

Listen And Learn

Long Island dealer hears sounds of success

By Lindsay Renick Mayer

Quality products, reasonable prices and creative marketing are all key elements for pool and spa companies that have a constantly growing list of customers. Joseph Musnicki, president of Ocean Spray Pools and Spas, with stores in New York and North Carolina, says investing in his committed staff of 35 has been the biggest key to his company's success.

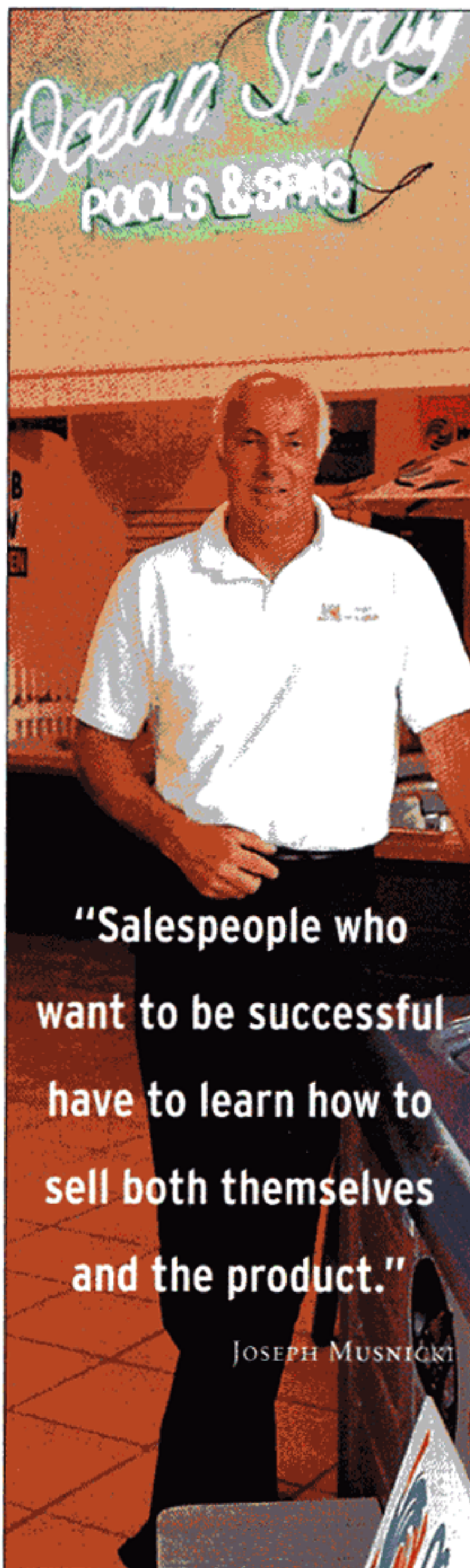
"We have a lot of dedicated people here that go the extra mile to make sure things are done properly and on time," Musnicki says. "If you have a company that has great management, you allow your key people to take charge and delegate."

Bob Green, manager of the company's Westhampton Beach, N.Y., store, says Musnicki is wise to treat his employees well and ensure they're providing quality service. "You make sure your people are happy," Green says. "You get more with sugar and honey than you will with salt and vinegar."

Ocean Spray, which has been in business since 1981, is celebrating its 25th anniversary this year. After working as a sales representative for PepsiCo. for 15 years, Musnicki took what he had learned about store layout, merchandising and displays to fill the need he saw for a good service and repair business in Westhampton Beach.

The company's startup costs were under \$1,000 at a time when the stock market was surging and the housing market was growing. "I always wanted to have a business in my own community," Musnicki says. "And it just grew and grew and grew."

Today, Ocean Spray specializes in hot tubs and saunas and has showrooms on Long Island in



Westhampton Beach, Farmingdale and Port Jefferson; as well as in Morehead City, N.C. The company provides pool and spa service and repairs and showcases more than 15 brands of spas, including Hot Spring, Tiger River, Hot Spot and Solana Spas. According to Musnicki, Ocean Spray has a referral rate of 45-50 percent and sells over 500 hot tubs and saunas each year.

Because listening to customers is such an important part of providing stellar service, Musnicki says he strives to find the right employees who can listen well and then trains them how to do so effectively. The average length of employment at Ocean Spray is seven years and many people have worked there for more than 20 — a testament to the positive work environment there. "We look for friendly people, outgoing people, who can listen and who have a work history of some longevity with a company," Musnicki says.

He then provides his employees with in-house training during their first week and will send them out to a vendor's factory in California to learn about their products, depending on the employee's position. "They really are the ones on the front lines," Musnicki says. "They're in touch with the customers on a daily basis, whether in service, sales, administration or bookkeeping. You really need a professional face on all of those departments."

Salespeople who want to be successful have to learn how to sell both themselves and the product, Green says, adding that Ocean Spray is unique in that it has multiple salespeople in multiple locations.

"If you're liked, you'll get business."