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A large infinity pool at sunset with lounge chairs in the foreground. The pool's surface is calm, reflecting the vibrant orange and pink hues of the sky. In the foreground, several white lounge chairs are partially visible, some with blue LED lights. The background shows a dense line of green trees under a dramatic, cloudy sky.

The sun sets on a wild year...



BY BRETT LLOYD ABBOTT



TIPS FOR MANAGING YOUR POOL BUSINESS IN 2021

OVERWHELMING DEMAND IN 2020 has pushed pool and spa companies to the limit and beyond, causing many of them to be booked up well into the new year. For most companies, revenue and cash flow are up, but let's not forget some of the business pain we've experienced as part of this unexpected windfall:

- Unprecedented phone calls and web inquiries.
- Each designer with 50 to 100 "hot leads" to follow up on.
- Three to four week delays for an initial sales consultation.
- Ongoing shortages in parts and materials.
- Ongoing labor challenges in just about every area.
- Awkward online and excuse-the-mask face-to-face meetings.
- And one-star reviews from

homeowners who were upset that you didn't drop everything the minute they called and respond to their request instantly.

Remember how quickly things changed? In March, we thought it might be the end of the world. By April, business was exploding out of control. And now, most everyone is wondering: *"How long is this going to last?"*

Well, let's take a step back and look at the bigger picture — and see if we can make some sensible predictions. This crazy year called 2020 was fueled by "the forced staycation." With everyone forced to stay at home and/or work from home, the buying public desperately grabbed for anything that would help them retain their sanity. Inground swimming pools. Aboveground swimming pools. Hot tubs. Man caves. She sheds. Boats. Recreational vehicles. Lumber (for

adding on to your home). And wine. Lots of wine.

There was also an unexpected global shortage of webcams, since suddenly, millions of people had to figure out how to telecommute. The conferencing software Zoom went from losing money in 2018 to creating multi-millionaires out of its top 10 board members in 2020. And slowly but surely, millions of people learned how to do their jobs productively without getting in their car (or even getting out of their bathrobe) to get to work. And guess what — they **LIKED** it!

Meanwhile, thousands of businesses are discovering that when their employees work productively from home, they can save tens of thousands of dollars on expensive office space.

And thus, we are seeing the birth (or transfiguration) of the so-called "Workcation." An undeniable cultural



shift has occurred, such that even after COVID-19 is well behind us, millions of breadwinners will choose to continue working from home, for the time savings, the money savings, the reduced stress and the better quality of life.

Thus, you can expect 2021 to continue the 2020 push for, *“Make my home a more enjoyable place to live.”*

WITH THAT IN MIND, HOW DO WE PLAN FOR THE 2021 SEASON?

We’re forecasting that pool and spa demand will continue unabated, and resources will continue to be stretched thin. Sales fatigue (and employee fatigue in general) will continue to be a challenge, with the unrelenting pressure of, *“We’re getting more leads than we can handle.”* (*“And we can’t find anyone to hire to help us!”*)

The tragedy here is that closing ratios may actually go down if the salespeople don’t get a break. (You may have seen this already.) After all, they only have so much time to invest in each prospect, so it’s only natural that they will want to minimize their efforts with anyone who looks a little bit questionable or uncommitted. (It’s either that or work themselves to death.)

If there was ever a time to systematize and automate your sales and marketing processes, this is it.

Most likely, you’ve heard these admonitions before:

- Make sure you have a clear and compelling “story” or “message” about why your company is the preferred choice.
- Incorporate that message into a

clean, fast, modern website that educates and converts prospects into hot, qualified leads.

- Tell your story even more compellingly with professionally produced videos that educate your prospects about the industry in general, and you in particular.
- Set up a series of automated “drip marketing” messages that communicate with your prospects when your sales team is too busy. From an initial “welcome,” to links to your videos, to telling them how to prepare for their upcoming face-to-face meeting, this is a perfect opportunity to nurture the hungry homeowner who is anxiously wanting to buy what you sell.
- And then manage all this with a professional sales CRM system that allows a sales manager (or a lower-cost and probably easier-to-find administrator) who can help manage the leads while they’re waiting to meet with your designer or salesperson.

From a sales and marketing standpoint, your goal here should be to make your prospects as “sales-ready” as possible *before* they meet with your salespeople. Done properly, your marketing automation will not only nurture your good prospects, but it will also help weed out those prospects who aren’t a good fit for your company. When you tell your marketing story clearly and compellingly in your automation, your prospects will “self-qualify” themselves by deciding early on whether or not you’re the one who has what they want.

Now, let me offer a rather unusual suggestion — which may at first seem counterintuitive but could in fact be the perfect solution to the sales fatigue dilemma. (And it’s faster and easier than creating new videos and building brand new websites.)

You can use the laser targeting power of PPC advertising to directly zero in on your ideal clients — giving your sales reps more of the ideal hot prospects you would prefer.

My favorite example of this would be for the mid to higher-level pool builder who sells a lot of \$75,000 projects, but would much prefer to sell \$150,000-\$250,000 projects. The PPC advertising (whether it be Google or Facebook or whatever) allows you to “speak” directly to those people, while winnowing out the less attractive tire kickers and budget buyers.

Fortunately, if you’re in the northern hemisphere, you’ll have a few months of partial relief which will allow you to prepare for the onslaught of 2021. If the year 2020 was profitable but painful for you, here’s what I suggest you do:

- Take care of your salespeople. (They can only take so much.)
- Update your website. (Let it do as much of your selling as possible.)
- Set up a “drip marketing” system. (Let it handle the bulk of the repetitive communications that the salespeople would otherwise have to handle.)
- Implement a sales CRM system. (It’s the only sensible way to handle an onslaught of leads.)
- And consider some laser-targeted online advertising to find your ideal clients. (So you can stop wasting time with the masses of time-wasting budget buyers.)

Imagine the year 2020 *without* all of the bad and ugly. That’s what 2021 could be for you — if you start preparing now. ~

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