

# POOL & SPA NEWS

## CPSA Moves to Chapter-Based Model

**By Nate Traylor** The California Pool & Spa Association soon will create regional chapters.

CPSA officials have decided to make this move to allow the lobbying organization to operate more efficiently and better attend to more local matters.

They also hope the move helps in the

group's recruitment efforts. The association's membership roster took a hit during the recession. Though it has attracted more than 160 new members over the past year to combat drought-related restrictions, it needs to further bulk up its ranks, which currently include 400

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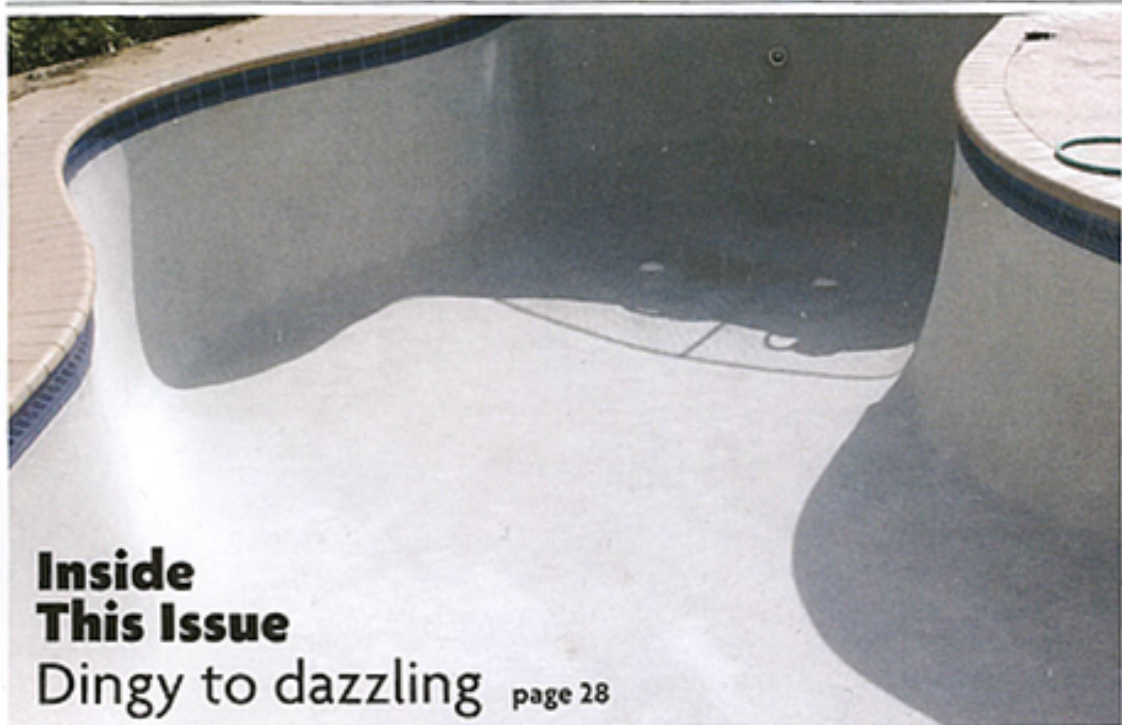
## Calif. Industry Makes Preparations for El Niño

**By Rebecca Robledo** It isn't known how much the anticipated storms intensified by El Niño weather patterns will help with California's historic drought. But they will affect work, so professionals are getting ready.

El Niño conditions have already impacted other countries, and heavy rains are expected to hit California in January, February and March. One climatologist told the *Los Angeles Times* that signals point to "one storm after another, like a conveyor belt."

Builders and service professionals are making preparations to

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## Inside This Issue

Dingy to dazzling **page 28**



# Picking the Perfect Mix

Your product selection can make or break your business

Selecting your store's product mix is a vital part of your company's longevity. If you're selling merchandise that's outdated, not of interest to your customer base, or just not moving very well, you could find yourself shutting your doors for good relatively quickly.

No two stores are alike — what works for your downtown location may not work

for your customers in the suburbs. So selecting pool and spa products isn't as easy as it may seem. It requires, at the very least, a deep understanding of your customer base — at each store.

"Products are chosen by taking into account who your consumer is and what products will serve them best," says Carlos De Leon, owner of Aqua Bella Pools & Spa

By Dana Robinson



**Product selection:** Retailers must take into account a number of factors before deciding on the ideal product mix for their stores. No two customer bases are alike, so treat each store differently when getting to know the preferences and needs of each clientele.

in Bridgehampton, N.Y. "You also have to take into account the cost and if the price is right for your market."

Here, experts discuss how to decide on a product mix and continually monitor it to make sure each SKU is pulling its weight.

#### Meet your customers

Since it would be completely impractical to systematically knock on each of your neighbors' doors to survey their spacare, poolcare, and backyard-living needs, you'll have to find different means to that end.

Asking customers to fill out informational surveys, either in-store or online, can help provide insight into their buying habits. But retailers can't always rely on these alone.

"Shoppers often say one thing and do

another," says Bridget Johns, head of customer success at RetailNext in San Jose, Calif.

She finds observing behavior to be the most accurate way to determine customers' purchasing preferences and behavior. Store owners can use in-store analytics systems that incorporate data streams from video cameras to determine which displays attract store traffic and how well they engage shoppers. This requires installing a video camera hooked up to a software system that will monitor a display or any other section of the store (aka a "dwell" zone).

"Then, it's a simple integration with point-of-sale systems to determine how effectively a display ultimately converted," Johns says.

Talking to customers one-on-one about their needs is a method that should be tak-

en into consideration as well (but there's still no need to do the door-to-door thing.) If you notice that a number of customers are coming in and asking for a particular product or line, then exploring that as a potential add-on to your current mix might not be such a bad idea.

In those cases when consumers are not forthcoming with what they want, there are still ways to get the needed information out of them. Some of those methods should be part of the day-to-day routine for retail staffers. Have you ever noticed how grocery store clerks typically ask this while they're ringing you up: "Did you find everything you were looking for?" By doing the same thing in your store, you can find out if customers were searching for something that should be on your shelves.

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## PRODUCT MIX

engaging with the display, but the POS system doesn't reflect comparable sales, it could point to pricing adjustments being needed or perhaps better sales associate interactions," Johns says.

On the other hand, dwell analytics may show that shoppers never cross paths with a display, let alone stop and engage with it. This could indicate that the item needs to be displayed more skillfully or that the traffic flow should be navigated more effectively.

Getting products to move out of a store can be as simple as moving them around. Reed Thompson, a consultant at AMZHelp.com, recommends displaying them in a way that shows off their best qualities.

"Put a skimmer in a spa on your showroom [to] show the customer that it actually does work," says Thompson. "Or merchandise toys on a lower shelf so children can see them."

It's important to move products around so adults can see them as well, no matter where your customers tend to roam.

"We make it standard practice to move items around our store every four to eight weeks," O'Neil says.

Moving merchandise around a store

also prevents the sales floor from looking stagnant. You can give the store a fresh, new look every few weeks by simply moving a display or two around here or there — and it's a lot more economical than a full-scale remodeling effort or even a fresh coat of paint.

Dwell analytics may show that shoppers never stop at a display, let alone engage with it.

But if a product has been analyzed, moved and showcased in every possible light, then a price reduction, at cost or even a loss, might be the only option left. But the situation doesn't have to be seen as a complete failure. The cash generated by liquidating a product, Thompson says, can be used to purchasing inventory that will sell.

### Manufacturer relations

Some retailers choose to simplify their inventory by only carrying products from one manufacturer or a small handful of companies. This can take some of the guesswork out of creating the perfect product mix, and may lead to better pricing that can then be passed along to your customers, says Carlos De Leon, owner of Aqua Bella Pools & Spa in Bridgehampton, N.Y.

But potential drawbacks include stunting your ability to attract certain clientele, and contending with advertising or purchasing requirements considered restrictive by some retailers.

If you're on the fence about whether an exclusive partnership with a manufacturer is right for you, consider this master list of what to look for when trying to make a decision, formulated by Don Riling, vice-president of Olympic

Hot Tub in Seattle.

He suggests aligning with companies that have:

- Quality products
- Good dealer relationships
- Good flooring options and financing for products that are to be displayed
- A good online marketing strategy
- Strong lead-generation capability to provide new prospects as they enter the market
- A professional website
- Good support to help service the product once it's in the customer's home

It's also good to know whether the company performs any type of beta testing with selected dealers when they're developing new products. And don't forget to get details about a potential territory designation. —D.R.