

MAXIMIZING BOAT SHOW ROI

BOAT SHOW

EXHIBITOR

SPRING 2012

TARGETING YOUNG, MULTICULTURAL BUYERS



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SPRING 2012

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FEATURES



ARE YOU READY FOR THE NEXT GENERATION OF BOATERS?

Your future customers will be younger and culturally diverse. Make sure your marketing and exhibit space reflect that change.



THE WOW FACTOR

Three companies share the secrets behind their head-turning exhibits.



BUILDING BUZZ

If you want to make sales at the boat show, make news at the boat show.



BOTTOM-LINE BUSTERS

The seven most common (and costly) boat show blunders—and how to avoid them.

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A Second Show for the **SECOND CITY**



PROGRESSIVE **CHICAGO IN-WATER BOAT SHOW**

Chicago, Illinois' newest marina will host its newest boat show. The first ever Progressive® Insurance Chicago In-Water Boat Show® will take place June 7 to 10 at 31st Street Harbor on the city's South Side.

The show will feature roughly 150 power and sailboats for sale, test-drives and demos, and complimentary boating courses at Discover Boating's Demo Dock. Attendees can also pick up travel and safety tips, and shop for the latest marine electronics and accessories from more than 100 vendors.

The four-day show will be the first

major event held at the brand-new facility featuring 1,000 fully equipped floating slips, a fuel dock, room for boats up to 200 feet, a playground, a lawn area and an indoor parking garage.

This show will become "a favorite annual tradition for boaters and a summer sales haven for the region's dealers and manufacturers," predicts NMMA executive vice president Ben Wold.

Admission is \$10 for adults, and free for kids 15 and younger.

For more information, visit

www.chicagoinwaterboatshow.com.

[SCORECARD]

The first reports from the 2012 boat show season are in! Here are attendance stats and exhibitor feedback on some of the major shows that kicked off the year.

Houston International Boat, Sport & Travel Show

The Houston, Texas show reported better than expected attendance in the wake of a forced shutdown during its first Saturday due to an NFL playoff game, and flood waters that prevented exhibitors and consumers from getting to the show the following Monday. Despite these obstacles, the show saw **a 15% boost in attendance** the next day over the same day last year, and overall, dealers indicated **sales were steady**.

"Dealers were cautiously optimistic about a stronger 2012 boating season."

—Ken Lovell, show president

Seattle Boat Show Indoors + Afloat

Attendance at the Seattle, Washington show was down for the first time in three years, dropping 11% compared to 2011. Organizers have cited the elimination of a free parking promotion as the leading cause for the decline. Despite this, dealers and brokers reported **a positive spike in boat sales**.

"Buyers turned out in full force, shopping for fishing boats, sailboats, cruisers, performance boats—you name it. Not every exhibitor enjoyed the same success, but this is the first time in several years that we've heard a consistent message through the show: Buyers are here."

—George Harris, president,
Northwest Marine Trade Association

2012 Show Calendar

April

12-15: Strictly Sail Pacific
Oakland, California

19-22: Mid-Columbia
Boat & RV Show
Richland, Washington

19-22: Newport Boat Show
Newport Beach, California

19-22: Texas International
Boat Show
Corpus Christi, Texas

20-22: Lake Havasu
Boat Show
Lake Havasu State Park,
California

20-22: Southeast U.S.
Boat Show
Jacksonville, Florida

May

4-6: Progressive® Insurance
Catawba Island Boat Show®
Port Clinton, Ohio

11-12: Logan Martin LakeFest
and Boat Show
Pell City, Alabama

June

7-10: Progressive® Insurance
Chicago In-Water Boat Show®
Chicago, Illinois

8-10: National Houseboat
Expo on Water Show
Jamestown, Kentucky

20-24: Houston Summer
Boat Show
Houston, Texas

August

10-12: Maine Boats, Homes &
Harbors Show
Rockland, Maine

17-19: Carolina Fall Boat Show
& Sale
Raleigh, North Carolina

18-19: Port of Toledo Wooden
Boat Show
Toledo, Oregon

23-26: Progressive®
Insurance Michigan City
In-Water Boat Show®
Michigan City, Indiana

September

6-9: Atlantic City In-Water Power
Boat & Brokerage Yacht Show
Atlantic City, New Jersey

7-9: Port Townsend Wooden
Boat Festival
Port Townsend, Washington

7-9: Central New York Fall
Boat Show
Syracuse, New York

12-16: Progressive®
Insurance North American
In-Water Boat Show®
Sandusky, Ohio

20-23: Progressive® Insurance
Norwalk Boat Show®
Norwalk, Connecticut

27-30: Lido Yacht Expo
Newport Beach, California

28-30: Progressive® Insurance
Tampa Boat Show®
Tampa, Florida



Tim McAfee

Progressive® Insurance Miami International Boat Show & Strictly Sail®

The Miami, Florida event attracted about 101,000 visitors, down 3% from 2011. Many boat and accessory exhibitors reported **strong, quality traffic and record sales** since the economic downturn.

"We're not in the numbers game as far as attendance goes—the quality and the seriousness of the buyer is what's of greatest concern."

—Cathy Rick-Joule, show manager

"This year's show was the best in the last few years. We are very optimistic that the show has kicked off a great season for boat sales, and the momentum from the show should continue for months ahead."

—Chris Peterson, president, Hell's Bay Boatworks

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ACCESSORY
OPPORTUNITIES



Three-quarters of all boat owners purchased at least one boating accessory last year, making accessories an integral part of the boat purchasing process, reports the 2011 Boating Industry Accessory Market Study, published by NMMA and Foresight Research. The report details what types of accessories boaters are buying, how much they're spending and the best time to reel them in.

Here are a few of the ways boat buyers discover what accessories are available:

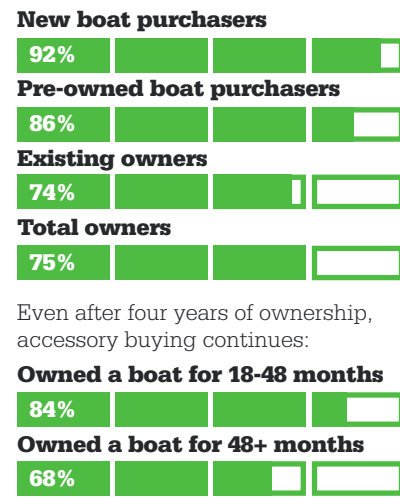
Source	New boat purchasers	Pre-owned boat purchasers
Salesperson	44%	27%
Display at dealership/retailer	27%	12%
Boat Show	22%	12%
Boat brochure	30%	13%
Internet	27%	17%

To inquire about the research, please contact Ron Hein at RonH@foresightresearch.com.

Who's
Buying?

Three out of four boat owners purchased accessories in 2011.

Percentage of boat owners who purchased at least one type of accessory in 2011:



HEAD TO THE HILL

American Boating Congress

WASHINGTON, D.C.
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KNOWLEDGE IS POWER

For your business to succeed, you must understand the challenges facing the industry. The 2012 American Boating Congress (ABC) in Washington, D.C. provides industry professionals with the opportunity to have an impact on Capitol Hill and meet one-on-one with congressional representatives and their staffs.

At the event, which is scheduled for April 24 and 25, you can advocate for legislative changes

to help your business prosper as well as take the first step toward forging a rapport with your elected officials.

It's not all about voicing your concerns, though—there will be plenty of listening to do, too. The ABC offers engaging seminars on the latest developments in the industry, just in time for the summer boating season. Plus, you'll have a chance to interact with ABC co-hosts.

DON'T MISS THESE SPEAKERS

- **Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse** (D-RI)
- **Greg Ip**, *The Economist*
- **Francisco Sánchez**, Under Secretary of Commerce for International Trade
- **Rep. Andy Harris** (R-MD)
- **Jon Jarvis**, Director of the National Park Service
- **Neil Newhouse**, Public Opinion Strategies

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ARE YOU READY FOR THE NEXT

GENERATION OF BOATERS?

Your future customers will be younger and culturally diverse. Make sure your marketing and exhibit space reflect that change.

Boating typically conjures up the image of a white, middle-aged male. And that's largely where boat show exhibitors have put their focus. It makes marketing sense: Whites account for approximately 90 percent of U.S. boat owners, according to NMMA. But dramatic demographic shifts point to the need for exhibitors to adopt new multicultural marketing strategies—or risk losing the next generation of boaters.

“If the boating industry hopes to grow our share of the market and attract more people to our lifestyle and sport, we need to take the blinders off and recognize the buying power of those outside the traditional stereotype,” says Wanda Kenton Smith, owner of Kenton Smith Marketing in Destin, Florida and president of the Marine Marketers of America.

BY EVAN PETERSON

U.S. census figures reveal the Hispanic population over the age of 18 grew by 45 percent between 2000 and 2010—up to 16 percent of the total population. The African-American population older than 18 grew 17 percent and now makes up 14 percent of the total population. And although the overall numbers are smaller, the Asian-American population jumped 46 percent, making it a fast-growing—and lucrative—niche.

By 2050, the Census Bureau projects that non-Hispanic whites will be the minority.

Despite the numbers, young multicultural consumers are often neglected, Kenton Smith says. “These segments have their share of affluence and in particular markets are prime candidates for boating,” she says.

Kenton Smith points to the significant buying power of Hispanics in the Miami market, and the



MINORITY BUYING POWER

The top states in terms of Hispanic, black and Asian buying power:

Source: Selig Center for Economic Growth, University of Georgia

CALIFORNIA
Hispanic: \$265 billion
Black: \$64 billion
Asian: \$172 billion

TEXAS
Hispanic: \$176 billion
Black: \$72 billion
Asian: \$34 billion

NEW YORK
Hispanic: \$81 billion
Black: \$91 billion
Asian: \$54 billion

NEW JERSEY
Asian: \$34 billion

ILLINOIS
Hispanic: \$44 billion
Asian: \$24 billion

GEORGIA
Black: \$66 billion

FLORIDA
Hispanic: \$107 billion
Black: \$63 billion



VAST POTENTIAL

The 2010 U.S. census reveals sharply changing demographics that boat show exhibitors in any region should take into account.

+43% vs. **+1%**

Hispanic population growth from 2000 to 2010

Caucasian population growth from 2000 to 2010

The minority population increased in all 50 states from 2000 to 2010. And **the Hispanic population overall shot up 43 percent** compared to just 1 percent for the Caucasian population.

97 million

The demographic shift is even starker when looking at census projections. **The total Hispanic population is expected to grow by more than 97 million from 2000 to 2050.** The African-American population is expected to increase by more than 17 million in the same period, while the white population is expected to grow just 7.6 million.

large number of affluent, active black boaters in the Washington, D.C., Virginia and Atlanta areas.

A DIFFERENT APPROACH TO MARKETING

Young, multicultural consumers often respond differently to marketing efforts than the more traditional boating audience. Here are some strategies to capture these audiences:

Get them on the water. Many young, minority consumers have never been boating. Recruit boaters to co-host an open house or day cruise, and offer free tickets to a boat show. "These events help introduce new people to the sport," says Maurice Nicholson, chief strategy officer at UniWorld Group, a multicultural

ad agency based in New York, New York.

Ramp up your online presence. Weaned on technology, young consumers, especially minorities, can be found increasingly online and on mobile devices. Black internet users, for example, are 30 percent more likely to visit Twitter than the rest of the population, according to a Nielsen and National Newspaper Publishers Association study. Additionally, more than half of African-Americans between the ages of 25 and 34 own a smartphone, making the demographic a prime target for mobile marketing.

Although Hispanics don't own mobile phones at the same rate as African-Americans or Caucasians, they're more likely to

access the internet, email and instant message on those devices, according to a study by the Pew Hispanic Center.

However, just because some minority audiences use technology at a greater rate doesn't mean you can blindly blitz them with online campaigns.

"You have to ask whether your message is right for those platforms and you have to have the right entity delivering those messages," Nicholson says.

Find the right partners. You don't always need to recruit an industry insider. On Twitter, for example, exhibitors can use an actor or other celebrity with a solid following "who's listened to, who's credible and who happens to be a boater," Nicholson says.

A power shift in terms of marketing opportunities is likely to come with this change in population makeup. This can be a huge positive for boat show exhibitors, according to Wanda Kenton Smith of the Marine Marketers Association.

"Those who embrace these various markets in addition to the old faithful have the potential to grow sales."

Dynamic Growth

Hispanic buying power throughout the United States is expected to grow from \$1 trillion in 2010 to \$1.5 trillion by 2015.

African-American buying power is expected to grow from \$957 billion in 2010 to \$1.2 trillion by 2015.

And the trend shows no sign of abating, especially with a Hispanic baby boom happening. The 2010 census revealed that the under-18 Hispanic population grew 39 percent from 2000. By comparison, that number decreased by 10 percent among whites.

The number of African-American households earning at least \$75,000 per year increased by 64 percent from 2000 to 2009—12 percent more than the population at large.

Even at the height of the recession in 2008, African-American consumers spent \$2.8 billion on entertainment and leisure.

Sources: Selig Center for Economic Growth, Nielsen and the National Newspaper Publishers Association, Target Market News

Exhibitors should also align with youth or minority organizations. Along with targeting boating-specific groups such as Black Boaters of America, reach out to associations for young, black, Asian-American and Hispanic professionals.

Entertain them at the show. “The younger demo has been raised in an entertainment era,” Kenton Smith says, “so the more you can do to create excitement in the booth, the better.”

Wakeboard gear manufacturers, for example, drew in younger attendees at recent shows, she says, with large-screen displays, contests and special events.

Make them feel welcome. Whatever marketing tactics you use, the young market demands inclusiveness. Think about how youth would boat differently and cater your approach. The skiing industry, for example, has had success with a “try and buy” technique, where ski shops offer discounts for first-time skiers.

“Consider developing a program along the same lines—first with an experiential event without a purchase to generate qualified leads,” Nicholson says. Then follow up, perhaps with a discount on an entry-level vessel.

“You’re bringing them into a community, not just seeing them as a customer,” he says. “And once they’re in, they’re in for the long haul.”

Tip: Consider creating bilingual marketing materials,

suggests Wanda Kenton Smith of the Marine Marketers of America. If you’re exhibiting at a show that draws a significant Latino population, for example, you might want to have handouts in Spanish, as well as a staffer who speaks Spanish.



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THREE COMPANIES SHARE
THE SECRETS BEHIND THEIR
HEAD-TURNING EXHIBITS.

by Don Sadler



Cigarette Racing Team

How to Wow: Recruit some like-minded partners to ramp up the excitement in your booth.

Powerful machines. Glamorous brands. Stunning models. Cigarette Racing Team certainly knows how to grab attention, nabbing the best boat-builder display award at not one but two prior boat shows. But the lush exhibit also reinforces the company's message.

"Everything at our boat show exhibits is part of a cohesive marketing plan designed to project the Cigarette brand and image of sexy, hot and bold," says Marilyn DeMartini, public relations representative for the company in Opa-Locka, Florida. "Cigarette has a very loyal following, and this is what our fans expect to see."

Part of the appeal comes from partnerships with other high-performance luxury brands. At the Progressive® Insurance Miami International Boat Show®, for example, the Cigarette exhibit featured a Mercedes-Benz C63 AMG Coupe Black Series car and a Ducati motorcycle.

"These aren't just publicity stunts or toys we throw into the exhibit to look cool," DeMartini says. "It's cross-marketing with our strategic partners who are performance enthusiasts."

Visitors to the booth could pose for pictures with the vehicles and models. The photos were then posted on Cigarette's Facebook page, connecting visitors directly to the brand via the exhibit.

To stay organized, the company keeps a spreadsheet documenting each and every element that goes into the behind-the-scenes planning for its boat show exhibits.

And the payoff is obvious: more customers stopping by to check out the action. "All of the lighting, sound, photography and video are designed to create lots of movement, color and excitement," DeMartini says.

"Everything at our boat show exhibits is part of a cohesive marketing plan designed to project the Cigarette brand and image of sexy, hot and bold."

—Marilyn DeMartini,
Cigarette Racing Team



Yamaha Marine Group

How to Wow: Use the show to play up your cred from expert endorsers.

If you've got it, flaunt it. Armed with testimonials from professional anglers, Yamaha Marine Group likes to show them off at its boat show exhibit.

"These personalities engage our customers, help draw them into the exhibit and give them an experience they will remember," says Cindy Thompson, corporate sponsorship and events manager for the Kennesaw, Georgia-based company. "And, of course, all of this ties back to our brand and the fact that these personalities use Yamaha motors."

The engine manufacturer pulled in 200 people at the Miami show when it taped a segment of the popular fishing program *Sportsman's Adventures With Captain Rick Murphy* right in its exhibit. Yamaha also ran continuous video footage of TV shows such as *Shark Men* on a giant 12-by-21-foot video screen.

From a design standpoint, the company stresses simplicity backed by strategy.

"We design our exhibit layout so it's inviting and lends itself to selling," Thompson says. "I want visitors to see our products everywhere they look—not have them hidden by huge displays."

When visitors want to learn more, QR codes on the engine display take them directly to the product website. "And an informational kiosk connected to the Yamaha website demonstrates how prospective buyers can hone in on the right propeller," she adds.



TYING WOW TO ROI

Having the latest technology displays, cool motorcycles and TV tapings in your boat show exhibit may get people talking—but it won't mean much without added sales.

"If your exhibit doesn't support your marketing message and your products, then it's just a publicity stunt," says Marilyn DeMartini of Cigarette Racing Team. "Obviously, we want to attract show visitors to our booth. But we're really focused on our customers and potential customers, because we're there to sell boats."

To achieve exhibit ROI, accessory manufacturer Dometic Group follows three rules, according to Shryl Conner, the company's trade show manager in Pompano Beach, Florida:

- 1. Grab attention.** Electronic imaging, engaging and informative graphics, and an open and inviting exhibit space can all help pull people in.
- 2. Create operational product displays.** For Dometic, that means heads that actually flush and cross-sections of air-conditioning units.
- 3. Staff your booth with the right people.** The company includes representatives from sales, service and engineering at all of its boat show exhibits.

Raymarine

How to Wow: Make it easy for attendees to play with your products.

On crowded boat show floors, electronics manufacturer Raymarine tries to pull in attendees with interactivity.

"Live demonstrations of a product's capabilities are a great way to get customers out of the aisles and into the exhibit," says Jim McGowan, marketing manager at the Nashua, New Hampshire company.

Raymarine's newest means of luring prospects is the virtual sea trial.

"One of the challenges of demonstrating marine electronics in a static convention center is bringing them to life," McGowan says. "So we brought the water into the convention center virtually."

Raymarine built a mock-up helm of a 38-foot center console sportfishing boat tricked out with software to mimic a ride on the water. Visitors could choose from 15 different ports to experience the system in action.

"Everything on the console works, and the view through the windshield is reflected with GPS accuracy on the Raymarine electronics," McGowan explains.

But when it came to promoting the e7 Network Multifunction Display, Raymarine was forced to rethink its exhibition strategy due to the product's small size.

"The display is only seven inches wide, and we needed a way to showcase it to a larger boat show audience," he says. "So we put an HD camera on the display and projected it onto a 55-inch LED screen. This enables visitors to experience all of its features larger than life."

Many customers are still a little intimidated by technology, McGowan adds, "so the big-screen product demonstration lets them see firsthand how easy the product is to use. That immediately gets them more comfortable with the product and also gets the questions flowing, too."

The demonstration program has led to increased sales in the weeks following the show, he says. 🚀

"One of the challenges of demonstrating marine electronics in a static convention center is bringing them to life. So we brought the water into the convention center virtually."

—Jim McGowan, Raymarine



BUILDING BUZZ

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE SALES AT THE BOAT SHOW,
MAKE NEWS AT THE BOAT SHOW.

BY MATT ALDERTON



Reporters are always looking for a good scoop. And with a well-constructed public relations (PR) blitz, you can pique their interest, score some free coverage—and get customers to your booth.

You're not going to get very far without a solid hook, so here are a few ideas for pull in the press pack:

Introduce a new product or service: “Any time you have ‘the first ever’ or ‘the only’ of something, it’s a really great opportunity to garner some attention,” says Caroline Sherman, vice president at Alpaytac, a Chicago, Illinois-based PR firm.

In Action: Because fishing boats are especially popular in the Pacific Northwest, Boston Whaler debuted its first-ever pilothouse at the Seattle Boat Show in January. In addition to drafting a press release, the company hosted a special launch event on the opening night of the show that helped create considerable industry buzz.

And a local paper, *The Herald*, found Gateway Yachts’ fractional ownership a unique angle to focus on in its coverage of the Seattle show.

Celebrate a company milestone: Highlight an anniversary or sales record.

In Action: After the 2011 Dubai International Boat Show, ART Marine, the Middle East’s largest importer and distributor of luxury motor yachts, announced it had set a new sales record—news that was picked up and published internationally by boating bloggers as well as business reporters.

Host an event: Contests, competitions, seminars and celebrity appearances can all attract coverage.

In Action: Professional kayak angler Drew Gregory appeared at the Progressive® Insurance Atlanta Boat Show® in January, courtesy of exhibitor Jackson Kayak. The event was featured in an article in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

Do some good: Align your product to a charitable endeavor or fundraising campaign.

In Action: At the Progressive® Insurance Minneapolis Boat Show®, Midwest boat wrap provider Crow River Signs partnered with Jared Allen’s Homes for Wounded Warriors—a nonprofit created by pro football player Jared Allen to build and modify homes for injured military veterans. The two organizations created a military-themed wrap that was displayed during the show. With Allen himself in tow, the company’s design was featured in a televised sports report broadcast by the local CBS affiliate.

Apply for an award: Nominating your company for a prize like “best booth” means it has the chance to not only win, but it also gets recognized by reporters covering the awards.

In Action: At the Progressive® Insurance Miami International Boat Show® in February, 13 marine products were honored with Innovation Awards. Not only were the

tip:

Don’t just pitch stories; pitch visuals, too. For example, if you’re pitching a story about boat safety, include pictures of people wearing lifejackets and a video demonstration about how to choose them and put them on.

“Any time you have ‘the first ever’ or ‘the only’ of something, it’s a really great opportunity to garner some attention.”

—Caroline Sherman, Alpaytac



Kayak maker Paddle and Trail rode the wave of free publicity surrounding PaddleFest, an event at the Chicago show.

Chicago Boat, Sports & RV Show® in January, exhibitors had the opportunity to introduce consumers to paddle sports at “PaddleFest” by giving free kayak and paddleboard demos on an indoor pool. As a PaddleFest presenter, Paddle and Trail, a Loves Park, Illinois-based kayak maker, was not only featured on the show’s official website but also mentioned in articles produced by local newspapers and television stations, including Chicago’s local ABC affiliate.

Look beyond your product: Tips like what to look for when purchasing a boat get a lot of mileage in the media because they’re educational, Serra says.

In Action: During the 2012 Tullett Prebon London Boat Show, Shieldbase, a British fleet-tracking company, attracted media attention with its article “15 Ways to Prevent Boat Theft.”

MEET THE PRESS

It sometimes helps to make your pitch in person. To get some face time with reporters:

- **Hold press events:** At the Miami show, for instance, Chris-Craft president Steve Heese unveiled two new models at a

honorees mentioned in the boat show’s official awards press release—which was published on the show’s website—but they were also listed in articles about the awards published by several industry publications, such as *Soundings* and *Cruising World* magazines.

Book a speaking engagement: Signing on as a presenter at the show can help establish your company as a thought leader, says Matt Serra, vice president for North America at Mulberry Marketing Communications in Jacksonville, Florida. And it might also earn your company mentions in the show’s marketing materials.

In Action: At the Progressive® Insurance

Tip: Target your PR Messages.

Research what media will be covering the show and tweak your pitch accordingly. National trade media, for instance, are generally interested in trends and new innovations, according to Caroline Sherman of Alpaytac. Local consumer media are looking for breaking news and current events. And a business reporter will have different interests than a sports or lifestyle reporter.

If you’re launching a new fishing boat, the editor of a national boating industry magazine will likely respond best to a press release sent on the first day of the boat show outlining specifications, price and differentiators. A local sports reporter, on the other hand, is more likely to respond to statistics or events—for example, a company survey revealing that fishing boats are the most popular type of boat in the boat show’s host city, or a live fishing demo that takes place on the show floor aboard the new boat.

LET THE Blitz Begin

Six to nine months before the show: Begin applying for awards and speaking opportunities at the show.

Four months before the show: Decide what you’re going to announce at the show, obtain last year’s press list and begin pitching reporters at long-lead media outlets, such as magazines.

Six to eight weeks before the show: Contact reporters to schedule press briefings at the show.

A couple of days before the show and the day of: Email press releases to reporters and invite them to stop by your booth. Also, drop off marketing materials in the pressroom and check back as the show progresses to make sure you haven’t run out.

press conference. Exhibitors can often entice busy reporters with the offer of a good meal or a cocktail—as you tell them all about your company and its products, Sherman says.

- **Schedule one-on-one briefings:** Serra recommends scheduling 30-minute appointments with individual reporters on the pre-registered press list. Not only can these meetings secure coverage at the show, they also help establish relationships that bear editorial fruit weeks, months or even years afterwards.
- **Offer onsite interviews:** Make a company spokesperson available for impromptu interviews with reporters who stop by your booth. “Choose somebody who represents your company well, who knows the product and is personable,” says Daniel Grant, account director at Pierson Grant Public Relations, a Fort Lauderdale, Florida-based PR firm that handles publicity for five boat shows. If your spokesperson hasn’t conducted formal interviews, consider media training beforehand.

PARTNER FOR PUBLICITY

To maximize your exposure, work in conjunction with the boat show’s PR efforts, such as:

- **Media placements:** Before, during and after the show, the event’s PR team sends out press releases. Keep event organizers informed about your boat show plans, and they may include you in their marketing efforts and promote you to reporters, Grant says.
- **Pressrooms:** Stake out the spot where reporters convene to work, rest—and pick up marketing materials.
- **Show dailies:** Many shows publish daily newspapers for attendees. Speak with organizers to see how you can garner some coverage.

PR opportunities abound at boat shows. And they all come with an added benefit: credibility. “Stories about how nice your product is are much more powerful coming from a third party than from you,” Serra says. 🌐



Get the Word Out Digitally

Distributing news is as important as creating it—and most reporters prefer the digital route. “No media members want to be weighed down by pounds of paper,” says Caroline Sherman of Alpaytac.

1 Press releases: Email press releases directly to media a few days before a show and then follow up on opening morning. But don’t ignore wire services that can give press releases a longer shelf life by popping up in search engine results during—and long after—the show, says Matt Serra of Mulberry Marketing Communications.

2 Media kits: Sherman recommends distributing branded flash drives loaded with press releases, executive bios and headshots, press clippings, a company fact sheet and high-resolution product images. Be sure to post the same items on your website in an online pressroom, too.



Bottom-Line Busters

The seven most common (and costly) boat show blunders—and how to avoid them.

BY BRIAN TODD



1. YOUR EXHIBIT SPACE ISN'T MAXIMIZED.

Figure out the minimum space you need, suggests Cory LaCanne, general manager at LaCanne's Marine in Faribault, Minnesota. That doesn't mean cramming in as much of your product as you can fit, however. A claustrophobic booth will lose customers, he warns. To help determine exactly how much square footage you need, use grid paper to visualize the space.

If you decide to increase your exhibit space, make the most of it. Even a difference of one foot can make a big impact.

"When doing a show, I take a look at what product I am bringing, and if I can bring a 16-foot model versus a 17-foot model," says Danny Thompson, sales event coordinator at Cabela's, the outdoor recreation retailer, in Owatonna, Minnesota.

Certain layout tricks can also maximize what room you have. "The way you line up boats, such as angling them or backing them up to walls, can save space," he adds.

Hannay's Marine in St. Anthony, Minnesota recently opted for a larger area to create side-by-side booths that were split between pleasurecraft and fishing boats. But this change came with some growing pains, says sales manager Tom Ferdinandt. He learned the importance of assigning the right salespeople to the right booth at all times "because you can't have people running back and forth between spaces," he explains.



2. VISITORS DON'T FEEL AT EASE.

No matter what size exhibit you choose, you must create an inviting space. "Our attitude used to be, the more on display the better," LaCanne says. "This year, we went for a more comfortable atmosphere."

The company highlighted products that didn't make the trip to the show on handout sheets, which LaCanne says generated calls for the next three months. "We sold things we didn't even bring," he says. "That saved money on what we brought to the show and gave us more room for customers in the booth."

Decking out vessels with accessories—a bottle of wine, a vase of flowers, a book—helps people envision themselves in that boat, Thompson adds.

And "any activities at your exhibit to keep the kids occupied are a huge plus," LaCanne says.



3. THE ENTRANCE LOOKS DIFFICULT TO NAVIGATE.

You want your exhibit to be an adventure—but that doesn't mean visitors should feel uneasy stepping into it. That faux pier you've erected might evoke a nautical mood, but if it appears unsafe, potential customers could very well pass you by.

"I see some dealers cut corners when they use steps, but handrails are a must," LaCanne says.

To increase the chance of a sale, your exhibit should be accessible to all.

"People with disabilities or the elderly aren't going to scale a boat in order to look at it," he adds. "You need to make each product accessible if you plan on marketing it to each potential customer."

Sometimes the barrier to entry is your staff itself. "People want to see an entrance that is not crowded by boats or salespeople," Ferdinandt says.

If you're displaying boats, make them easy to access, he adds. "We take all of our boats off of trailers, which makes them more inviting."

Exhibitors must have an exit strategy as well: "You need to provide an obvious entrance, but also a visible exit, as people don't want to feel trapped in your booth," LaCanne explains.



4. PROSPECTS GET LOST IN SLOPPY CUSTOMER TRACKING.

Don't let the good ones get away. Train staffers to gather contact information, rank prospects and add detailed notes immediately after interacting with potential customers.

"When you're done with two days in a row at the show, you need to have some notes and a ranking so you can make sense of that lead later," Ferdinandt says.



5. YOUR SALES TEAM HASN'T BEEN PROPERLY TRAINED.

Whether you bring seasoned salespeople or rookies, they should know their stuff. And educating your staff doesn't have to cost a lot. Take advantage of the sales training offered by many manufacturers, Ferdinandt suggests. Hannay's Marine, for example, sends its sales staff to Yamaha University, which offers workshops on the engine maker's products and sales strategies.

You should also tailor your training to the specific type of show you're attending. "Look at your audience and who you're going after," Thompson says. "Are they pleasureboaters or is it a straight fishing show?"

His salespeople are trained on how to connect with customers in multiple industries, including boating, camping, hunting and fishing. This makes for well-rounded staffers at boat shows, where the company exhibits many non-marine items, he says.

tip:

Don't sabotage sales at home. Taking all your best talent to a show could hurt your retail sales, so leave at least one top seller back home, says Cory LaCanne of LaCanne's Marine.



6. POOR PLANNING RATCHETS UP TRANSPORTATION COSTS.

When hauling exhibit materials and products to the boat show, avoid extra trips and multiple vehicles.

Thompson's team tallies how many flyers were used, which decorations worked out and whether more chairs were needed, so Cabela's knows what to bring the next time around. He also cuts shipping costs by packing booth handouts right into his boats.

LaCanne's Marine goes a step further, loading all materials, including desks, in its vessels.

And a good transportation plan involves taking the time to determine exactly what the most efficient route is beforehand, Thompson adds.



7. UNCLEAR MESSAGING CONFUSES PASSERSBY.

With hundreds of people walking by your booth on a busy weekend, you only have a few seconds to capture their attention. Exhibitors must present signage and displays that concisely and clearly explain offered products and services—or lose sales.

Not only do you need to have enough signage to stand out on a chaotic show floor, your messaging must also be narrowly focused. Target what brands you offer and your pricing, Ferdinandt suggests.

"Keeping signage simple is best," Thompson says. "If you have too much on the sign, people lose focus."

Your verbiage must be crystal-clear. "Having signage that's confusing or misleading can affect sales, as customers may assume something that is not the case," he warns. 🌐

BUILDING A MODERN BRAND

I recently had a chance encounter with one of today's most respected marketing visionaries, Seth Godin. He had just finished presenting a keynote address to an enraptured ballroom full of marketing professionals in Minneapolis, Minnesota. As he was stepping into a limo bound for the airport, he took the time to answer my question: "What can exhibitors do to leverage their boat show experience today?"

His advice was very direct and pure Godin. First off, he said that if you are trying to meet strangers at a boat show and convince them to be your customers, you are wasting your time and money. True to his mantra, Godin went on to say that marketing in the postindustrial age is not about random interruption but about focused conversation.

NO LONGER ONE-SIDED

Before the days of social media sites, QR codes and iPads, you probably tried convincing the boat show audience at large to drop an entry form into a fishbowl at your booth. Then, after the event, you painstakingly entered those names and addresses into your database and sent a letter thanking visitors for stopping by to see you at the show. Of course, you probably closed the note with an invitation to visit your marina/store/dealership

If you want to be part of the final decision, **you must be part of the dialogue**—this is what a modern brand strategy is all about.



Tim McAfee

with the hope that these individuals would buy something.

Then, every so often, you sent out a "mailer" or "flyer" to your ever-growing list of prospects in an effort to connect with recipients and encourage them to respond to your call to action. This one-sided dialogue is the foundation of a traditional brand strategy.

DIRECT THE CONVERSATION

But a purchase isn't usually a spontaneous decision. Most people don't say to themselves, "I think I'll buy a \$40,000 speed boat today" after receiving a single flyer. This is a decision that brews for a long time in the minds of most buyers. It starts with an idea or dream that grows into an internal dialogue. This is when the dreamer begins to research the marketplace on his or her own, and, eventually, enough information is gathered to allow the buying decision to be made.

If you want to be part of the final decision, you must be part of the dialogue—this is what a modern brand strategy is all about. Now, rather than using events like the boat show to identify prospects you can pitch to on

a regular basis, you can use the events to begin or continue discussions with your market. The internet allows you to not only be part of these discussions but to *direct* them. Easy-to-use tools make relationship-building on the web available to everyone. And, over time, these relationships turn prospects into customers.

Combined with all of your marketing contacts, a boat show encounter becomes just one more knot in the communication thread connecting you to your marketplace—one relationship at a time.

Godin would likely recommend that you think of the boat show as an event lasting 365 days. But because you only have face-to-face access to the market for a few of those days, why not use the other 360 or so days to help your prospects shape their dream of boat ownership? And if that dream includes you, what a sweet dream it is!

Mike Mraz is a principal at Exhibiting Excellence in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Watch his informational videos at boothstaffingbasics.com.



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