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DEALER PROFILE: Sin City's Thirst Quenchers

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Much has been said in recent months about diminishing water supplies throughout the arid southwest, notably in America's desert playground. Explosive growth in Las Vegas, Nev. continues to make additional demands on the region's already struggling water infrastructure. Businesses and residents alike must face the realities of water availability and quality as never before.

Enter water industry veterans Tom Cartwright and Mike Paice (with 25 and 31 years of experience, respectively), who joined forces to purchase GWC, Inc. Cartwright holds two patents for water treatment applications, with one still pending, while Paice holds one. "Our goal is to make a difference," Cartwright said. "We have the products and technology to do just that. Our objective over the next five to 10 years is to lead the industry in new technologies for water treatment, expand globally in strategic markets and fully educate our market channels on available technologies and options."

The business was started in 1006 with a mission based on the concept of point of use (POU) reverse osmosis (RO) systems that utilize a newly patented process. Subsidiary and retail dealership Diamond Water of Las Vegas, Nev. is the primary supplier for GWC's trademarked PureOFlow systems for residential and commercial applications. The parent company handles all of North America; its systems are now installed in Florida, Minnesota, Illinois, Missouri, Texas, Arizona, California, Michigan and Canada. Future expansion into international markets is expected in the next couple of years. The firm serves four primary markets (residential, food and beverage, HVAC and hotels). Residential is the most consistent of the four, while the food and beverage market is the strongest performer.

GWC also offers educational programs about water issues and created its own media shows to address the most important aspects. "We air a radio program every Sunday entitled *The Truth About Water*, along with television spots and publicity releases. We also host seminars for various water-related organizations," said Cartwright.

As industry and customer needs change, challenges arise that need to be addressed sooner rather than later. Cartwright sees technology, pricing-versus-value and globalization as the biggest changes in immediate need of attention. "Technology must keep one step ahead of demand. To date, most of us have been focusing on making things cheaper and more efficient. The time is now to incorporate visionary new concepts to address global water demands."

Just as critical is price-versus-value. “Because something is cheaper doesn’t mean it is necessarily better,” explained Cartwright. “Our market needs to focus on providing value, not just looking for cheaper materials and lower labor costs.” Greater numbers of products are coming from Asian manufacturers and more and more major water treatment companies are having their products molded and/or manufactured outside the US and Europe; the net result of this transition (that goes beyond lower costs) is that new markets are being opened up to western companies. How those markets are approached will be critical in the years to come.

Customer service is an ongoing challenge that must be addressed more positively, Cartwright stressed. “Call a company for service and get five phone prompts before reaching a live voice—often based halfway around the world. Try asking for help outside a company’s written policy and you hit a brick wall. Any company in our industry willing and able to make customer services a true priority and not just a marketing slogan will succeed in the future.”

Cartwright is very confident that continued industry consolidation by large corporations will open doors for small companies with a vision. Processes are changing and perceptions of what is the best product or market must adapt as well. This creates opportunities for alternatives to be discovered, produced and marketed. “Ion exchange is under pressure in many states. We see this increasing rather than decreasing over time. In addition, media attention is driving scrutiny of bottled water—from waste (i.e. not recycling), to the source of that water,” he noted. “Alternative solutions—like our systems—will take over as consumers continue to look for ways to improve the quality of their water.”