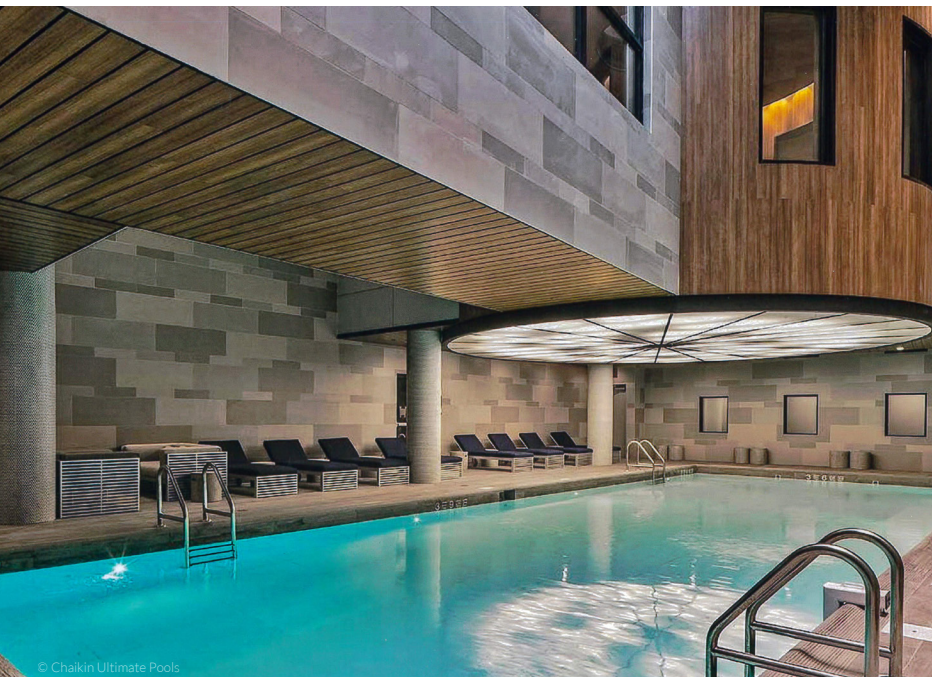


BUILDING OUT

The 2022 PHTA Builder of the Year shares top tips for service providers looking to get into pool construction



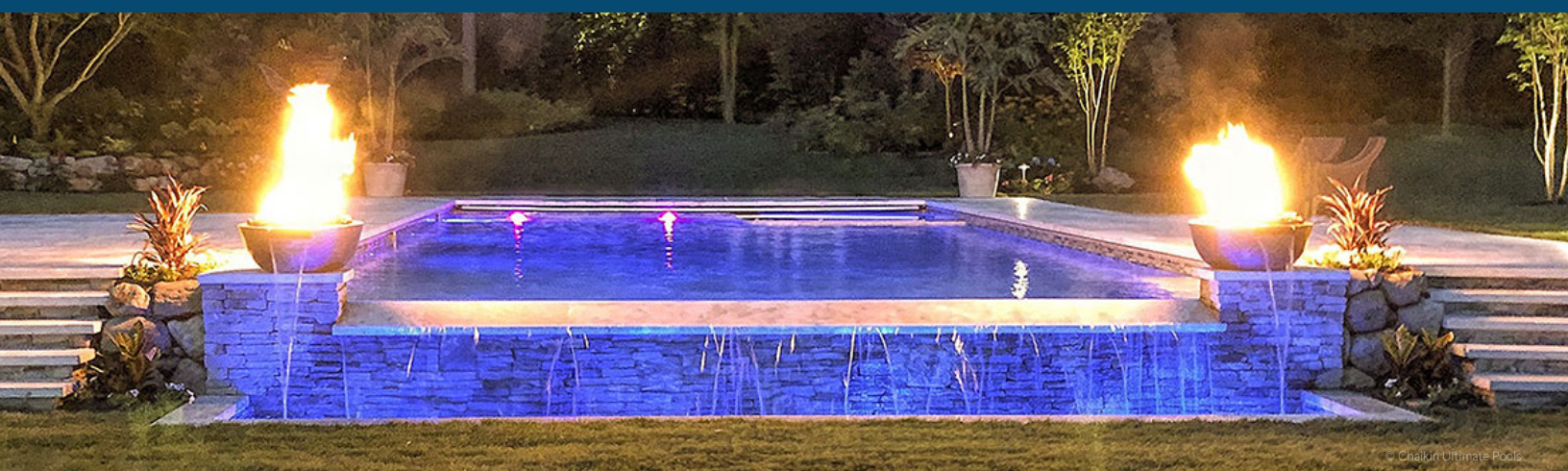
When Kyle Chaikin began building pools, he dove in head-first. He had been servicing pools for more than a decade and just completed his first renovations when a long-time customer asked him to build his hotel pool. “I told him I had never done it before, but I would sure like to try,” he says.

With the customer’s support, he built his first pool. Not long after, Chaikin found himself with two more hotel jobs and his service company progressing into the construction space — a move he says he never intentionally planned.

Fast-forward past a merger in 2011, and Chaikin is now president of Long Island, New York-based Chaikin Ultimate Pools and was named the 2022 Builder of the Year by the Pool & Hot Tub Alliance (PHTA). His company still services pools under the business arm The Ultimate in Pool Care, and Chaikin himself oversees residential and commercial builds — many of them high-end — on the construction side.

To build or not to build

For both service companies and builders alike, the grass often seems greener on the other side. Builders often turn to service to maintain business with customers



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they built pools for, but the draw from service to construction is just as strong.

“There’s always a push to get into construction from the service side,” says Chaikin. “Sometimes it works out great. In my case, it seems to have worked out, and we’re very happy, and I know lots of companies that have done it.”

However, Chaikin advises that service companies weigh the pros and cons of making the change carefully, as the big jobs in construction can mean “big money, but also bigger headaches.”

“There’s always something, there’s always an issue, whether it’s with a piece of equipment or not being able to get a piece of equipment, or perhaps even the timing of it,” he says.

Scheduling projects can be especially challenging on the commercial side, where you often must meet the demands of customers while at the mercy of general contractors’ timetables.

However, while the world of construction can bring big risks, it can also yield big rewards.

“Monetarily, if you’re doing it well and doing it right, there’s money to be made by being a good builder who does the job properly and on time,” says Chaikin.

How to build a construction business

For those service companies determined to make it big as builders, Chaikin shares his top tips for getting started and ramping up.

Tip #1: Get the prerequisites first.

“The best advice I can give is to go through the proper channels,” Chaikin says. Before starting, you’ll want to have the necessary education, license, experience, and insurance needed to build safely and properly.

- Education and licensure — You will want to obtain and maintain the Certified Builder Professional (CBP) certification if you are to build pools that are economic, efficient, and safe, according to Chaikin. You can earn all four levels of certification, from CBP to Master CBP, through the PHTA GENESIS® education program.

- Experience — “Classrooms are great, but get out in the field and check it out first,” says Chaikin. If you’re starting at square one, his advice is to subcontract out a builder and observe the job start to finish until you can understand and avoid common obstacles yourself.

- Insurance — Make sure your insurance will cover construction work. The insurance you need to build pools is not the same as the insurance needed to run a business or service pools.

Tip #2: Get the proper people in place.

Ensuring you have the correct workers building your projects is critical, as the pool of qualified skilled builders is currently small.

“If you’re building a swimming pool these days, even in a backyard, you need a pretty high level of knowledge to make sure that you’re building it properly and engineering it correctly,” he says.

As safety is paramount, you’ll want to make sure those who are building the pool and overseeing the build know all the building codes in the jurisdiction in which you are working. Be aware that commercial and residential codes are quite different. The laws will vary in different locations as well. For example, in New York an engineer is required to design all the hydraulics and structural components of commercial pools.

Tip #3: Get pricing right.

Supply chain issues have begun to resolve, but builders are still dealing with some unexpected price increases for materials. Chaikin says including escalation clauses or force majeure in building contracts can help provide financial relief. However, this can be difficult on the commercial side.

“These general contractors and developers have become savvy, if not shark-like,” he says, adding that most will refuse escalation clauses and look for someone else.

If you cannot protect against escalation, you will need to make sure that all parties stay on schedule, so your project is priced properly. You can limit your liability by getting a substantial completion date.

Tip #4: Get involved in the industry.

Chaikin says his involvement in the industry has been the most beneficial thing for his business. This means committing to continuous learning, as well as helping to teach others.

“If all our peers are doing the same education tracks, the more knowledgeable everybody is, the better educated everybody is, then the better the industry will be.”



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Kyle Chaikin, CBP