

# CAPTURING YOUNG WATER



Rick Harvey

## Former WAVE chair shares his top strategies for marketing your pool business to young consumers in 2023

**A**s Director of Pro Pool Sales at BioLab, which is owned by KIK Consumer Products, Rick Harvey is responsible for the promotion and sales of popular premium brands SpaGuard and 60-year-old BioGuard. The brands have a well-established customer base, especially among older demographics. Even so, Harvey plans to change up his marketing approach for 2023.

"What we did 60 years ago is not the same as what we're going to be doing in 2023," he says.

Throughout the past three years, BioLab's 1,200+ national independent retailers have experienced what many others have — high demand for pool products, supply challenges, and "more business than they could handle."

Now that supply and demand is beginning to level out, and much of the older consumer market is saturated, Harvey says manufacturers and retailers will need to start working hard for business again.

For BioLab and many others, that will mean capturing new water — more specifically, the attention of the next gen consumers.

"Our solid customer base, they bled blue, right? They knew BioGuard. They wanted BioGuard. The younger demographic that's now coming up and experiencing the BioGuard brand is a little different," says Harvey.



© BioLab

"When you are trying to reach out to different age groups and different demographics, 'one size fits all' does not work."

Here Harvey explains the top differences of younger consumers as well as how to reach them.

## A product of the times

The advent of the Internet and social media has done a lot to shape the buyer decision-making process of young consumers.

"In the old days, you would ask, 'Well, who sells pool chemicals?' You open up the Yellow Pages and look for it," says Harvey. "Nobody does that now. They'd rather pull up their phone. They would look to see if there's something that's trending."

Those who grew up in an age where hundreds of options can be accessed with a single Google search have learned they can be more selective. Young consumers are choosing to make purchases in accordance with their top values: **affordability, trust, and convenience.**



### Affordability

"The younger generation tends to be a little more price conscious than other demographics," Harvey says, adding that inflation and fears of recession have exacerbated this.

Young consumers want to know they're getting "the most bang for their buck," and are frequently looking for promotions.

One way to appeal to this price consciousness is by offering a variety of sizes of products, Harvey says. Some customers may not have the cash flow needed to buy bulk sizes upfront. If that's the case, retailers can expect the customer will need to come for more and must plan accordingly.

"Once a quarter or every couple of months, you're going to need to get them back in the stores," Harvey explains, adding that planning with marketing calendars will come in handy here. "How do I do that? That's constant promoting, taking advantage of things like text messaging or social media alerts."



### Trust

Referrals are crucial for younger consumers, who need to feel they can trust a product before they buy.

"The younger consumer will buy it because that's what Mom and Dad have always used," says Harvey.

Confidence in family experiences is common across demographics, but younger consumers will be reassured just knowing someone will vouch for a product.

"It's amazing how the younger consumer will use a product because a certain celebrity might be using it," he says.

Celebrity endorsements can be effective, but the importance of getting positive customer reviews cannot be overstated. Younger consumers will always trust the opinions of real customers over the word of those trying to sell it to them. Harvey suggests taking advantage of this by asking satisfied customers to leave online reviews and publishing favorable reviews on your website or social media.



### Convenience

Young consumers will rarely make a purchase that is inconvenient to make.

"A marketing approach is, 'Your time is valuable. We want to service you, but we want to do it in a way that's not going to inconvenience you,'" says Harvey.

He suggests businesses evaluate how easy it is for customers to shop online and at their store.

Retailers should also ensure lines are short and there is staff available to help customers in their store. However, Harvey says young consumers will always look to technology when making their buying decisions.

"They want to be able to do it all at the palm of their hand if they can," Harvey says, explaining it's time for businesses in the pool industry to fully embrace digital marketing with new and exciting ways to promote their brands and products. "There are vast resources available by professionals to help navigate you through that."

## Leverage young minds

If marketing to younger consumers seems daunting, Harvey's advice is to turn to the young professionals that work for you. Not only are they likely more technologically savvy, but they are closer to your target market.

"When you're looking to bring on young folks to work in your businesses, look at their experiences, look what their knowledge is," he says. "Take advantage of that, because that can help you take the next step."

Whether you need help launching local e-commerce, marketing through social media, or simply understanding what appeals to young consumers, the young professionals on your staff likely have the answers.



***"When you are trying to reach out to different age groups and different demographics, 'one size fits all' does not work."***

Rick Harvey, BioLab