KEEP IT MOVING
PROMOTING THE BENEFITS OF HOT WATER SOAKING TO PROSPECTIVE CUSTOMERS

In recent market research conducted by the Harrison Group of Waterbury, Conn., it was revealed that 16.9 million U.S. households expressed some likelihood to purchase a hot tub. Of those households, 6.3 million are extremely, or very likely to buy. The research, funded by contributors to the ‘Hot Tub Industry Growth Initiative’—an Association of Pool & Spa Professionals (APSP) facilitated program, demonstrates that despite the economic downturn, consumers are continuing to invest in themselves and in their homes.

In stark contrast, hot tub retailers are seeing a dramatically different world.

In the U.S., hot tub sales have been on the decline for several years and the economy is throwing up additional challenges each and every day. Although the Canadian hot tub market has not been hit as hard, the increase in everything from fuel to food may discourage a hot tub purchase. The converse should, however, be considered—higher airline and gas costs are encouraging more people to vacation closer to home. A new hot tub in a newly renovated backyard is an ideal addition to make the home the perfect getaway. And just as in the U.S., Canadian homeowners are continuing to pour money into their backyards.

Additionally, ‘mega’ trends surrounding health, fitness, and the desire to keep young—coupled with the aging baby boomer population—all favour discretionary spending on a hot tub. A growing number of studies suggest soaking in a hot tub is good for one’s heart and overall health. The retailer’s challenge is to explore ways to attract prospects and help them buy the benefits of hot water.

KNOWING YOUR CUSTOMER IS KEY
Whether it’s a bear market or a bull market—knowing the customer is key. It comes down to focusing on the customer and understanding them to develop a story that is meaningful to them and their lifestyle. Learn more about what prospects are looking for, not just about features of the products carried in the store. Making a quick sale based on misinformation or lack of information can lead to a loss of repeat and referral business.

How does this connect back to the research conducted by the Harrison Group?
The Harrison Group was tasked with helping retailers understand their prospects. They uncovered three distinct groups of motivations for a hot tub purchase: ‘health & wellness,’ ‘connection,’ and ‘escape.’ Their research revealed about 3.2 million households (19 per cent of the 16.9 million households) are keenly interested in the health benefits that hot tubs offer.

Within the ‘health & wellness’ group of prospects, the respondents pointed to three categories that would motivate their interest in a hot tub purchase (there was an overlap between these, with some prospects considering all three important to them.)

1) General Health / Therapeutic Benefits—these respondents would purchase a hot tub to relieve sore and achy joints or muscles, and as a way to help them achieve a healthy lifestyle.
2) Specific Health Conditions—these respondents would purchase a hot tub to provide relief from specific health issues and to help manage a chronic condition or disease.
3) Rehabilitation / Rejuvenation—these respondents would purchase a hot tub to rejuvenate after playing sports or doing other strenuous activities and to recover from an injury.

According to the Harrison research, of the three prospect groups, the ‘health & wellness’
segment is the most developed and committed. This means they carry a projected conversion rate 55 per cent higher than the other two categories of prospect groups. It was also learned that the aging baby boomer is most motivated by the 'health & wellness' message. Of those surveyed, 61 per cent of respondents were aged 42-62. This is tremendous news for the industry since the most recent U.S. census report indicates there were 36.3 million Americans older than 65, and 4.9 million older than 85 in 2004. This is an incredible opportunity, as aging baby boomers are the largest growth sector of the population.

In his book, The Culture Code, author and cultural anthropologist, Dr. Clotaire Rapaille, shares profound insights on how to understand why people around the world live and buy as they do. He has created 'codes' explaining consumer perceptions that drive their buying decisions. Relative to people's perception of health and wellness, Rapaille assigns the code of 'movement or mobility.' In other words, if we are not able to get around, we perceive ourselves as unhealthy. Therefore, if a product helps us live a healthy life (able to move), the product will be 'on code' with people's desire—and they will be more receptive to making a purchase.

How does this translate to selling hot tubs? The power of understanding the 'code' is significant to the growth of the industry. We only have to link learning about the code with the research results from the Harrison Group to understand the potential to change the way hot tubs are sold—the ability to keep moving is a primary driver to convert prospects to customers. Some of these prospects may not yet have hot tubs on their radar because they haven't heard how one will benefit their health and wellness.

UNDERSTANDING HOW HOT TUBS HELP
Understanding how hot tubs help our prospects meet their need to keep moving is primary. Knowing how to sell hot tubs requires salespeople to know more than the features of the product. They need to understand and communicate the benefits. As a result, education and training on how hot water helps people's health is important to provide to salespeople.

That's where management and the sales team come in. Train sales staff on how hot tubs can make the customer's life healthier and provide them with the tools to help promote those benefits to prospective customers. Make an assessment today to determine how to take better advantage of this tremendous opportunity to provide prospects with valuable information to help them move to purchase. Take a full inventory of the lead generation process, from the time it was first promoted to the point of making the sale. And look at the process for referrals after the sale.

There is a powerful tool available now to help share the health benefits of hot tubs. For those people who have wondered how warm water makes them feel so good, a newly published book, Hot Water & Healthy Living, may help them discover the answer. Published by the National Swimming Pool Foundation (NSPF), Hot Water & Healthy Living provides a thorough review of how the pressure and warmth of warm water immersion causes the heart to pump more blood, the chest to work harder to breathe, and the mind and body to relax. It includes more than 25 sources of scholarly research presented in an easy to understand manner.

What does this small book mean for business? It is a perfect training tool for salespeople. It also provides third-party verification of the very real, scientific benefits of soaking in a hot tub. The book is inexpensive enough that retailers across the U.S. and Canada are beginning to give Hot Water & Healthy Living books away to prospective customers. They are including information about the book on websites, in their lead follow-up packages, displaying the book in the store near the check out, and by hot tub displays. Some dealers are using it as a way to bring prospects in via mall shows, fairs, television, newspaper, radio, blogs and more.

Instead of just selling a 'nice to have' item, consider each time a new customer is sold on the health benefits of immersing themselves in a hot tub as a response to a true need—meaning a customer for life.

For more on the book and how hot tub manufacturers and retailers in Canada and the U.S. are using it in their sales process, visit www.hotwaterbook.org.

For 30 years, Laurie Batter has assisted organizations, manufacturers and retailers in the swimming pool, hot tub and backyard industries, providing marketing, public relations, advertising and promotional consulting services through her full-service marketing firm, BatterUp! Productions—a boutique agency serving clients of all sizes around the globe. A past chairperson of the APS Hot Tub Council, she earned the ‘Eagle Award’ for outstanding contribution to the hot water industry, the APS's highest award for an individual. She can be reached at batterup@batterupproductions.com.