



Spread *the Word*

Now that you've got 'green' certifications
let everybody know *By Jack Sweet*

It's one thing to invest a lot of time for you and your techs to pick up one or more of the many green plumber certifications available today. It's quite another to let your customers know that you possess the knowledge, skills and techniques to help them save money on their water bill while making their water use more efficient through the studied application of products. What good is it to have the best services in town with the most knowledgeable techs if nobody in your market area knows about it?

"One of the biggest issues is when a contractor goes through a training that isn't mandatory, *per se*, they get really excited about it but wonder how they can go about integrating it into their businesses and create a revenue stream," said Jon Cruz, Sacramento-based executive vice president of GreenPlumbers USA. "What we usually do at the end of the courses is give them about a 20-minute presentation on the marketing aspect of things. So, about a week later we will reach out to them and see how the training was and do a customer service follow-up. The No. 1 question is, 'How do I get a return on this investment?'"

It depends on where you are. In some areas of the country there seems to be much more public understanding, said Chuck White, the vice president of technical and code services for the Plumbing-Heating-Cooling-Contractors—National Association. He's based in South Bend, Ind., and the PHCC Certified Water Auditor Certification Program falls under his supervision.

"People are including it [their green certifications] in their advertising, whether it's billboards or on their trucks or whatever. They're trying to put out there that they've done the training, have some expertise in the field and can provide these services for you to benefit your bottom line and the environment," White said. "We have some people who are more innovative than others, but one of the aspects in the training is the ability to try and help people. You can approach people with logical projections."

White said some people are using auditing programs as a way to open the door to the hotel market and other people want to go out and evaluate facilities with no strings attached.

"One of the guys who took the test at our convention in October was thinking about strictly being a water auditor," White said. "All he wanted to do was go out and evaluate facilities as an independent voice so he can make recommendations without selling stuff. Really the people who have gotten the certification are approaching it from some really different perspectives."

Mike Massey, executive director of the Piping Industry Progress & Education Trust Fund, said the United Association of Journeymen and Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe Fitting Industry of the United States, Canada and Australia's green commitment encompasses the union's mainstream plumbing and piping group while also offering green certifications in its HVAC division.

"You have to cover all of your basics," Massey said. "You have to have a commitment to green on your website, on your business cards and on your trucks. You should have a video or a DVD. Anything else you do that's in the media these days. You have to see that the market you're operating in has an interest in green. There are certain developers who promote themselves as being green. If I were a subcontractor in construction I'd find out who the green developers are and I'd pitch my wares to them. If I were a service and repair guy I could make a pitch about saving you water and energy if you put in all low-flow fixtures."

One of the first basics to cover is to get the word out and establish yourself as the expert. How do you do that?

"Well, you get yourself out from behind your desk and out of your truck and talk to people and get into social events," said John Smith, the Arizona Green Plumber. He's with Greenideasusa.com

"Start meeting people in the sustainable circle because the first question they ask is, 'What makes a plumber green?' You'd better be prepared to answer that. My answer is always, 'I have the opportunity to affect more homeowners' purchasing decisions on green products than anybody in this entire room,'" Smith said. "I'm in so many homes a day and I present that green product first. I show them the option that works and if they install it we might be able



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to get part of it paid for through rebate programs. You have to be willing to put that out there and you have to be willing to make your technicians go through that process. If they're not willing to go through the process, and it's not an easy one, but if you get them talking to your customers it's just like anything else. Again, you need to style yourself as the expert."

The idea, Smith said, is to get contractors and municipalities to join together and bring the contractor into a light that will have everyone think of the contractor as more than just a contractor. The idea is to use green to elevate that service professional to a different level.

"It's all done on a grassroots level, getting your boots on the ground and talking to people and showing them you have this powerful tool, which is your green plumber training. For example, I do a radio show on Sundays called 'Plunging into Green'. The people before asked what my show was about. I told them I'm a plumber and I do a show on sustainability. They didn't think I looked like a plumber. Just because I don't look like a plumber doesn't mean I'm not one. A plumber can wear a tie; a plumber can get up and speak to 500 people in the blink of an eye. That's what we want them to do with the green tools. We want them to realize it's something they can do to elevate themselves in their communities."

Not everyone has a radio show or gets invitations to speak in front of an audience of 500 people. But Smith said the key is starting at the grassroots level by working the basics. And other experts agree working the basics is a key phrase.

"You're educated. Take your education and put it in front of the municipalities. Sit down with them and tell them you'd like to offer the residents of the city or county a small class to go over the new products that have come out," Smith said. "You have to show them what's out there because if people don't know what's out there they're not going to buy the product. Early in February I'm going to a retirement community to talk about sustainability. That will put me in front of 60 homeowners. That's a chance to talk to 60 people all at once. It's pretty darn good in my eyes. Go set up a booth at a green show. People are going to walk over to a toilet just to see what it's about. If you have the product knowledge, and most manufacturers are willing to teach you about their products, you become an extension of their sales team they don't have to pay a lot for. The truth is you have to work it and you can get recognition almost immediately as long as you take the steps you need to take."

GreenPlumbers USA's Cruz said now that GreenPlumbers training conducted through IAPMO has become "almost the industry standard" for green plumbing training, the branding and the logo are highly recognizable. That branding and those logos are available for certified GreenPlumbers to use as part of their GreenPlumbers USA membership.

"The biggest thing is, once one becomes a member, we have a program we call the Niagara Green City program. It's run with our partners at Niagara Conservation. It's a retrofit program that is run through local municipalities."

Cruz said the group targets municipalities where there are licensed GreenPlumbers: "We work with the municipality, figure out what the water rates are and then we suggest certain manufacturers and products that will give the customers savings, be it multi-family, industrial, residential, whatever it may happen to be. There's no capital outlay for the property owner and we ensure that our GreenPlumbers get 100 percent of that work."

GreenPlumbers USA is a commercial organization that works very closely with certified GreenPlumbers. The training to become a certified GreenPlumber goes through IAPMO's well-known GreenPlumbers training program. Once you receive training and certification through IAPMO you're an accredited GreenPlumber and that's when GreenPlumbers USA steps in and helps with marketing and other issues. Steve Lehtonen is the senior vice president of environmental education at the IAPMO Group. He said all the basic marketing bases should be covered, but it's important to know your own strengths and weaknesses.

"I would say you start out as a contractor and you look at your strengths as a contractor. You never want to lose track of the things that got you where you are," Lehtonen said. "So the first thing is to take stock of your company. Being 'green' is an extra option that gives your customers that much more."

Contractors receive benefits, too, Lehtonen said. Just going to the classes gives you a totally new perspective. Next is, if you own a company, sending your employees motivates them. They get excited and look at their work a different way.

"No. 3 is the value to take to a customer. I said this back in 2007-2008 and it hasn't changed," he said. "The customer already knows what they want—they've done the research. So they call and contractor and they say, 'I've really been thinking about these toilets because they save water'. And the contractor, if he's not totally onboard, loses the sale many times. Or they get into a pitched battle with the homeowner who knows what he wants but the contractor is offering a different toilet because he's had good experiences with it. And the homeowner says, 'Yeah, but that's not what I want.' Being green and being certified green puts you on that higher plane with most consumers when you're negotiating a contract with them."

The bottom line is that a green certification can elevate you in the eyes of your customers but it's not just about sticking a patch on a shirt or a sticker on a truck.

"Look at yourself and elevate yourself past what others would think of your field," Smith said. "It takes a commitment. Nothing is worse than when I hear plumber jokes. They make me cringe. If we can find something to elevate ourselves in our communities and have people look at us in a different light, I don't care if it's charity work or if it's green, we just need to do something to elevate the trade."

White pointed out this is a really a very established market with a real demand: "I'd like to think about them getting involved," he said. "A lot of people sit on the sidelines and think there isn't a market for this and there are products that aren't developed. Whether it's PHCC or whoever, there is a wealth of education out there and a wealth of high performance products that work very well." **RJ**