



Solutions to H₂O Problems



By Nate F. Searing



Water Wërks

2400 E. Main Street, PMB 273
St. Charles, IL 60174

20 Danada Square West, Suite 245
Wheaton, IL 60187

Tel: (630) 327-4060, cell
(630) 752-0700, office
Fax: (630) 752-0105

Email: info@waterwerksforyou.com

Web: www.waterwerksforyou.com

Owner: Richard G. Berner

Customers seem to understand the link between plumbing and water quality. They are a complimentary pair. Water purification, water softening and bottled water services are what I feel is an extension of several of the core principles of the plumbing code. The key with any service-oriented business is to give the customer more value for the dollar, and offering water treatment with our plumbing services has given us a more professional turnkey approach. This hasn't hurt our bottom line either; the average add-on sales per call has increased by 30 percent!

—Richard Berner

Water Wërks, a fully licensed, bonded and insured plumbing service business and water dealer based in Wheaton, Ill., is paving the way as the next innovation in multi-service companies. By providing products and services related to plumbing, water softening, drinking water purification and a “branded” bottled water, Water Wërks’ owner Richard Berner is creating the new standard for plumbers and water dealers alike. “Plumbing service businesses, water softening/purification companies and bottled water dealers have mostly split into separate and distinct groups, forcing their customers to make business alliances with sometimes inconsistent and questionable trade practices or service rates/fees, appurtenance health hazards and/or blatant plumbing code violations,” Berner writes on his company website, www.waterwerksforyou.com. “That split is costing all of them customers and in turn, costing them revenues day in and day out.”

As a third-generation plumber, he grew up in the family plumbing business, Berner Plumbing, Heating & Electrical Inc. After college, Berner worked in environmental sales and as a production supervisor for animal feed manufacturer, Ralston Purina. However, the job market wasn’t all he hoped for and he began to think about returning to plumbing and

obtaining the necessary licenses. Throughout his college career and for many years thereafter, he continued to provide emergency and routine plumbing services for friends and family. “I’ve always had the skills and when friends know you know how to, well, you find yourself installing the occasional faucet!” Berner said.

By 1996, Berner had returned to the plumbing world, facing about 16 months

to complete his journeyman’s plumbing license requirements. It was not until the spring of 2003 that he attended the Water Quality Association’s annual convention in Las Vegas where he joined a round table discussion group in which one dealer stood out from the rest ... Aqua Systems of Avon, Ind. Impressed by their business model, Berner approached the presenters about the idea of taking on a plumber to expand their service offerings. Now, when he visits a home, he can do much more than simply install a softener or an RO unit.

“Throughout history, the plumber has had the ultimate responsibility to uphold the plumbing code and protect the public health and sanitation,” Berner said. But the numerous violations of public and private water supply, as well as cross-contamination practices by unlicensed companies and untrained workers, means that having a water dealer that is a licensed plumber should be more than an anomaly or an added bonus, it should be a requirement, he said. “As someone who grew up in a family plumbing business, a strong work ethic was emphasized and practiced both at work and at home. Providing professional plumbing services with quality products and long warranties, water softeners and water purification units that are state-of-the-art in reliability and efficiency, are all a part of the same business



Owner Richard Berner (l) and journeyman plumber John Lech (r).

and should be guaranteed by the same service provider.”

Now, two years later, Berner’s unique approach to providing clean water is catching on. The company is expanding, serving nearly 500 customers in DuPage and Kane County. With a need to hire additional “cross-trainable” employees, Water Wërks has also expanded its product and service lines beyond the traditional offerings of a water dealer, delivering bottled water under the Aqua Systems label. The move has been so successful that a fleet expansion is planned for 2005.

And if all that weren’t enough to draw in customers, Water Wërks offers an ever-expanding array of promotional and free offers to entice new customers and up-sell existing ones, including a free sanitizing service, free upgrades on all coolers with the WaterGuard® UV filter/valve, free basic water analysis testing, incentives to upgrade to a POU cooler, newsletter sign-up offers and even restaurant gift cards for prepaying for six months or more of bottled water.

Conclusion

The Water Wërks name, like the company itself, is steeped in his family’s plumbing tradition and reflects the unique direction Berner has taken his company. The Berner Family came to this country from Germany before World War II and as homage to his father, grandfather and his heritage, the Water Wërks name (with its unique *ë*) is a public memorial, Berner said.

With the history of providing quality plumbing services and the foresight to predict the future of the water treatment industry, Berner and Water Wërks are paving the way for the water dealer/plumbers of the next generation—and leaving the competition in the dust. ♦