

You Can Live Without Soft Water ...

But It's Hard

Introduction

Las Vegas is famous for more than casinos, showgirls and millions of dazzling lights. Located in the middle of a dry, harsh desert, it's also known to have some of the nation's hardest water.

As the population of Las Vegas has exploded over the last 30 years, so too have the business opportunities for water conditioner providers and drinking water dealers in Sin City.

One independent dealer among them is H₂O To Go, a family-owned and operated dealership that like many successful businesses in Las Vegas began humbly but today is a large team of water professionals trying to keep up with the lightning-fast growth of the city.

H₂O To Go started in 1981 as Soft Water of Nevada, distributing water softeners to a small customer base in the (then) small town of Las Vegas. In 1985, Bill Bacon, a graduate of the University of Nevada at Las Vegas with a background in water purification, purchased the company. Bacon saw the potential for growth in the residential sector of the water treatment industry in Las Vegas and quickly expanded the dealership's offerings of reverse osmosis systems and water conditioners.

Since that time, H₂O To Go has blanketed the city with water treatment equipment, providing rental and for-sale units to every part of the greater Clark County area. Although Bacon has retired, the company is still a family affair, jointly managed by his sister, Elizabeth McGuire and longtime employee Sid O'Brien.

Products and services

Many of H₂O To Go's products have been manufactured specifically for treat-



By Nate F. Searing

ing harsh Las Vegas water. The company offers a complete line of conditioning products, as well as RO systems for drinking water in residential and commercial applications.

"Las Vegas has a whole bunch of problems that make the water bad," O'Brien explained, including hardness ranging from 15 to 80 grains, high chlorine levels and growing fears about the impact of perchlorate from rocket fuel production in neighboring Henderson.

"It's very hard to find a house in Las Vegas that isn't using some sort of water purification equipment or drinking bottled water," O'Brien said.

That usage translates into thousands of new H₂O To Go customers every year. About 85 percent of the company's business comes from the residential side while the remainder is made up from providing POU/POE systems to restaurants, hospitals, hotels and other commercial outlets.

In addition to providing equipment rentals, sales and service to hundreds of new residential and commercial custom-



H₂O To Go of Las Vegas

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Employees: ~30

Owner: Bill Bacon

General Manager: Sid O'Brien



Quotable: Las Vegas has had an endless supply of people moving here that don't want to live without quality soft water, so we've had an endless supply of very happy customers.
—Sid O'Brien

ers every month, H₂O To Go has created a new niche market for itself by providing service to equipment of all types installed by other dealers.

"There are a lot of start-up companies in the city selling water purification equipment," O'Brien said. "More and more start-up every year and more and more fold every year, too."

The result, O'Brien said, is a growing market for the service of the systems such companies leave behind. "It's a whole new way to introduce the customer to our products; more than that it's a really effective way to demonstrate our commitment to customer service and our expertise."

Customer service yields new business

While H₂O To Go utilizes a wide variety of marketing and advertising to solicit new customers in the greater Las

Vegas area, the majority of their business comes from referrals, O'Brien said.

The company maintains an extensive list of its commercial clients on its website, www.h2otogo.net, along with testimonials from happy residential customers and business owners benefiting from their systems.

The site also features easy-to-understand technical information about reverse osmosis, water conditioning, hardness, water refiners and the status of Las Vegas water to help their clients better understand the water they're consuming and assist potential customers in diagnosing their own drinking water needs.

"Treating water is basically pretty simple," the site notes. "Take out the bad, leave or put in the good. Although at first the devices used to do this may seem unfamiliar and complicated, they are not. With just a few basic understandings most anyone can troubleshoot or even repair their systems in a matter of minutes."

Combined with coordinated marketing campaigns, advertising and strong

word-of-mouth, teaching water treatment basics to their clients helps maintain a longlasting relationship that guarantees H₂O To Go will be around a lot longer than their competitors, O'Brien said.

Water in the desert

While the majority of H₂O To Go's business comes from residential customers seeking relief from the city's hard tap water, which is typically 20 grains, the company also provides treatment services for a growing number of private wells in Las Vegas.

"No one ever expected that private wells would be so common in the desert, but many people drilled their own because they lived far outside the city limits just a few years ago yet they are now surrounded by development."

The problem for private well owners, O'Brien said, is that water is even worse coming from the ground than through the local municipality. Hardness from the wells is often as high as 80 grains.

To that end, H₂O To Go has seen a spike in sales of whole house softening units and RO systems for drinking water from a private well water source.

Conclusion

In the coming years, H₂O To Go will grow as the city of Las Vegas grows, O'Brien said. The company has no plans to build more offices or expand to outside the city.

That growth is the result of hundreds of commercial referrals each month, new residential development at a lightning-fast pace and the ability to continue to provide quality water to thousands of people in a desert where it is both scarce and of continually poor quality out of the tap.

"We sell our services under the tagline, *You can live without soft water...but it's hard*," O'Brien said. "Las Vegas has had an endless supply of people moving here that don't want to live without quality soft water, so we've had an endless supply of very happy customers." ♦