency, and trust, key elements in building long-term relationships.

Seamless payments: Electronic funds transfer, cards on file, and more

Similar to other digital tools, seamless payment options have become a standard expectation for fast, secure, and repeat-friendly transactions in today's business environment. Customers now expect flexible digital payment methods, and specialty retailers and service providers are increasingly using them to simplify billing and accelerate cash flow. These tools can:

- Store electronic funds transfer (EFT) and credit card information securely

- Automate recurring billing for services
- Process payments in the field via mobile devices

By adopting modern payment solutions, businesses can reduce administrative time, minimize overdue balances, and eliminate the need to chase checks or phone calls—streamlining billing while lightening workloads for everyone.

New tech enables omnichannel marketing and why it matters

The business world is embracing the concept of omnichannel marketing, and it is especially relevant for pool and spa businesses. Omnichannel marketing is the practice of creating a unified customer experience across all touchpoints: store, website, email, social media, phone calls, and even text messages. Unlike multichannel marketing, which simply involves being present on multiple platforms, omnichannel marketing integrates these platforms so that customers enjoy a consistent, personalized experience at every step.



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Cloud-based retail platforms unify sales, service, and e-commerce operations for seamless customer experiences.

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Automating ad targeting for local markets

AI is also reshaping how omnichannel marketing strategies reach customers. Instead of relying on broad, generalized campaigns, AI can help optimize ad targeting through data-driven insights. Local geo-targeting ensures promotional messages reach homeowners within a service area who have shown interest in pools, spas, or outdoor living products. Seasonal timing allows campaigns to adjust automatically, for instance, increasing visibility during spring pool openings or fall spa cover promotions. Behaviour-based targeting further refines engagement, allowing follow-up offers to align with demonstrated customer interest. Together, these applications improve marketing efficiency and return on investment (ROI).

This matters because pool and spa customers are not impulse buyers; they research, compare, and often require follow-up support. Whether investing in a hot tub or maintaining pool chemistry, they expect both convenience and expertise, online and in person. As a result, omnichannel marketing is no longer optional. Customers demand a consistent experience across every interaction, making it a top priority moving into 2026.

Here is how omnichannel marketing helps pool and spa businesses:

- Build trust and repeat business through consistent, helpful communication
- Increase sales by making it easy to buy online, schedule service, or check inventory
- Capture more local leads through Google, social media, and email
- Stand out from large competitors that lack personalized service

The digital future of retail is already here. Businesses that adapt are better positioned to gain efficiency, strengthen customer loyalty, and improve profitability. Integrated digital tools now play a key role in unifying operations, streamlining service, and delivering consistent customer experiences. For pool and spa businesses, embracing these technologies is not simply about keeping pace with change; it is about ensuring long-term competitiveness in a rapidly evolving market.

AI represents the next stage in digital transformation for the pool and spa industry. What began as simple automation and e-commerce integration is evolving into predictive, adaptive, and hyper-personalized customer engagement. In the near future, AI will not only accelerate transactions and improve marketing precision but also anticipate needs, automate complex decisions such as service scheduling or warranty processing, and deliver tailored water-care or maintenance reminders at scale.

For independent retailers, this emerging technology offers the opportunity to compete effectively with large online and national competitors, while maintaining the personalized expertise, local trust, and human connection that define the industry's greatest strengths. 🌊



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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Motivating Summer Staff

By Lisa Kennedy

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How to Create a Fun and Productive Work Environment

For the pool and spa industry, spring, summer, and fall represent the make-or-break seasons. Customer demand surges as families and backyard entertainers turn to their pools and hot tubs to make the most of their leisure time at home. Whether operating a retail store, managing a service department, or running a busy pool facility, staff members are the face of the business, especially during these peak months.

The challenge? Many summer employees are seasonal hires, in some cases, younger and less experienced. Without strong leadership and an engaging work environment, turnover and burnout

can quickly disrupt operations during the busiest months of the year. By intentionally creating a strong culture that strikes a balance between productivity and fun, managers can boost morale, reduce stress, and ultimately deliver better service to customers.

Here are a few key ways to keep summer staff motivated, engaged, and performing at their best.

Set the foundation with purpose and expectations

A motivated team begins with clarity. Seasonal employees need to understand not only what to do, but why it matters. The season should start with a

structured orientation that goes beyond paperwork and basic introductory training. Leadership should share the company's mission, customer service philosophy, and the role each employee plays in creating a positive customer experience. Including all employees in key parts of the orientation process reinforces that expectations are company-wide, not just for new hires. This approach allows new team members to see best practices in action and learn directly from experienced colleagues.

For example, when a staff member understands that water testing is not just "another chore," but the key to keeping families safe and pools sparkling clean, the task becomes more meaningful. Tie everyday duties back to the customer experience, and staff will work with greater pride.

Create a positive workplace culture

The physical demands of summer work—long days, heat, and repetitive tasks—can wear down even the most enthusiastic team. Proactively cultivate positivity by:



- Providing comfort: Hydration stations, anti-fatigue mats or chairs, shaded break areas, and breathable uniforms demonstrate care for employee well-being.
- Encouraging positivity—Managers who offer quick, genuine recognition, such as a simple "Great job handling that customer!" set a positive tone for the entire team. Encouraging staff to support and recognize one another further helps foster a collaborative and upbeat work environment.

Clear communication and knowledgeable staff help create a positive customer experience during peak pool season.

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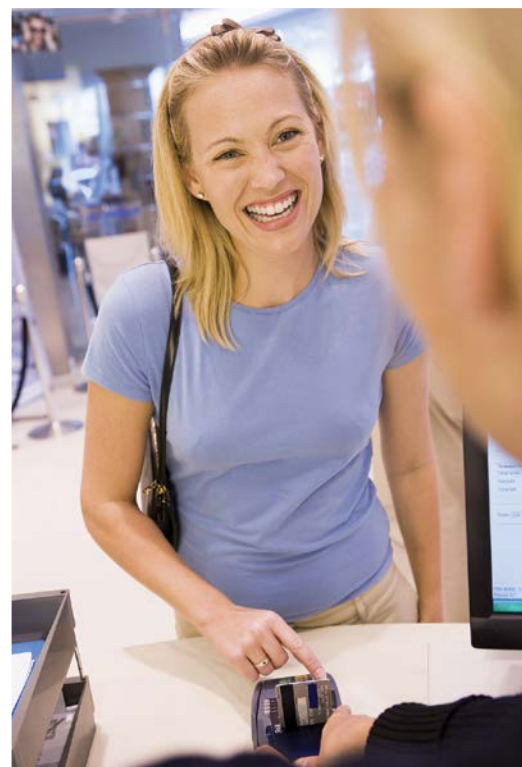


Above: Seasonal employees are often on the front lines of pool maintenance and customer service during the busiest months of the year.

PHOTO BY JASON CRAMP

Right: When employees understand the importance of their roles, they engage more deeply and deliver better customer interactions.

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rate, highest sales for water-care products, etc., so staff work toward and are rewarded for their collective achievements.

- **Celebrations**—Recognize milestones like “100th water test of the week” or “largest spa sale of the season” with group treats or fun prizes. Simply recognizing someone’s birthday with a shout-out or a small gift, such as a cake, goes a long way.

- **Maintaining energy**—Small gestures can make a big difference. Background music in the store, a brief morning huddle, or a rotating snack station can help maintain high morale and consistent energy throughout the day.

A supportive and fun environment helps employees push through tough days with greater resilience.

Encourage team cohesion

In many businesses, summer staff includes a mix of students and part-time workers. Building cohesion among such a diverse group is essential. Consider the following approaches:

- **Team-building activities**—After-hours social events such as mini-golf outings, axe-throwing, picnics, or even work-hour short icebreaker games during meetings help break down barriers.
- **Shared goals**—Set team challenges, such as fastest pool cleaning times, best customer satisfaction

When employees feel part of a team, they naturally look out for one another and provide better customer service.

Keep tasks engaging through training and rotation

Repetition can drain motivation quickly. To keep work fresh and engaging, rotate tasks whenever possible. For example, a staff member might spend one shift on cleaning, the next on water testing, and another on sales support. While this approach requires additional training, it keeps employees motivated, builds versatility, and develops well-rounded team members who bring greater value to the business.

Offer short but structured and informative training sessions to build confidence. If possible, maintain consistency throughout the season. Teach retail associates the basics of water chemistry, or show service assistants how to handle customer questions.

Not only does this improve operations by allowing customers to work with multiple employees if needed, but it also gives staff a sense of growth and investment in their future careers.

Recognize, reward, and retain

Recognition is one of the most powerful and underutilized motivators. A simple “thank you” after a busy Saturday rush or individual recognition during the morning’s meeting can mean as much as a gift card or cash bonus. Still, structured reward programs can help maintain high morale during extended periods of peak season. Structured rewards programs do more than boost morale during the peak season; they demonstrate that the organization values hard work and recognizes achievement. In a competitive seasonal industry, these programs can make a critical difference in attracting top talent and keeping employees motivated through the busiest months.

- “Employee of the Week” boards highlight achievements and set examples for others.
- Bonuses for going above and beyond for the employer show immediate appreciation.
- Team rewards (such as a pizza lunch after a big sales weekend) strengthen camaraderie.

Remember, recognition does not have to be expensive; it just needs to be consistent and genuine.

Lead by example

Leadership is contagious. When managers show up energized, organized, and willing to pitch in, employees are far more likely to follow suit. Great leaders lead by example. By stepping into the hard, messy work, they prove that leadership is about service, not status. A manager who grabs a skimmer during a rush or helps explain a complex spa system to a customer demonstrates respect for the team and commitment to the customer.

Good leaders also communicate openly and effectively, sharing weekly goals, listening to concerns, and celebrating and recognizing wins. Employees are motivated when they believe in their leaders and the organization’s direction. Transparent leadership fosters this belief by creating trust. By openly sharing successes as well as setbacks, leaders demonstrate authenticity and accountability. This openness inspires motivation, reinforces a sense of shared responsibility, and encourages employees to go beyond simply completing tasks and truly invest in outcomes.

Make work fun without sacrificing professionalism

Customers can always sense when staff genuinely enjoy their work. Infusing fun into the day not only boosts morale but also enhances the overall customer experience. Simple initiatives, such as themed dress-down days, lighthearted contests, or small seasonal

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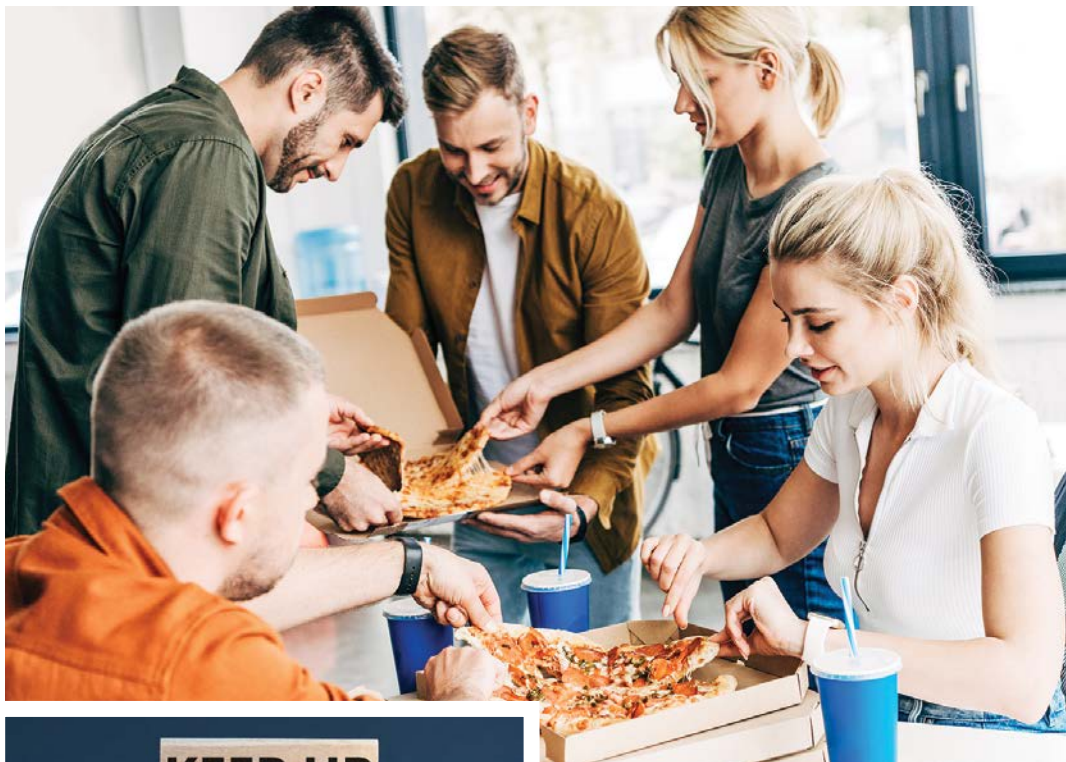
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Top: Recognizing team efforts with shared meals or small celebrations helps maintain energy and morale during demanding schedules.

PHOTO ©LIGHTFIELD STUDIOS INC./COURTESY BIGSTOCKPHOTO.COM

Right: Consistent recognition, whether verbal praise or formal rewards, keeps staff motivated and reinforces a positive culture.

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- Retaining seasonal employees saves both the time and expense associated with constant rehiring. It also increases the likelihood that experienced staff will return in future seasons, reducing the need for retraining and ongoing recruitment efforts.

In a seasonal, customer-driven industry such as pools and spas, the quality of the staff directly impacts both reputation and profitability.

celebrations, help boost energy levels and alleviate workplace stress.

Even the anticipation and buildup to these events add excitement and foster a sense of team spirit. To maximize impact, approach these activities with a marketing mindset by promoting them in advance, creating buzz both internally and externally. The key is to strike the right balance: maintaining professionalism while showcasing a cheerful, welcoming atmosphere ensures that customers benefit from both enthusiasm and excellent service.

The business impact of a motivated team

Motivating summer staff is not only about creating a positive workplace; it is also a strategic business decision. Engaged employees lead to:

- Stronger customer satisfaction through friendlier, more attentive service, which goes above and beyond what the customer is expecting.
- Improved efficiency as staff stay focused and are collaborative.

Final thoughts

Summer may only last a few months, but the impression a business leaves on its customers can last for years. By investing strategically in the motivation and engagement of seasonal staff, businesses are also investing in smoother operations, stronger sales, and lasting customer loyalty. Creating an environment that is both enjoyable and productive ensures that seasonal employees not only meet expectations but often exceed them. 🦋



Lisa Kennedy, vice-president of dealer channel sales at Core Covers, brings 20-plus years of pool and spa industry experience, specializing in leadership of sales and customer service, strategic business growth, and human resources development.

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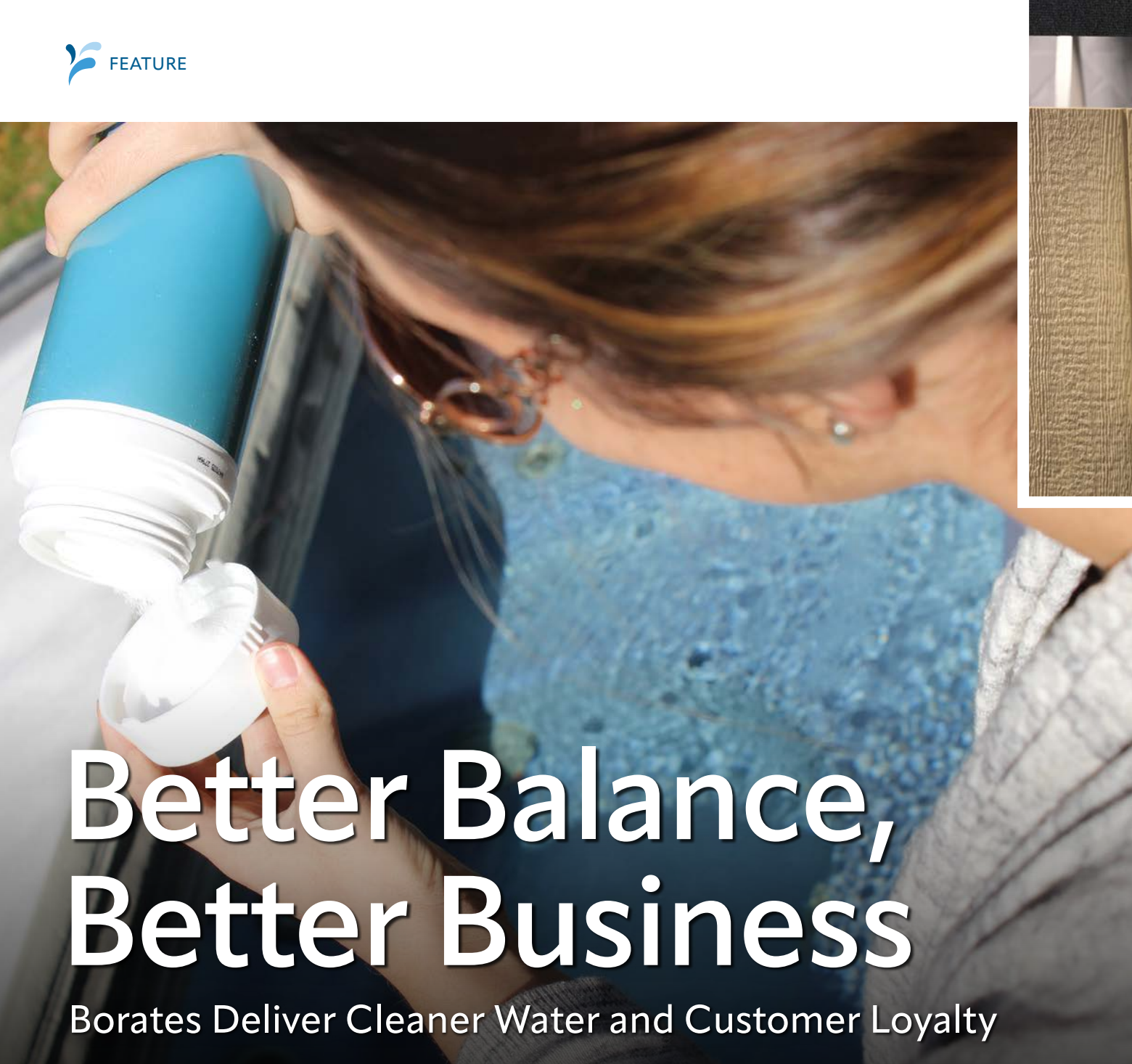
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Better Balance, Better Business

Borates Deliver Cleaner Water and Customer Loyalty

By John Bereza

PHOTO COURTESY
ARTHUR EDWARDS POOL
AND SPA CENTRE

Maintaining customer satisfaction with pools and hot tubs remains a constant goal for the pool and spa industry. Although newer automation systems might seem like the ideal solution, a rising number of first-time pool and spa owners have reshaped the market. Many new owners depend on professionals for reliable, easy-to-manage ways to keep water clean, clear, and properly sanitized. This is where borates have become a vital tool—helping to attain better water balance, enhanced clarity and comfort, and increased sanitizer efficiency, often at a lower cost.

Besides saving homeowners money, borates simplify water maintenance, reduce common frustrations, and foster long-term customer loyalty.

Borates play an important role in improving both water quality and user comfort. They help inhibit algae growth, decrease the frequency of chemical adjustments, and improve the overall appearance of the water. Their capability to stabilize pH levels and prevent common water balance issues makes them a valuable tool for both pool professionals and homeowners.



Left & middle: Salt chlorine generators benefit from the buffering power of borates, which help extend salt cell life and maintain optimal sanitizer performance.

PHOTO COURTESY ARTHUR EDWARDS POOL AND SPA CENTRE

Many in the industry see borates as a game-changing addition to modern pool care—not only for their effectiveness, but also for their long-term cost savings. By improving water balance and reducing the need for additional chemicals, borates make maintenance easier for service technicians and homeowners.

The borate buffer

One of the main reasons borates have become popular among pool service professionals is their ability to help manage corrosion. Borate products are offered in both powder and slurry forms and can be added directly to the pool. Their natural buffering capacity helps keep a more stable, neutral pH level

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Top: Routine borate maintenance supports long-term water balance, making it easier for pool owners to maintain sparkling, clear water throughout the season.

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Middle: Borate-based start-up products simplify water care for hot tubs, enhancing comfort while maintaining ideal pH stability.

Right: Service professionals rely on borate-enhanced products to maintain consistent water quality and protect spa surfaces from corrosion.

PHOTO COURTESY SOUTHERN POOLS AND SPAS

over time. As a result, chlorine stays more efficient and effective at sanitizing the water, enhancing overall water quality and system longevity.

Corrosion prevention

Although salt chlorine generators (SCGs) have become very popular, the electrolysis that takes place within these systems can sometimes cause plating on handrails, light niches, and other metal components. In these environments, borates offer an additional buffering system that helps prevent corrosion and shields pool surfaces and equipment.

Many pool professionals consider borates as an ideal complement to SCGs because they make long-term water maintenance easier. While these generators are designed to simplify sanitization, no professional wants the equipment itself to introduce additional maintenance burdens.

"It's worth the consumer's extra investment in a borate product," says Jonathan Schulhoff, retail manager at Arthur Edwards Pools in Long Island, N.Y. "Borates add an anti-corrosion effect that helps prevent rust on equipment, accessories, and fixtures around the pool. Our customers who use borates never come in with rusted ladders, and even their vinyl liners seem to last longer."

Calcium scale prevention

High calcium levels in pool water can cause scale buildup and cloudiness. Scale forms when calcium and carbonates crystallize on pool walls, waterlines,

surfaces, and equipment, a problem often worsened by high pH levels. Borates help prevent this by stabilizing pH and reducing the upward drift that leads to scaling.

The rising popularity of SCGs has increased the value of borates, as scale buildup can reduce the lifespan of the cell plates in these systems. Keeping borate levels around 50 parts per million (ppm) in pools with a SCG can greatly help in extending the life of salt cells.

"Salt conversion cells on chlorine generators in pools where borates are used can easily last a decade," says Schulhoff. "Even customers who carefully maintain balanced water typically get only five to six years out of an equivalent cell."

Salt cells last longer when borates are present because borates bi-chelate—or bond—with calcium in the water, helping keep the cell plates cleaner by reducing scale formation. When scale does form, it is typically much softer and easier to remove. As a result, less acid is needed for cleaning, which further reduces plate damage over time.

Due to the naturally high pH levels on the surface of the cathode plates in SCGs, scale formation is almost unavoidable, even when the pool water is otherwise well balanced. To prevent this, Schulhoff's service teams begin all new pools with a borate concentration of roughly 30 to 50 ppm, a level that generally remains effective for one to two years.

"After about a year and a half, we test the water and usually need to add a bit more borate to bring the level back into that range," he explains.



Algae prevention

Borate-based products also suppress algae growth by interfering with their reproduction abilities. Customers who regularly use borates in their pools rarely experience green water, even during the hottest summer months when most pools in the region develop algae after heavy rainfall.

Regular testing for borate levels has become a standard part of many water maintenance programs. In addition to helping maintain proper chemical

balance, borates keep the pores of pool plaster clean and resistant to algae growth. Without borates, algae can more easily take hold in these areas of the pool wall. Borates are especially important for pools with SCGs, where they help tackle specific challenges by stabilizing pH, reducing corrosion, and increasing chlorine effectiveness. However, their advantages go well beyond saltwater pools, making borates a useful addition for keeping all pools and spas clean, clear, and comfortable.

A store team showcases a specialized salt pool section, simplifying shopping for customers who use salt chlorine systems.

PHOTO COURTESY
DARTMOUTH POOLS & SPAS

Simple borate retail strategies

As pool and spa retailers look for new ways to boost sales and enhance customer loyalty, borates provide a simple and effective solution. With the rapid growth of SCGs over the past decade, there is an increasing need to offer pool and spa owners solutions that make long-term water care easier, and borates do exactly that.

Many forward-thinking retailers have already launched in-store programs that educate customers on the benefits of borates, creating new profit



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Top: In-store water testing programs that measure borate levels help retailers demonstrate expertise and build customer confidence and relations.

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Right: Retailers use borate-based maintenance programs to create long-term customer loyalty through education and product consistency.

PHOTO COURTESY HAVILAND POOL & SPA PRODUCTS



centres while fostering lasting relationships. By offering tailored “salt pool” maintenance programs and helping owners understand how borates support easier, more balanced water care, retailers are distinguishing themselves from big-box competitors and enhancing both customer loyalty and profitability.

Here are three proven strategies retailers are using to effectively promote and sell salt-support maintenance programs:

1. Create a “salt pool” section

Retailers should focus on the customer experience when they enter the store. The goal is to make shopping straightforward, not confusing. Setting up a dedicated “salt pool” section can help achieve this. As grocery stores have a specific “organic” section, a designated area for salt pool and spa owners allows customers with SCGs to find the products they need conveniently.

Without clear guidance, these customers might wander into the general chemical aisle and feel overwhelmed, especially during peak times when staff are busy helping other clients. An organized

section, with clear signage and short instructional videos, helps direct customers until a team member is available. This method improves efficiency, boosts confidence, and fosters a positive in-store experience.

2. Add “salt support” to water testing software

Including salt-specific products and parameters in water testing software can be very beneficial for busy retailers, especially during peak season.

“What has really helped us sell this product is testing for borates in our water testing lab,” says Schulhoff. “We use a digital spin test system and have added borates as one of the parameters measured in every water sample. We also offer a borate-based salt-support product for customers with salt pools.”

Schulhoff notes that customers often inquire about borates when their test results indicate low levels. Although his team may not always have time to thoroughly explain the chemistry, he finds that curious customers frequently research borates themselves and quickly see their advantages for maintaining water balance in salt pools.

“If we didn’t test for borates, some customers might think we were trying to sell them snake oil,” says Schulhoff. “Testing for borates has been a big win for us.”

3. Provide prescriptions

Retailers need to establish a consistent “go-to” salt-support program for their customers. This program should include a start-up product, such as one containing borates, to help stabilize pH levels, which tend to rise in pools sanitized with SCGs. Adding this product once a year at the start of the season forms the foundation of a simple, effective maintenance plan.

The program should also include a product to prevent scale buildup on the salt cell and a seasonal “boost” treatment for times of high bather load during summer. To ensure optimal performance, the salt-support program should feature a chlorine-free shock, a phosphate-free scale preventer, and an algaecide that remains stable in saltwater environments.

Preparing for next season

Borates are a vital tool for maintaining balanced pool and spa water, improving clarity and comfort, and increasing sanitizer efficiency, often resulting in measurable cost savings. The “borate pH buffer

advantage” offers immediate chemical savings for pool and spa owners, while also reducing maintenance issues, preventing corrosion and scale damage, and encouraging long-term customer loyalty.

By inhibiting algae growth, reducing the need for chemical adjustments, and improving water appearance, borates help produce cleaner, more comfortable water. Their capacity to stabilize pH and prevent common water balancing issues makes them an important resource for both professionals and homeowners. Additionally, by lowering the requirement for additional chemicals, borates simplify maintenance for service technicians and enhance the overall ownership experience.

Now is the perfect time for retailers to prepare for the next season by offering clients a straightforward, borate-based salt-system maintenance program. A well-designed plan not only guarantees customer satisfaction but also boosts loyalty and creates a reliable, recurring revenue stream. Salt-pool-support products give specialty retailers an effective way to strengthen relationships with customers,

stand out from big-box competitors, and avoid competing solely on price. For retailers who have not yet adopted one, implementing a borate-based salt-support program for the 2026 season is a smart strategy to enhance both profitability and long-term customer loyalty. 🌊



John Bereza is the Great Lakes regional sales manager for Haviland Pool and Spa Products, a manufacturer of water treatment products in Grand Rapids, Mich. He works to

promote the company's pool and spa/hot tub product lines to its network of national distributors and dealers. Bereza has worked at Haviland since 2003 in various roles, including decorative coatings technical support and marketing, and, since 2020, has been in the current sales role with a primary focus on technical training. He can be reached via email at johnb@havilandusa.com.



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The 2025 Readers' Choice Award winners are Anderson Manufacturing Company, Aquiform, Fluidra, H.S.T. Synthetics Ltd., Pentair, PoolWerx Inc., Select Pool Products, and Water Tech Corp.

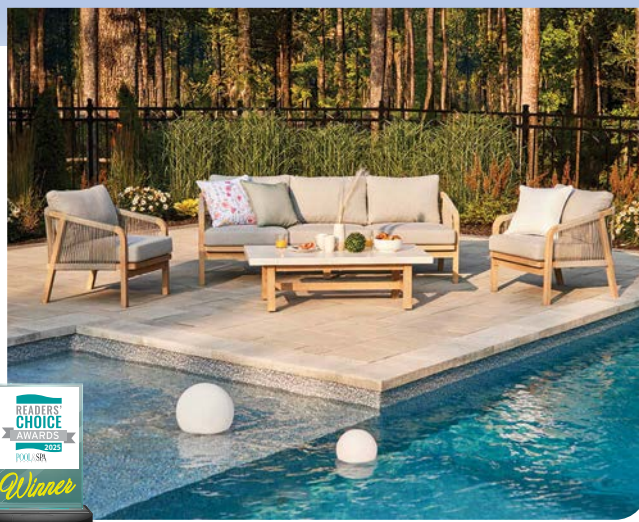
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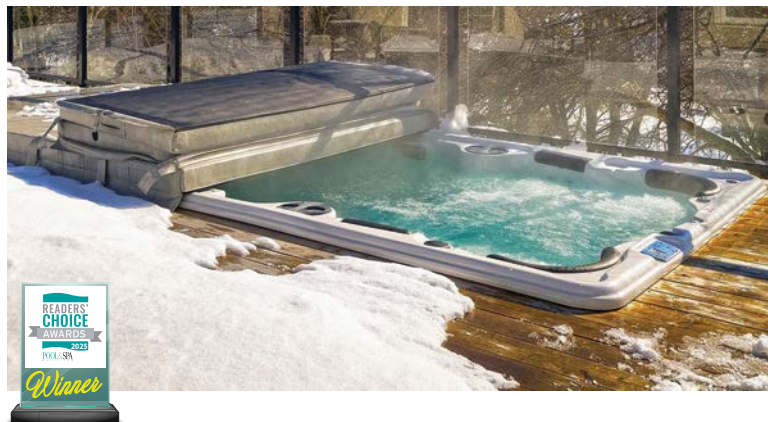
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www.pentair.com/en-us/landing-pages/intelliflo3-vsfpool-pump-hub



Winter Duck Plug

Anderson Manufacturing Company's Winter Duck Plug is a key component of its no-drain winterizing system, allowing pool professionals to prepare plumbing lines without lowering the water level. Its patented duckbill valve allows air and water to be blown from return lines while preventing backflow, eliminating the need for line "burping." Made from heavy-duty, chemical-resistant rubber, the plug guarantees efficient and reliable winterization and can be used in conjunction with the company's Big Blue Blower for optimal results.

www.leaktools.com/winter-duck-plugs-25-qty.html

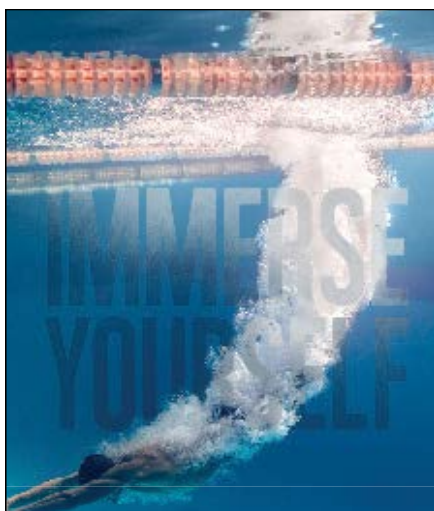


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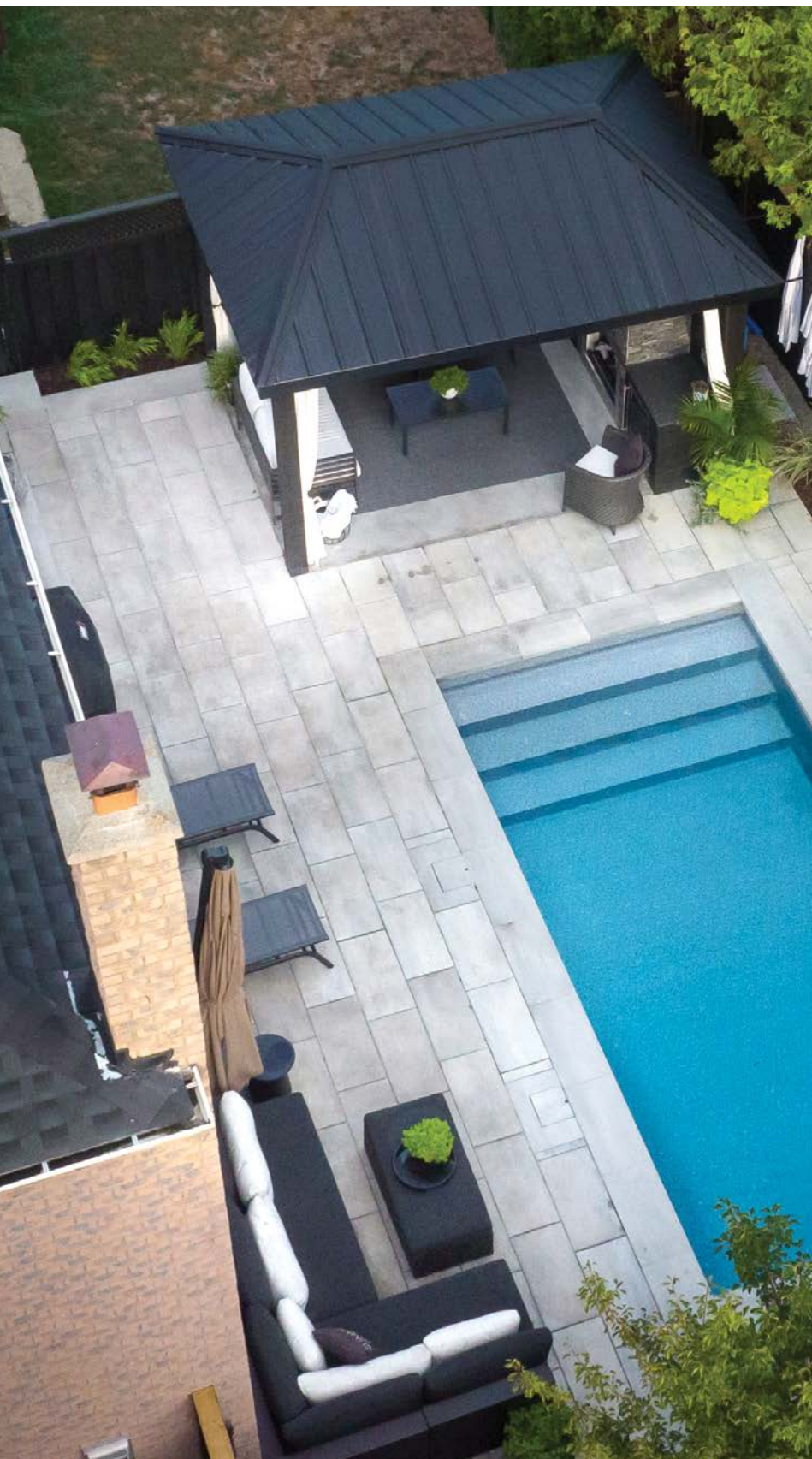
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—Jason Cramp

PHOTO COURTESY POOL CRAFT

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