



Know your market

WQA consumer study sheds light on strategies for water filtration dealers.

By Dale Filhaber, Dataman Group Direct

Understanding the mind and requirements of potential customers can help a dealer pitch a sale to them. With a new set of survey results, you do not have to guess what they think about water filtration before you approach them.

The Water Quality Association (WQA) recently published the results of its “2015 Study of Consumers’ Opinions & Perceptions Regarding Water Quality.” This 172-page study, unveiled at the WQA Aquatech conference in March 2015, covers topics including consumer concerns about contaminants, motivations to buy a water filtration unit and confidence about brands in the marketplace.

Studies like this act as marketing intelligence. The more we learn about what prospective customers want, the better we can market to them and generate sales.

For those who have been in the industry for a while, some of the results are intuitive, but others might be surprising. For instance, only 16 percent of American homeowners have a water filtration unit in their homes, so likely thousands of prospects are in an area waiting to hear from a dealer.

To frame this, 56 percent of consumers are “concerned/extremely concerned” about the quality of their water supply, particularly with contaminants in tap water and bad taste, so a dealer’s communication should address these concerns.

With this in mind, this article examines the findings of two categories: target markets and their motivators. Regardless of the method used, just pulling the right mail,

phone or email list is not enough. Water treatment professionals need to direct their creative materials, copy and offers to a group.

New homeowners

The WQA survey has validated the effectiveness of the industry’s longstanding use of new homeowner lists to generate sales. Of the people who purchase a water softener, 60 percent do so within one year after buying or leasing a home.

Because the new homeowner list is typically small, dealers can reach out to the people on it multiple times. While many dealers want to be the first one in the home, according to the WQA survey, the key here is the phrase “within the first year.” Often they find water does not taste the same as it did in their old home, so a key motivator to keep in mind is taste.

In addition to new homeownership, other life stage changes, such as new births and home refinances, factor into water treatment product purchases. According to the survey, 80 percent of Americans believe tap water contains chlorine, and 70 percent believe water contains lead. Parents who can afford a water filtration system might find themselves more ready to take action to eliminate contaminants. With new births, the key motivator is health.

Outside of targeting consumers with life changes, water dealers should look broader to get a solid flow of incoming leads. After all, according to the survey, 28 percent of those without a water filtration device are likely to install one in the near future.

Healthy lifestyle

We know that concerns about contaminants, healthy lifestyle and quality

of life are the most important factors influencing the purchase of a water filtration product. In fact, the survey found that 63 percent of consumers agree that water softeners protect drinking water in the home and cite these motivators:

- Eliminating contaminants
- Improved appearance/taste of tap water
- Healthy lifestyle/quality of life
- Eliminating soap scum/rust stains

Those looking to improve their healthy lifestyles can become a pretty broad market. Consider marketing to a combined list of those who suffer from an ailment, seniors and affluent homeowners.

Luxury versus necessity

A water filtration system is considered a luxury by 54 percent of the respondents and a necessity for 44 percent. Perhaps surprising, deciding not to purchase a

water system was rarely caused by the inability to obtain financing.

Eco-friendliness is only a small factor affecting water filtration decisions. The survey found that only 11 percent of consumers have stopped buying water/drinks in plastic containers. However, if green is the mantra, consider marketing to environmentally conscious homeowners, making sure messaging reflects “green-ness,” eco-consciousness and stewarding the environment — and be sure to use recycled paper for marketing materials.

Boil water alerts

The findings indicate that boil water alerts tend to trigger the purchase of water filtration systems. Almost half the respondents (48 percent) reported purchasing a water filtration device after receiving a “boil water” or “unsafe water for use” alert. More than half of those

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surveyed (56 to 66 percent) expressed a willingness to pay more for a home water treatment system that is able to remove biological waste, arsenic, lead and other contaminants.

Boil water alerts are inevitable, so water dealers always need to be prepared. Preprint postcards to mail into affected areas or have an email ad ready to broadcast into a given market on the same day that the boil water alert is issued. Synchographics, the use of market timing, can really impact response.

Other highlights

In addition to the highlights mentioned, water dealers should be aware of these findings when putting together a market program or working on branding:

- Last year, only 19 percent of consumers purchased their water filters through a local water treatment dealer.

- Thirty-nine percent purchased a softener at a home improvement store.
- Sixty-nine percent installed water filtration products themselves.
- The majority of the consumers surveyed believe the refrigerator filter is adequate to purify water or replace other water filtration devices.

Knowing these findings, dealers should stress their expertise, product knowledge and customer service. They should also consider adding a Q&A section and retail component to their company websites since people tend to purchase filters and other supplies online.

Whatever water filtration dealers do, the findings from the WQA study should be incorporated into their selling strategy. Whether they target life stages, add green language or watch for boil water alerts, the most important way to market is to act. **WT**

To download a snapshot of the 2015 Study of Consumers' Opinions & Perceptions Regarding Water Quality, visit wqa.org.

https://www.wqa.org/Portals/0/Resources/2015_WQA_Consumer_Opinion_Study_Basic_Results_final.pdf

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