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Boat & Motor

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DEALER

Special Report

Dealer Certification: Setting New Standards



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Marine Industry Dealership Certification takes on a life of its own

In this issue, *Boat & Motor Dealer* takes an in-depth look at Marine Industry Dealership Certification (MIDC). Beginning on page 13, we provide three articles examining the certification process.

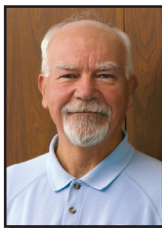
The first article on Bald Knob Marina offers a glimpse into what one dealership is going through as it enters the final steps for being certified. The second article affords readers some insights into the real business benefits that accrue to MIDC dealers by looking at Reed Marine. The third article details the “untold secret” behind the rapid evolution of MIDC, the financial support from Grow Boating, boat builders and engine manufacturers, and state and regional marine trade associations.

When Larry Russo Sr., owner of Russo Marine, Medford, Mass. first proposed it at the 2004 Marine Retailers Association of America (MRAA) meeting in Las Vegas, Nev., the idea of dealer certification standards received an enthusiastic response from the dealers in attendance, but they were less than 10% of all dealers in the United States.

What began as a laudable concept has turned into an integral part of the Grow Boating Initiative. Indeed, MIDC has now been incorporated as Marine Certification Inc., with an eight-member board of directors, consisting of four members nominated by National Marine Manufacturers Association and four nominated by MRAA. Larry Russo was elected chairman of the board.

What began as a pilot program for dealership certification in 2006 has now grown to the point where more than 200 dealers have completed the certification process and earned the official “Marine Industry Certified” designation. In addition, more than 442 dealers have enrolled in the MIDC and are currently in the process of working on the certification process. Marine Certification expects to have 500 dealers certified by the end of 2007.

One of the other main goals for MIDC in 2007 is to heighten consumer awareness of dealership certification and what this designation means to consumers in the purchasing process. It is not a stretch of the truth to say that dealership certification has become the new standard for judging boat and motor dealerships throughout the United States.



EDITOR'S NOTEBOOK

By Jerome A. Koncel

Don't wait around for dealership certification

As a proverbial procrastinator, I urge you to become Marine Industry Certified—now. Marine Industry Dealership Certification is moving forward at a rapid pace, and those dealers who don't board the certification train now may be in for a rude awakening. Certification will be the minimum industry standard for judging dealerships in the near future.

I'm sure there are a number of boat and motor dealers who are chuckling to themselves right now and saying, “Another one of those industry supporters urging us to spend money on something that's not worth the paper it's printed on.” Well, that's just bull.

Dealers need to be certified as a way to recheck their operations, to compare themselves with other dealers, but most of all to improve their customer services. As the saying goes, “The reason this is important is because it's all about the customers. Without them, we're not in business.”

Here are some of the most commonly heard reasons for not being certified, and why they are just excuses.

“It costs too much!” Well, everything costs money these days, and dealers are getting a \$1,500 price reduction right now on getting certified. If dealers can spend \$5,000 on the blackjack table, \$25,000 on a car, and \$300,000 on a home, they can invest \$2,500 on their future growth and development.

“It takes too much time!” How much time is too much? When it comes to improving operations, increasing customer service, and strengthening customer loyalty, how much time is too much? There's no time like the present to begin moving your boat and motor dealership into the 21st century.

“I'm not getting any business benefits from being certified.” This is just not true. Certified dealers will get leads from the Discover Boating Web site. Statistics show that certified dealers receive higher customer service index scores than those not certified. And, certified dealers will not only sell more new boats, they'll keep those customers coming back for new and bigger boats and added accessories.

“I'm a good dealer, and I don't need certification to tell me that.” Well, this may be true, but certification will eventually become the “Industry standard” for judging dealers. In the not too distant future, consumers will visit a dealership to purchase a boat based on whether it's certified or not.

While we are all in this boating industry together, it's a fact of life that we're also competing with each other. Give yourself a competitive advantage in today's marketplace by being certified.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jerome A. Koncel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'J'.

Visit our Web site: www.boatmotordealer.com

You can also send us e-mail with comments or letters to: jkoncel@boatmotordealer.com