



Tony Sharpe, MD of Hayward Pool Products Australia at their Dandenong facility

Appointments

Hayward's bigger footprint to drive growth

Hayward Pool Products Australia has expanded into Perth, moved to larger premises in Brisbane and is looking to also expand facilities in Melbourne over the next year to 18 months, says MD Tony Sharpe.

This is partly to accommodate an increase in sales, while enabling a high inventory strategy.

"It's going really well," says Sharpe. "It's been eighteen months since Hayward's investment in our business in Australia, and we've seen over that period substantial growth in total unit sales in just about every product category."

Sharpe puts the growth down to being more competitive and also to increasing their footprint.

"We're in the process of opening up in WA. We're moving into new premises and we've appointed a state manager, Shane Wheeler. He's worked for both AstralPool and Pentair, and will be setting up in Perth," he says.

They are also setting up bigger premises in Brisbane to accommodate larger stockholdings.

"Since Hayward's investment, we've more than doubled our stockholding, so that provides us the capacity to service the growth we anticipate. One of our strategies is to never run out of stock. Hayward as a company takes a view that running out of stock is detrimental to both our business and that of our customers, so it's very important that we carry more than we're likely to need for the foreseeable future. We're holding a significantly larger amount of inventory compared to previously. As a ratio to sales

it's quite high with the intention that we don't want to let anybody down," he says.

"In the next 12-18 months we'll move our Victorian premises, but we've got enough to take on at the moment with Perth and Brisbane. We've taken on external storage premises in Melbourne for the moment, and that's also doubled our space in Victoria for the time being."

Hayward has also appointed Canadian Stephen Reed as national accounts and marketing manager.

"He's been with Hayward for a large number of years and has worked through various sales roles in Canada where he managed very large accounts as well as buying-groups and franchises, with quite a large sales team. It was an opportunity for us to bring in some Hayward blood that helps us improve our links with Hayward and get a better understanding of the global processes," says Sharpe.

As well as marketing, Reed will be managing the major national accounts.

Sharpe plans that next year will see them continue to improve their position in the marketplace through the investment in WA, improving their footprint in Queensland and also by the introduction of new products.

"We've introduced robotic pool cleaners in the past few months and also a range of controls, and quite a number of other products to come out over the next 12 months.

"General signs are if we have a warm summer then retail will do well, and certainly it's started off well. It's really a matter of crossing our fingers and hoping the economy and other factors will assist construction around the country as well."

Safety

Portable pool warning labels

In 2011, the Australian Competition and Consumer Commission (ACCC) commenced work on a proposed safety standard for mandatory labelling of portable swimming pools.

A number of stakeholders including SPASA NSW made submissions on the draft labelling requirements and to the extent possible, those comments have been taken into account while preparing the draft safety standard.

It is proposed that for portable swimming pools capable of being filled to 300mm deep or more, the pool and packaging must carry a permanent, highly visible message including the following statement:

WARNING! Children have drowned in portable swimming pools. Ensure active adult supervision at all times. Do not leave children unsupervised in or around the pool—keep them within arms' reach. Pool fencing laws may apply to this pool. Consult your local government authority for fencing requirements.

If the pool's capability is less than 300mm, the statement: "Empty and store safely after use" is to be used instead of the statements about fencing.

The key changes from the first draft labelling requirements, now incorporated into the draft safety standard are:

- The scope of regulation has been re-defined.
- The proposed warning to be applied to the pool and its packaging is now prescribed to improve certainty so that suppliers know exactly what must be provided on the pool in order to comply.
- The form of warning has been amended to accommodate suggestions by stakeholders (such as to include reference to active adult supervision and include that children should be kept within arms' reach)
- A safety sign is to be included on the pool next to the warning to reinforce the warning. The safety sign is not required on the packaging. The inclusion of the safety sign was recommended by several stakeholders.
- The font size of the warning has been increased and there is additional clarity around the term 'legible'.
- It is now proposed that the safety standard take effect from 30 March 2014 to provide suppliers the opportunity to sell existing stock.



Go online at splashmagazine.com.au to see a copy of the draft standard and the different forms of the warning.

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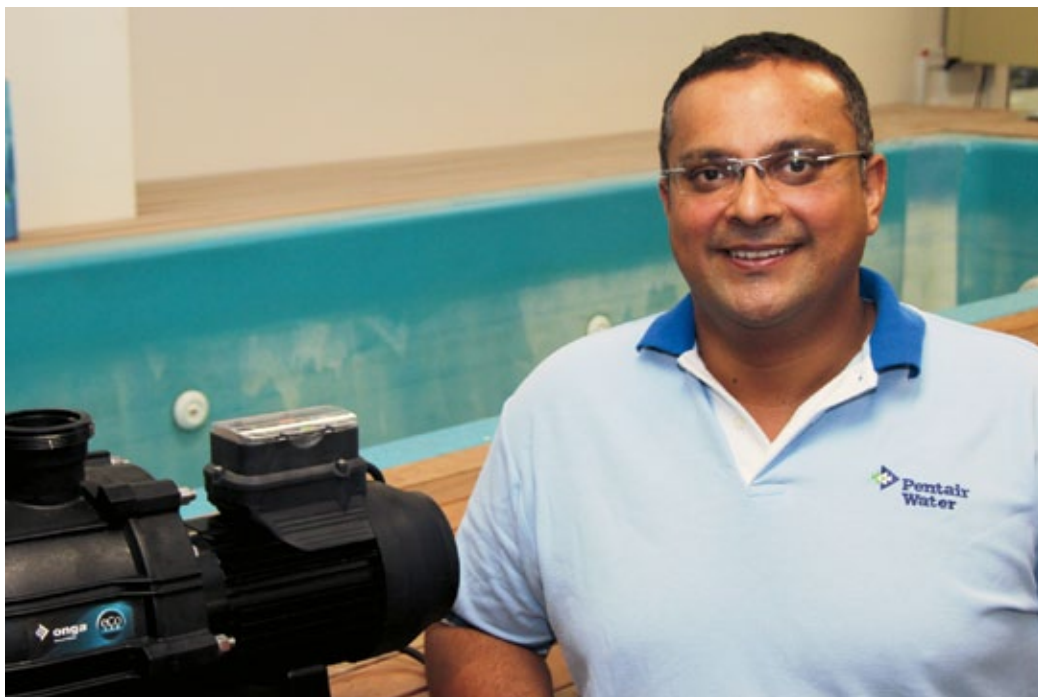
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LEFT: Australasian Sales Manager for Pentair's Aquatic Systems division, Bipin Gangadharan

BELOW: The new Pentair office in Dandenong South

BOTTOM: Australasian Product Manager for Aquatic Products Robert Sterland with the new Eco 800, being tested at the Dandenong facility. There is more on this pump in the New Products section



Strategy

New direction chalked out for Pentair

The new Australasian Sales Manager for Pentair's Aquatic Systems division, Bipin Gangadharan, says that price is becoming more of an issue in this market, and Pentair is responding with a strategic plan.

"Australia is a mature market compared to what I've seen in other parts of the world, but it's becoming a very price competitive market," says Gangadharan.

"Basically everyone is asking 'how much?'. First the end-users want the right price, then they want the right product."

This requires a shift in strategy, as Pentair and sister brand StaRite occupy the quality end of the spectrum.

"Pentair and StaRite have been the premium brands, so we are planning to put the Onga brand into that bracket, and also bring out some new products to try and get some of the competitors' business," he says.

"Some of our competitors have been dropping their prices to gain market share. So we'll concentrate on good quality value brands at a good price. We have a complete new line

of products in pumps, filters and lights."

He says most of the new products will be made or assembled in Australia; while some components will be sourced from Europe, the US and a small number from Asian countries.

Another element of the plan is to target the commercial pool sector by the second quarter of 2013.

"Pentair has the complete range in commercial products, so we are planning to tailor fit them to the Australian market. These will be commercial pumps and filters, and commercial sanitizers, mostly aimed at the theme parks and the competition pools sector," he says.

The third change is that Pentair will sell its own brand of lights, and no longer carry locally made lighting.

"We'll introduce the new energy-efficient GloBrite lighting from the USA to compete with the local light suppliers. We won't buy from them anymore; we'll be selling our own products."

Gangadharan believes prospects should improve in 2013, saying that the market seems to have bottomed out. Pentair had



experienced a substantial drop in sales, most notably in Queensland where sales declined by more than 50 per cent.

"We are re-saturating the market in order to hit the replacement business," he says. "We are mostly concentrating on Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland in the first three months, and then we'll slowly expand our strategy to different areas."

There have been some new staff brought on board, including Robert Sterland as Australasian

product manager for aquatic products, Max Riboni as state manager in Perth, Eddie Borg (formerly of Poolrite) also in WA, and Matt Cooper formerly of Zodiac in Victoria.

"I think the drop in sales has bottomed out in this market," he says. "So from now on it's upward. But that's provided we do it right and work to our strategic plan for next year," he says.

"We've got a team in place and the right direction already chalked out." ■



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New ideas keep *aboveground* market afloat

By **Christina DiMartino**



This Classic lap pool is an example of the trend towards more varied shapes in aboveground pools, making them more suitable for modern residential blocks

If consumers around the globe have learnt one thing during the economic turmoil of the past few years, it's how to stretch a dollar, pound, rupee, peso, yen or euro. People are using less, wasting less, needing less and, well, moving about less.

The world's economic traumas of the past few years have been particularly tough on the hospitality industry. People travel less frequently, especially for pleasure, which is somewhat beneficial to the home improvement market, including backyards. When consumers are forced to suck it in, tighten it up and bear down due to economic pressure, they tend to stay at home and spend the majority of their leisure time in their own backyards. And it's in our nature to spruce things up a bit when we are more home-bound than usual.

Some aboveground pool manufacturers and distributors are among the beneficiaries of the trend toward updating and spit-



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This pool utilises Abgal's Quick-Fix system so the liner can be replaced without disturbing any of the decking. This might be no big deal for the initial installer, but saves a lot of drama for the homeowners or renovator down the track. This liner is in the Pacific Marble print

shining our homes, staying at home and entertaining family and friends more often in our own backyards. But others say they're feeling the pinch as much as most other industries.

In Australia and the Asia Pacific, the belt-tightening seems to have had some affect on aboveground pool purchases.

Kate O'Brien, marketing manager of Classic Pools, headquartered in Loganholme, Queensland, says the company has distributors in India, Sri Lanka, Malaysia, Oman, New Zealand, New Caledonia and New Guinea.

"It appears that the slowdown in sales of aboveground pools in Australia is in line with the downturn in concrete and fibreglass pool sales," says O'Brien. "Some countries, however, are not showing the slowdown as much."

Having a wider range enables a larger market to consider your products, and O'Brien says their range of aboveground pools has changed dramatically compared to 30 years ago.

"Backyards have become smaller, which has resulted in suppliers creating narrower pools similar to a traditional lap pool," she says. "These pools cater for consumers who reside on smaller residential blocks."

"Also, many years ago, most oval aboveground pools had side braces. This trend has almost disappeared with most oval pools now brace-less to save more space."

The standard sizes that Classic Pools now carries in stock range between 4.8m by 3.6m (18,000L) to a huge 18m by 7.3m (147,000L) with another 23 sizes in-between.

The prices range between \$3500 and \$14,500 for a complete pool kit. However, these prices do not in-

clude extras such as pool cleaners, covers, heating equipment or fencing.

"The biggest change in technology for aboveground pools has been the replacement of metal components to resin components," says O'Brien. "Classic Pools was the first to introduce resin copings and hardware into aboveground pool kits in Australia. Most other companies have now followed."

Classic Pools currently designs many custom-made pool kits for swim schools throughout Australia.

"We have also sent our pools to Afghanistan, one in particular for the British army to train their canine team," she says. "Housing estates are also interested in the products, especially in emerging markets such as India."

No longer cheap and temporary

"With warranties of up to 20 and even 30 years, aboveground pools are no longer seen as cheap, temporary structures," says Garry Long, managing director of Abgal Liners & Covers, headquartered in Crestmead, Queensland.

"More often than not they are being fully integrated into the garden landscape," he says. "One of the most common ways to achieve this is with decking. But while covering the coping with decking or pavers looks fantastic, it's a nightmare a few years down the track when the liner needs replacing."

With this in mind, Abgal created its Quick-Fix aboveground track and welded bead system. Long says the Quick-Fix is suitable for all new pool installations, simply hanging on top of the pool wall. It provides an ideal, easy-to-access bead receiver, allowing the pool coping to be covered over.



Abgal's Quick-Fix aboveground track and welded bead system



This oval Paradise aboveground design is surrounded by garden and decking to give it an in-ground appearance

“Once installed, replacement liners can just be snapped into place using welded bead or an overlap-style liner with capping,” he says. “And you shouldn’t have to lift a single board or tile to do it.

“We’ve been making liners for aboveground pools for almost 40 years, and we have patterns on file for pretty much every pool out there,” he says. “Even unique, one-off pools are no problem, as we use sophisticated computer-aided manufacturing to assist in creating the most complicated of liners.”

He adds that in addition to the standard blues and greens you expect to see in aboveground pools, Abgal’s colour pick for this season is Coral Sand.

“Coral Sand was previously only available as an in-ground pool finish,” Long says. “It is now available for aboveground pools as well, giving the look of pebblecrete but with the feel of silk.”

Profiting from staycations

Jim Newman, executive vice president of Splash SuperPools, headquartered in North Little Rock, Arkansas, USA, says that some people are doing well in the aboveground pool industry because of the poor economy, but others report that they’re not doing at all well.

“In economic times such as these, people are prone to stay closer to home and invest in a pool, but when things are particularly tough, they look for something useable but less expensive. We basically are seeing economic trends repeating themselves from similar situations in past years,” he says.

Splash SuperPools has approximately 300 dealers throughout Canada and the United States. Its vinyl aboveground pools get their strength from the polyester weave on the inside. The company also manufactures in-ground and commercial pools and splash tubs.

The company’s legacy began in the early 1970s when, in Italy, Palmiro Spedini developed a round swimming pool that incorporated an inflatable collar. This pool design was so unique that a patent was applied for and received in Europe. This pool was then branded and sold by Piscine Laghetto of Vescovato, Italy.

Laghetto pools were introduced into the United States as a result of an exclusive marketing and distribution arrangement between Splash SuperPools and Agrisilos in 1986.

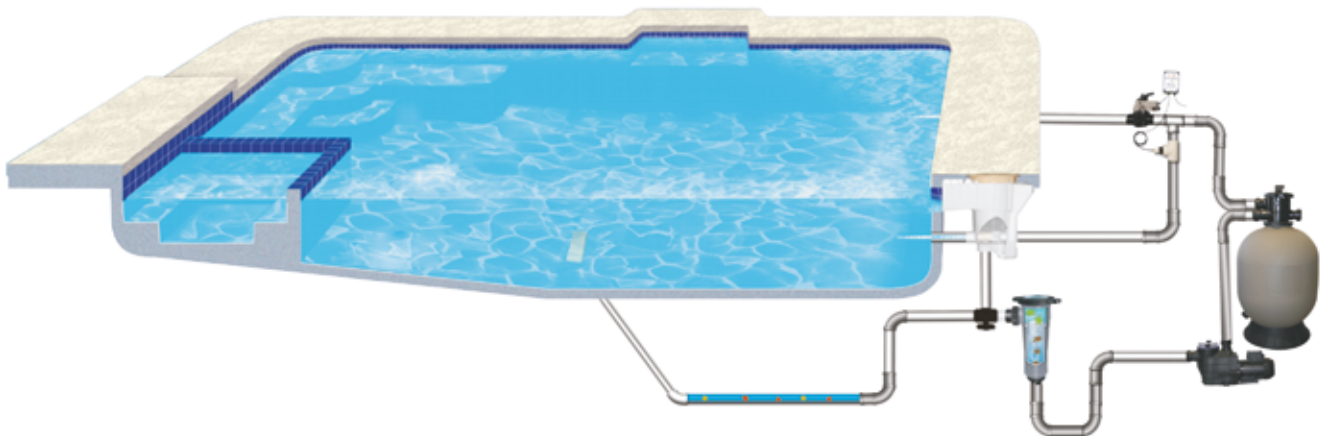


A Myrtha Pools creation at Montage Beverly Hills, California

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This Classic display pool shows that with well-considered coping, paving and accessories, an aboveground pool can look stunning

Splash SuperPools continues to serve as the industry standard by offering more shapes, sizes, and depths than any other aboveground pool seller in their market.

“People are staying home more, and that’s turning into more pool sales for Splash SuperPools,” says Newman. “Families are taking their vacations in their backyards today.”

Timber aboveground pools

Paradise Pools is based in Newcastle, NSW and has been manufacturing and building swimming pools since 1975. Around 10 years ago they adapted their design methods to produce an exclusive saltwater aboveground pool. They are currently looking for dealers/builders throughout Australia.

Jo-Anne Wood says the range has since grown to suit virtually every budget and any site; fully aboveground, fully in-ground and everywhere in between — making it perfect for sloping sites.

“Coping styles include round timber coping, a flat top coping that allows decking to be built directly on top of the pool and be supported by it, and even a concrete ring beam for paving around any part of a pool that’s in-ground.”



It also includes a variety of shapes such as oval, teardrop and rectangular, and even the opportunity for clients to design their own freeform shape.

To accommodate salt water chlorination, they changed the construction method to using interlocking solid structural H5 treated building logs and marine grade 316 stainless steel.

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One way to avoid rust is using a resin structural system; but this Paradise Pool uses treated building logs to create a unique appearance as well keeping rust at bay

perfect for saltwater because it cannot rust and carries an unmatched 50 year structural guarantee," says Wood.

Ready to assemble in a flat pack with step by step instructions, the advanced engineering of the pool means its components simply interlock together to form an incredibly strong structure. Expensive and laborious backfilling is not required either, as the pool can be backfilled with drainage aggregate and spoil from the excavation.

"This is a previously ignored niche market," she says. "This pool suits people who don't want to spend \$30,000 on an in-ground pool, yet don't want the average aboveground pool either."

French import

Perth-based company Waterblade Australia is set to introduce a new, unique range of aboveground swimming pools to the Australian market: the Evolux range by French company Cristaline Pools.

Cristaline have supplied the European market with DIY kit-style swimming pools since the launch of their range in 1992, and have recently appointed Waterblade Australia as their sole Australian distributor.

Evolux is available in aboveground, semi-inground and inground versions. They consist of composite wood panels joined together by a unique internationally patented assembly system and are available in a variety of sizes and shapes.

Waterblade will be offering a range of liner colour options supplied by Abgal Liners.

On a bigger scale

Commercially speaking, Myrtha Pools, headquartered in Castiglione, Italy, is considered one of the most technologically advanced PVC laminated pool manufacturers in the world.

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The French Evolux system, imported by Waterblade, consists of composite wood panels joined together by a unique assembly system

The nature of the pool enables it to be constructed aboveground or completely in-ground. Myrtha projects include Olympic pools, YMCA facilities, hotels, waterparks and other large pool projects.

Mike Mintenko, director of sales for Myrtha Pools USA says the stainless steel panelised system is pre-engineered watertight vessel, supported by a buttress system.

“Myrtha builds swimming pools for special events, which can be later reassembled for a permanent owner after the competition,” says Mintenko.

“Florida State University, for example, purchased one of the swimming pools used in the 2005 world swimming championship in Montreal, Canada.

“Our pools are sold currently in 70 countries worldwide. Of these, the aboveground pools we build are for special events only. In many cases the special events are still permanent in-ground pools. This category represents 99.9 per cent of our projects.

“Our technology has been explored for various swim schools and club teams that want to utilise a commercial space rather than digging a hole in the ground and adding other infrastructures that are not already in place,” says Mintenko.

“There is some flexibility in that the Myrtha Pool can be assembled and disassembled. As a club or business such as a swim school grows, the Myrtha pool can be expanded and moved to a new location to fit any business model.

“We also have many incredible references in the hotel and/or resort markets. Most notably these types of pools are very rarely in-ground applications. Our pools are typically as part of an elevated design where they are constructed on the top floor of a building. Our pools are in most of the major resort brands throughout the world such as the Four Seasons and Montage properties.”

The Myrtha system is free standing and a modular technology that is more flexible than concrete construction, and they have added new technologies to their pools over the past few years.

“Most have been general improvements and advances, but one product we see more and more often is the Defender filter from Neptune-Benson.”

The benefits enjoyed by existing Defender customers are water and waste savings because the filter virtually eliminates water loss through backwashing. Instead of reverse flushing, as with a sand filter, Defender discharges the spent media directly to waste and is recharged from time to time. ■

Contacts

Abgal: www.abgal.com.au

Classic Pools: www.classicpools.com.au

Myrtha: www.myrthapools.com

Paradise Pools: www.paradisepools.com.au

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Victoria primed for the *turnaround*

In October, SPLASH! spoke with Brendan Watkins at the new SPASA Victoria offices in Notting Hill. He discussed the situation with fencing regulations, the new consumer show in February, upcoming governance changes and the state of the market in Victoria.



Brendan Watkins, CEO of SPASA Victoria at the new offices in Notting Hill

Barrier protection has been a big issue around the country, and Watkins says SPASA Victoria has been heavily involved in the subject through the Backyard Pool and Spa Safety Committee, which includes KidsSafe and Lifesaving Victoria among the other relevant parties. They look at coronial reports relevant to Victoria to see how to enhance pool safety.

“Our bottom line around barriers is that our industry is doing really well in producing fantastic A-grade product, and by law we can’t hand the product over to the consumer unless it’s compliant and safe. Consumers, by and large aren’t upholding their part of the bargain. Because we know anecdotally and it’s been proven through the building commission that they’re not being maintained. I’m not aware of a coronial report where they had a compliant barrier.”

He says he strongly supports the idea of regular inspections, but the question is, who would carry them out?

“The obvious party is the building surveyor or building inspector – but are there enough of them? There are more than 150,000 pools and spas in Victoria. There’s no way the existing workforce of licensed practitioners can get out to each one every four years. So we’re looking at a course, not dissimilar to the one they have in Queensland, specifically for barrier inspectors.

“Crazily, we have state-unique interpretations of the Standard, which we’re dismayed at. We need to harmonise legislation. They’re reasonably complex laws, and the fact that there’s variation doesn’t help anyone. There is confusion about what’s acceptable and what’s not regarding heights, boundary fences, doors and windows, and what’s retrospective and what’s not. So we’d

be very keen for a push for harmonised legislation, but not all the other states feel the same way about that,” he says.

Regarding the NSW Government decision to go with self-certification, he says that if he was an average consumer who owned a pool or spa, for peace of mind he’d like an expert to confirm the barrier was compliant.

“Inspections will happen in Victoria, and it’s likely that every property with a pool or spa that’s sold or leased will need an inspection and that can be easily done by a surveyor. That would be a really good thing to happen, because a disproportionately high level of drownings occur in rented properties.

“But they need to build the database before they can go out and knock on doors and start inspections.”

He also says that SPASA Victoria is very much in favour of ACCC’s proposed safety standard for inflatable pools, but believes it should be extended to include spas.

A successful state and a big show

The upcoming consumer show on February 1 to 3 will be the biggest ever held in Victoria.

“We’ve grown the show by another full bay,” says Watkins. “This will certainly be the biggest show in terms of floorspace, participation and promotional spend.”

SPASA Victoria will spend about \$180,000 in promoting the show through TV, print and radio; as well as setting up a dedicated website and Facebook page, and employing a PR consultant.

“It will be a much more interesting and creative campaign, and one we hope eats into competing markets,” he says. “We want to compete for the disposable dollar of people who are buying caravans, doing renovations or taking the family overseas on holidays.”

As DA numbers regularly show, Victoria is doing better than some states in these difficult times.

“There’s evidence of the two-speed economy in Victoria,” says Watkins. “The bottom end is challenged but the middle to upper tier is very healthy. We’ve grown with more than 100 new members in the past eighteen months. We’re ready for the turnaround: for good weather and for the economy to pick up. Our members will be well placed when the economy does take off.

“I’m not suggesting everyone’s breaking records – they’re not – but they’re here, they’re surviving and waiting for the turnaround like everyone else.” ■

Changes to governance

“The board should be out there identifying goals, opportunities, strengths, weaknesses, threats,” says Watkins. “Then creating a strategic plan, prioritising the goals and promoting the best possible people onto the board to achieve the desired outcomes.”

To help achieve this, the board has reduced from 12 to 10 this year, and will reduce further next year. They will then have the flexibility to appoint up to three external experts onto the board, who don’t necessarily need to be elected. Training is one area where expertise will be sought.

The new board is: Gary Kilworth, Out from the Blue, President; Rob Kruber, Spa Industries, Vice President; Lindsay Hartshorne, Lincoln Pool Equipment, Treasurer; Rob Anderson, Pool & Spa Poppits; John D’Arcy, Award Pools & Spas; Ted Martin, Compass Pools Vic; Brendan Nelissen, Waterco; Greg Op de Coul, Rheem; Callum Ross, Astral Pool; Colin Sloggett, East Coast Swim Pools.



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Smartphones are ideal for Twitter, especially if you use apps like TweetDeck

With that said, there is nothing wrong with a little promotion, but you need to think of your followers first. Most of them didn't follow you so they can just learn about new products you sell. They want to engage and interact with you. They want you to provide really awesome links to stuff they'll like and answer their questions when they need you to.

Don't tweet about your breakfast.

This is the common reason why people don't join Twitter in the first place. I've asked people from different companies why they're not on Twitter and they all say

Conquering Twitter *without becoming a tweet*

By **Matt Giovanisci** of Swim University

Twitter is a social networking platform unlike any other. For businesses, it's a place where like-minded industry professionals and customers can share stories, ideas and useful content. It's also a great place to meet people in the industry or reach out to high-level contacts who would otherwise be hard to reach.

I've personally found a lot of success on Twitter. I use it every day to connect with industry professionals and other folk around the globe. I listen to people who talk about swimming pools or hot tubs and I respond. I also reach out to big companies and ask questions about their products.

I've been tweeting for almost three years now, and I finally figured out why I follow certain people and why I unfollow others: some people have nothing to offer or they're just annoying. With that said, here is my list of the Dos and Don'ts of Twitter.

Don't overuse #hashtags

Using hashtags is a way to categorize your tweets. For instance, if you tweet about pool safety, you might want it to look like this:

"90 children under 15 reported to have drowned since Memorial Day. 72% were children under 5 #poolsafety"

By using #poolsafety as a hashtag,

they will be more likely to find you if they're searching for tweets on pool safety. Even better, it can become a trending topic if others use the same hashtag.

You don't want your tweets to look like this:

"90 children under 15 reported to have #drowned since #MemorialDay. 72% were #children under 5 #poolsafety"

In this case, you're stuffing 4 hashtags into 1 tweet. When someone reads it, it looks like a bunch of links in a short sentence. Twitter automatically links all hashtags to their search page.

Bonus Tip: Use popular hashtags to increase your chances of being found and followed. Otherwise, create your own unique hashtag and use it on relevant tweets. For instance, if I were to tweet this article, I might use the hashtag #twit-tips or #twitter.

Don't constantly self-promote

If there is any "don't" that will decrease your follower count the fastest, it's this one! When I'm following someone on Twitter, I expect a certain degree of self-promotion. However, if every tweet, or even every other tweet, talks about a new product you sell or a new piece of useless content on your site, I will unfollow you faster than you can tweet, "Check out the newest chlorine tablet we just started stocking. Only \$89, hurry in while supplies last!"

roughly the same thing: "I don't care what people had for breakfast."

There are tweeters who do that, but you don't have to follow them. It's that simple. However, it's nice to know that you're following a real person sometimes.

Companies who use Twitter have a tendency to automate their tweets and only tweet about things that are relevant to their industry, or to self-promote. While there is nothing wrong with this, sometimes people respond to more-personal tweets. For instance, you could sprinkle in some tweets talking about your family having a great time by the pool, or behind-the-scenes photos of your employees.

Don't tweet several times in a row.

I'm sure you're not on Twitter all day long like me. You may check it in the morning or at the end of your day for about a half hour. So, that's the only time you're able to tweet. If this is you, you need to think about using a web-based Twitter program to help you space out your tweets.

It's annoying when one person tweets 20 times in a row and then not again until the same time the next day. Other followers don't use their Twitter accounts the same way. They may check them every hour or every 15 minutes. If they don't check when you decide to post 20 times, they will miss everything you tweet.

The program I use to space out my tweets is HootSuite. It's free for one user and one Twitter account. It allows you to create tweets and schedule them throughout the day.

Don't tweet just to tweet.

Sometimes you'll think to yourself, "I haven't tweeted in a while. Let me just tweet something." The problem with this is, no one will care about your tweet if you



Swim University retweeted this SPLASH! tweet (@AussieSplash) by hitting the new RT (retweet) button

don't care about it. Throwaway tweets are worthless, and if you were a follower of someone with worthless tweets, you'd hate it too and unfollow them.

Instead, tweet only when you have something interesting to say or something cool to share.

Don't follow everyone who follows you

Hopefully, as you start using Twitter to provide interesting and helpful tweets, others will follow. However, don't be obligated to follow them just because they followed you. They might just be an average Twitter user who tweets about their breakfast and retweets other people's content.

You want to keep your following count at a manageable level. I've seen other users following counts match their follower counts. Meaning, they follow everyone who follows them.

I'll be honest, this use to be me. I invested in a program that would follow other users related to my industry, then wait one week to see if they followed me back. If they

didn't, the program would unfollow them and that's how I was able to get my follower count up so high.

The problem is, I couldn't keep up with 3000 tweeters, and most of those users provided me with no real value. I decided to unfollow all 3000 users and start over with 0 followers.

At that point, I actively searched out tweeters in the pool and spa industry who were tweeting useful content and meaningful stuff that would be a no-brainer for me to share or retweet with my own followers.

Now that my following count was lower and more manageable, I was able to engage with my small group effectively. Since then, my following count has grown naturally with users who are actually interested in what I have to say and share.

Don't just follow people in the industry

Remember, behind your company Twitter account, there is a human being who isn't just interested in swimming pools and hot tubs. Perhaps that person is interested in other related industries like barbecuing or landscaping.

Follow some influential tweeters outside your industry and you'll find that there is other unique content that your followers, or yourself, might be interested in.

For instance, I follow a chef who calls herself the Bikini Chef (@TheBikiniChef). She tweets about recipes, health tips, and she even sprinkles in some inspirational





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quotes. All in all, she's an excellent tweeter who has very little to do with the pool and spa industry.

You have to remember that most people are not passionate about their pools like we are. Our customers are passionate in the experience they get from enjoying the pool. You have to think outside the box. Tweeting about the effects of low pH is boring to the average pool owner, but tweeting about an awesome summer drink recipe to enjoy by the pool is something that a lot of people can get behind.

Don't ignore your direct messages.

Direct messages are like emails between Twitter users. Perhaps you'd like to reach out to a fellow tweeter, but you don't want others to know, or the information you want to share is private, like an email address or cell phone number.

The main reason why people ignore their direct message inbox is because a lot of tweeters set up an auto-response when someone follows them. It will automatically send a direct message to your inbox with some stupid self-promoting tweet like, "Hey, thanks for the follow. You should check out my website 'cause I'm so freaking awesome." When your inbox is filled with junk like that, you start to ignore it.

This is another reason why you should only follow tweeters you are interested in and not try to follow everyone in the hopes that they'll follow you back to increase your follower count.

Remember, you can only send a direct message to people who follow you.

Don't ignore retweets or tweets @ you

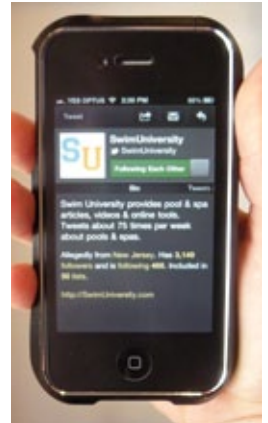
You'll notice that you might retweet something and that user will send you a tweet thanking you for the RT. This shows that they're human and truly appreciate what you've done for them. It makes you feel warm inside and now you will pay a little more attention to that tweeter.

In this case, you should tweet back something like, "No problem! I found your tweet interesting and thought my followers might like it." You can make it more personal or shorter if you want.

If this was the real world and someone thanked you for doing something for them, you wouldn't just ignore them and walk away, would you? Of course not! You'd say, "You're welcome," at least.

Also, if someone tweets @ you, for whatever reason, you'll want to respond quickly. You don't want to leave your followers hanging.

You can follow Matt Giovanisci at @SwimUniversity. You can follow SPLASH! at @AussieSplash and get instant news updates. ■



You don't have to follow everyone who follows you. Giovanisci has 3149 followers, but only follows 466

Matt Giovanisci is the creator of Swim University (www.swimuniversity.com). He has more than 15 years of experience in the swimming pool and spa industry and is also an award winning web designer.



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Global solar heating up

The manufacturer of Heliocol solar pool heating systems, Magen Eco Energy, sent some international executives to the recent Gold Coast Expo including VP of Marketing Itzhak Amar and engineer Tali Roitman.

Considering Heliocol's position as a solar powerhouse, SPLASH! took the opportunity to catch up with them and Heliocol's Kelly Dancer and Dan Roderick, and ask them about the current state of the global market.

Amar says while Europe had obviously been suffering from the economic downturn, they were surprised to find that the company had actually seen an increase in European sales by 12 per cent.

"The Europe situation had been really dramatic over the past two years," he says. "It was very bad in some countries like Greece, Cypress and Spain. But we dramatically increased our sales in

countries like Germany, Austria, Switzerland and France. The common thing with those countries is they are the stronger economies.

"In total, we increased our sales in Europe. It surprised us when we checked the numbers – we were up about 12 per cent."

The last time Amar spoke with SPLASH!, in 2010, his main concern was the economic situation in the United States. But over the past two years, things have improved there.

"We've increased our sales in the USA," he says. "First of all, that's because of the economic recovery, and second because we launched some new products that allowed us to get to some new markets."

"The first product is the one we launched here at SPLASH!, the SunX. Worldwide it's called EcoSpark. It's a collector with light, polycarbonate glazing. It's very efficient collector especially in areas that are windy or houses that have limited roof space. Because

now we need to compete for roof space with photovoltaic systems and solar thermal systems."

Another product they have focussed on is a solar collector for aboveground swimming pools.

"The potential for this product is huge. They are kits for the DIY market: an efficient product based on the SunX."

Kelly Dancer says the aboveground kits are sold in the US along the "climate line" the area where the summer is warm enough for a pool as long as there's some heating, but in winter the aboveground pools often get emptied and packed away.

"It's modular so you can add to if you want more heat," says Dancer. "They're cost effective, and price is the driver. We're still researching the best avenues for sales. We will protect our channels, but there might be other avenues through manufacturers. But I couldn't see this product sitting in a Bunnings

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