

## CASE STUDY

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# PACE Supply's Training Efforts Build Markets For Specialty Products, Despite Down Economy

*Northern California wholesaler PACE Supply invests in employee and customer product training and uses these educational efforts as a driver for growth.*

BY JOHN O'REILLY

SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA — Conventional wisdom holds that if you give a man a fish, he eats for a day, while teaching a man to fish means he eats for a lifetime. The debate has always been does this same

educational approach work in the world of business: Do investments in training deliver long-term results in terms of increased sales?

In Santa Rosa, California plumbing and HVAC wholesaler PACE Supply is answering that question with a resounding yes. Founded in 1994, the employee-owned company has grown to 12 locations throughout northern California. From its founding the company's mission has been to create an environment that enhances the quality of life for its team members through a commitment to education.



PACE VP//BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BARRY NITZBERG ADDRESSES A RECENT SEMINAR FOCUSING ON SANIFLO MACERATING PLUMBING SYSTEMS.

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“Team members” at PACE, of course, includes not only those employed within the organization, but also its customers, vendors and reps. And why not? The education value equation benefits each and every one of them.

**Business builder:** Education has been the vehicle to create new business for PACE and vendor partners like SFA Saniflo Inc. despite the economic slowdown. A manufacturer of a complete line of macerating toilet systems and gray water pumping systems for residential and commercial applications, Saniflo offers a specialty product solves complicated and costly remodeling problems. Rather than bust up a concrete floor to add a basement or below-grade bathroom, Saniflo’s above-floor plumbing systems makes it possible to install a complete bathroom on top of a finished floor virtually anywhere in a structure — with no need for digging to create drainage connections. In areas with an older housing stock as well as smaller office and retail spaces, such as in cities like San Francisco and Oakland, the need for this solution is great. But contractors and their customers need to be informed and educated on all the possibilities — residential, commercial and institutional.

Launching a complete product education program requires a significant time and resource commitment, but the staff at PACE has systemized the process for speed and efficiency and to ensure the learning outcomes. “Education is the foundation of our business development plan,” says PACE vice president/business development Barry Nitzberg. “We have a year-long core curriculum that each new member of the sales staff completes, and we work with vendors and reps to create dozens of product-specific modules.”

For a supplier like Saniflo, this commitment to education makes all the difference.



SANIFLO WESTERN REGIONAL SALES MANAGER CHRIS PETERSON (FAR RIGHT) LEADS A PACE TRAINING SESSION: “WORKING WITH PACE TO TRAIN ITS CUSTOMERS ENSURES WE CAPTURE THE MARKET.”

Western regional sales manager Chris Peterson says the market and demand for Saniflo solutions has always existed, but it takes an informed sales person to explain the technology to a prospect. “Most end-users have a need for our products, but since it’s not an impulse buy, many buyers need the reassurance that our technology works and does the job efficiently. The expertise and advice from PACE employees who are well-trained creates a level of confidence in end-users that can’t be accomplished by literature and a web site alone.”

PACE’s training efforts with and on behalf of Saniflo have changed the product conversation. “When a potential customer calls a PACE location, we want the most professional and knowledgeable service given to them,” explains Peterson. “Training the staff at PACE and working with PACE to train its customers ensures we capture the market by providing an extra, independent resource for consumers who have unique plumbing installation problems.”

While education takes many forms at PACE — some classroom-based and others through one-on-one defined mentor relationships — training manager Aletia Sexton says some of the highlight events on her year-long calendar include:

- **Field Market Summit:** Suppliers are invited to this annual event to tell the product story. Each manufacturer explains the technical side — how its products work and install — as well as answering the value questions that equip PACE personnel with the selling features and product benefits. For a solutions-oriented product like Saniflo, conducting an in-depth orientation to its line for the sales staff at PACE benefits both organizations. “Our salespeople become a better resource for our customers, and the Saniflo story gets told to potential clients who didn’t know the



PACE VP/BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT BARRY NITZBERG (FAR RIGHT) WITH (FROM LEFT) JEFF GAGNON OF DCS PACIFIC, SANIFLO WESTERN REGIONAL SALES MANAGER CHRIS PETERSON AND PACE TRAINING MANAGER ALETIA SEXTON.

technology existed to solve their plumbing problem,” explains Nitzberg.

- **Counter Days:** Saniflo rep Scott Smith of DCS Pacific conducted numerous product-training sessions at PACE branches, highlighting the recent decision by the City of San Francisco to allow Saniflo products. Smith combined this effort with joint sales calls with PACE’s outside sales force. “Having a training framework makes it easier to respond in a constructive way to the changing regulatory landscape,” says Sexton. “We identify what program will pay the greatest dividends and work within our framework to get classes organized quickly.”

Proof that all these efforts and all this time pay off? Nitzberg doesn’t need anything more than a quick glance at his product sales sheets to know. “Even in a down market we are driving business with this product line,” he says. “The law changed, we responded with education, and the result is increased sales.”

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**SFA SANIFLO INC.** is the only manufacturer of its kind in North America, offering a complete line of macerating toilet systems and gray water pumping systems for residential and commercial applications. Saniflo markets through independent sales agents throughout North America, and the product line is currently available at distributor and dealer locations throughout the United States and Canada.

**For more information,** contact Saniflo at 1-800-571-8191. Or visit the Saniflo website at [www.saniflo.com](http://www.saniflo.com).

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