

>> EXPERT ADVICE FOR STRENGTHENING YOUR BUSINESS <<

NOVEMBER 2008 WHITE PAPER

Boating INDUSTRY

TRUSTED SOURCE. PROVEN SOLUTIONS.
REAL RESULTS.

- A marketing recipe for success
- 7 questions your marketing plan should answer
- Marketing your competitive advantages

Cost-effective and proven

Marketing tactics

- 9 tips for avoiding the “panic and price” strategy
- Getting the most of your media plan
- 9 tips for co-op success
- 24 ways to increase your exposure



Strategies for
making the most
of your dollar in
a down economy.

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LORI A. STACY
VICE PRESIDENT

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Dear Colleague,

The marine industry has encountered rough seas this year that have impacted dealers, as well as boating enthusiasts. Although it was not easy, dealers who were well-prepared and worked creatively have been able to grow their market share, revenues and overall profits during this tough economy. Boat Trader is pleased to partner with *Boating Industry* to bring you this marketing e-white paper and offer helpful and creative ideas, as well as best practices from some of the recognized leaders in our industry.

Boat Trader has been dedicated to the success of the marine industry for more than 20 years, and our team remains committed to providing insight, guidance and statistics to help assist you in your business. Your growth is critical to the industry, and we are confident that the information provided in this e-white paper will help you capture the growth you need.

If you are interested in more information regarding these best practices or other information, please contact us at 877/354-4069.

Best Regards,

Lori Stacy

a division of
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A Recipe For Success

When Marketing Budgets Get Tight – It is Time to Get Cooking

By Mark Kellum, Kenton Smith Advertising & PR
Marine Marketers of America

The epicurean delights Cioppino, Bouillabaisse, She Crab Soup and Jambalaya are more than just ethnic stews. Each of these recipes originated from people who had to feed their families with little or no food budget, utilizing leftover or inexpensive ingredients. They made the dish palatable by adding herbs and spices to enhance the flavor of the stew. Today, by adding quality ingredients and following the same basic recipe these stews are often considered high-end gourmet fare.

Seen as a metaphor, marketing professionals on a tight budget can serve up a reduced set of traditional marketing. By being creative, marketers can spice-up a recipe by using ingredients that include a combination of more traditional “guerilla marketing” and non-traditional online marketing tactics.

The Recipe – First Make a Plan

To make a particular dish taste right, it is best to have a tried and true recipe. To execute a marketing program you also need a plan. Few marketing efforts succeed without one. If you don't have a marketing plan, there are many resources to help guide you. One resource, www.bppplans.com, offers online templates. Palo Alto Software offers Business Plan Pro which is a PC program that steps you through creating a business/marketing plan.

The book The Successful Marketing Plan, A Disciplined and Comprehensive Approach by Roman G. Hiebing and Scott W. Cooper, is an extensive tool for creating a detailed marketing plan and the book, Twelve Simple Steps To A Winning Marketing Plan by Geraldine A. Larkin presents a more basic approach. Check amazon.com for other tools and resources for creating a marketing plan for your business.

A good marketing plan should always incorporate these basic ingredients:

- A vision statement
- Clear, attainable and measurable goals
- Market situational analysis, SWOT analysis (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats)
- The strategies and tactics to obtain the marketing goals
- Budget
- Schedules for expenditures, development of deliverables and deployment of tactics

The vision statement is a summary of the plan presenting the overall scope, the basic and the intended results of the marketing plan.

It is important to have clear, attainable and measurable goals.

Selling more boats is not a clear goal; selling 10 more boats by brand name and model each quarter when compared to the previous fiscal year is a clear goal. It is also a measurable goal.

Determining if the goal is attainable is the hardest of these requisites to quantify. If it means doubling your manufacturing facilities, increasing employment by 100 percent and finding 30 new dealers, it's probably not realistic. But if the goal is a reasonable percentage increase over the previous year's production, then it may be. Get ownership and feedback from your team. Try to benchmark what the competition is doing.

The market analysis and SWOT analysis are tools that will help determine the feasibility of the marketing goals. SWOT analysis is a simple framework for generating strategic alternatives from a situation analysis. It is applicable to either corporate or dealer level marketing plans. The strengths and weaknesses applies to internal analysis and the opportunities and threats are obtained through an external analysis.

The internal analysis includes:

- Company culture
- Company image
- Organizational structure
- Key staff
- Access to natural resources
- Position on experience curve
- Operational efficiency
- Operational capacity
- Brand awareness
- Market share
- Financial resources
- Exclusive contracts
- Patents and trade secrets

The SWOT analysis summarizes the internal factors of the company as a list of strengths and weaknesses.

The external analysis includes opportunities and threats. Opportunities are the real chances to introduce a new product or service that will generate superior returns. Opportunities can arise when changes occur in the marketplace. Many changes can be described as threats to the product positioning.

Changes in the marketplace can be related to:

- Customers
- Competitors
- Market trends
- Suppliers
- Partners
- Social changes
- New technology
- Economic environment
- Political and regulatory environment

When the analysis is completed, a SWOT profile can be generated and used as the basis of goal setting, strategy formulation, and implementation. When formulating strategy, the interaction of the SWOT profile becomes important. For example, the strengths can be

A Recipe For
Success
CONTINUED
ON PG 7



Catching the wave of change And add some to your bottom line.

By Courtney Chalmers,
Boat Trader Brand

As a boat dealer, you have been riding the waves of change over the past five years in the boating industry – from booming to struggling economies, high gas prices and low-interest rates. But, one thing has remained consistent; consumers' desire to buy boats. And now, how they satisfy that desire has changed and it has become imperative that your dealership be on the forefront of this change.

The explosion in media options has changed consumers' buying habits. They are now using multiple sources when searching for information to buy a boat, and we are seeing a dramatic increase in consumers choosing the Internet. In fact, since 2002 we have seen a 65 percent increase in online searches, and dealers taking advantage of this transition are generating more leads than their competitors.

Just five years ago, boat consumers using print to search for their next boat versus those searching online was about 50/50. Targeted publications like Boat Trader have been very successful in converting readers into leads for dealers. For instance, dealers that advertised in print five years ago were averaging about 30 to 40 leads per month.

Now, those same dealers have added Internet to their marketing strategy and have increased their leads by 150 percent on average. And they're seeing the results to their bottom line, too – because when combined,

print and Internet advertising can reduce your overall cost per lead by 69 percent.

Boat Trader conducted video research with boaters nationwide and asked just how they search for their next boat. The answer? "I go online." Regardless of age or demographic, the answer was the same. Will they find your boats?

Most of you are probably nodding your head because you have a Web site, right? But does your Web site reach these buyers searching for your inventory? How do you drive traffic to your site? Just having a Web site no longer keeps you in the game, but leveraging your online partnerships can take you all the way to the finish line.

Online users visit an average of seven sites before reaching their final destination, so it's important that your Web site be among the top search results. Like you, consumers typically view the top three search results, as shown in the Google EyeTracking Study, before starting their search again. So, it makes sense that the listings toward the bottom of the first page receive less than 20 percent of the eyeballs. Many dealers assume that their Web site appears high in search results for keywords specific to their inventory and location. But, the "set it and forget it" model no longer works, and more than half of marine dealers do not appear within the top search results.

Fortunately, online classified sites like BoatTrader.com, boats.com and others do achieve high organic rankings for broad and



specific keywords because of the significant content we offer, so we typically rank among those top three search results that 80 to 100 percent of the consumers see when they conduct a search for boats. Dealers that have not added an online classified site to their marketing plan are probably paying more per lead and are certainly not reaching the maximum audience.

To further maximize your reach, make sure that your online classified partner has an affiliate network to put your inventory in front of more consumers. Such partnerships help place your boats among the seven sites consumers are visiting before reaching their final destination!

So just how many consumers are searching online to find their next boat? According to comScore, a third party tracking company like Nielson's, more than 1.5 million consumers visited the top marine classified sites just in September this year. More than one-third of those visitors use BoatTrader.com to search for a boat – what could they do for your bottom line?

Just having a Web site no longer keeps you in the game, but leveraging your partnerships can take you all the way to the finish line.

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Marketing your competitive advantages

Abandon old ways of thinking and incorporate your marketing into everything you do.

By Noel Osborne, Yamaha University

We are in the middle of one of the worst sales downturns in the history of the marine industry. There are certain marketing fundamentals, however, that do not change whether we are experiencing great sales or lousy sales.

We need to remember that marketing is everything we do. From the appearance of our facilities to the appearance of our products when we deliver them to our customers, it is all part of our marketing efforts. The way we answer our phones and the way we answer customer complaints, this is also marketing.

When times are good we probably do not optimize how we make marketing impressions on our prospects and customers. We can get away with it even though it's a major contributor to the low net profit levels in this industry.

During these tougher times, we don't have the luxury of such options. We have to tweak every profit opportunity available to us, and that means paying attention to what is required to gain our customers attention each and every day.

Many dealers think that marketing is solely advertising, but there's much more to it than that. I will agree that advertising certainly consumes a significant portion of our marketing dollars and in that regard we must ask ourselves how effective it is. But you should also be considering what you are currently advertising as opposed to what you should be advertising.

Many dealers feel that price is the only carrot that will bring the prospect through their doors, and then they complain when the buyer wants to negotiate price further when they walk into your showroom. If all of your ads are based on price, don't blame the consumer if they dwell on getting your price lower.

The answer to all of this, of course, is to market your competitive advantages. But the question is, do you know what they are?

Buyers will pay more for more value and there is a multitude of ways to present more value to your customers. Every competitive advantage you offer over the competition can be marketed to your customers as an added value. Your storefront, your employees, your brands, your service reputation, your policies and procedures, and much more can give you a competitive advantage over your competition.

At a time when the average gross profit on boats has dropped to 16 percent and the cost of operating your dealership has escalated to a figure higher than that, I suggest that you could easily convince your buyers that it is worth 2 percent more to do business with you due to your superior competitive advantages.

A wise course of action might be to have a meeting with all of your employees to determine what your true competitive advantages are. If you don't have any, then maybe your employees can suggest some

ways to develop some. Jack Welch, the former CEO of General Electric was right on when he said that, "If you do not have any competitive advantages, then you should not be competing."

We can learn some lessons from other retailers when it comes to the marketing of competitive advantages. The giant electronics retailer, Best Buy comes to mind as a good example. Their storefront is probably more inviting than any of their competitors. And when you walk through the door you are "wowed" by their merchandising.

One of the main reasons customers visit Best Buy stores is because they have sales representatives who know what they are talking about and can help you with your selection. Other electronic retailers have salespeople who don't have a clue as to how their products work. This is a strong competitive advantage for Best Buy, and the company is able to charge more for the same identical products because they provide

excellent customer service. Could you do the same thing?

Why do people pay \$700 or more to stay in a Ritz-Carlton when they can stay down the street for \$150 and still have a bed and bath? The Ritz's competitive advantage is the providing of impeccable service, and people are willing to pay for it. They will do the same for you if you separate your dealership from the rest by offering indisputable competitive advantages.

Of course, once you define your competitive advantages, then you need to market them by communicating them to your customers through everything you do: advertising, PR, the sales and service experience, events, delivery and so forth. You'll need to abandon any strategy based on advertising price alone and start advertising your competitive advantages if you truly want to capitalize on them.

How refreshing would it be to have prospects walking through your doors wanting to talk about your quality service rather than the price of your products? I can hear them ask, "Is it really true that I can obtain service advice from your dealership on weekends and holidays by dialing a number reserved for your valuable customers? Nobody else does that."

You bet they don't.

Noel Osborne is a seasoned marine industry veteran with over 35 years of boating experience. He has owned and operated more than 10 dealerships during that time. Noel has been a key contributor to the success of Yamaha Marine's Symposium and Performance 500 educational series for the past eight years. He can be reached at 239/594-8873 or janinedog@aol.com.



Sell the “Lifestyle” not “Panic and Price”

By David Parker,
Parker Business Planning

Many boat dealers today are selling “panic and price” instead of selling the boating “lifestyle.” If a dealer leads a sales presentation with “panic and price,” the only place to go after that is to keep lowering the price. This approach skips the very important steps of engaging the customer’s emotions.

People don’t buy an expensive recreational product like a boat because of logic. The buying process starts with the emotions. Then logic is used to justify that decision.

A homebuilder once told me that the decision to buy a house is made within the first 20 seconds a customer walks through the front door. The rest of the time is spent justifying that emotional decision. I believe the decision to purchase a boat is made in a similar way. Therefore engaging the emotions in the selling process is extremely important. So remember to include selling the boating lifestyle when you design your marketing plan.

Grow Boating’s “A Good Run” online video is an excellent example of selling the lifestyle of boating. Boating is one of the greatest ways for a family to enjoy spending time together. This video captures that exactly. You can view this video at <http://www.growboating.org/marketing/advertising/viral/goodrun.aspx>. You may even consider making this link a part of the signature line on all e-mails your sales people send out to prospective buyers.

As you create your dealership’s marketing plan, make sure that every aspect of your dealership is on its A game when the customer walks through the door. If not, all the money and effort spent on marketing could be wasted. Below are some things to keep in mind:

1. Put your best foot forward in all aspects of your dealership, including the phys-

ical appearance.

2. Stay on top of sales training to remain professional in your approach to customers.

3. Maintain customer logs (or guest registers) and phone logs to make sure no one falls thru the cracks. Go over these logs in your sales meetings.

4. Make sure you know the reason for every lost sale. Surprisingly this is one of the best ways to grow your business.

5. Rigorously work to have a top CSI rating.

6. Continue to host customer events, such as dealer-sponsored trips and outings. This gives your customers more reasons to use their boats. You want to reinforce to your customers that they will have more FUN with your boat than with any other brand.

7. Budget your income and expenses. Done properly a budget can provide significant peace of mind.

8. Enjoy the boating lifestyle yourself. Perhaps the enjoyment of boating is why you got into the business in the first place. It’s the best way to communicate to your customers what the boating lifestyle is all about.

9. Join a 20 Group. It is one of the best investments in your business you can ever make.

Many dealers are saying that sales are happening but each one is a “dogfight.” Those dealers who are continuing to sell the boating lifestyle and have their A game in place stand the best chance of winning these encounters.

A Recipe For Success CONTINUED FROM PG 4

leveraged to pursue opportunities and to avoid threats, and team members can be alerted to weaknesses that might need to be overcome in order to successfully pursue opportunities.

The budget and schedules are to provide a predictable and controlled level of expenditure, incorporating expense and human resources/labor.

Finally, have all stakeholders sign off on the plan so everyone can work together to achieve the marketing goals. It is important to remember that a marketing plan is a “living” document, not something cast in stone. As market conditions change, the marketing plan needs to be reviewed and periodically adjusted.

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Marketing is a Profit Center

Diversify your plan.

By Thaddeus B. Kubis, NAK Integrated Marketing

Marine Marketers of America

Recent data presented to the Marine Marketers of America indicates that the marine market, like many other consumer and business-to-business markets, has developed into a series of highly specialized segments.

In the past it was a basic understanding that power and sail ate from two different plates. Yet today the demographic and psychographic segmentation has increased to a point that not only the type of boat used but also the size and region that it's used in are now defining points and potential marketing demographics. Additional complexity is added to the marketing formula when one looks to regional and use patterns of these new segments.

What does this new data have to do with us as marine marketers? Well, it should make us all realize that marketing plans that focus only on offline media, will not provide the sales base needed to survive.

A marketer needs to address the segments and, using the latest in digital print technology, linked with leading media outlets (magazines and traditional offline media) must provide a cross media and multi-dimensional marketing strategy. Personalization, versioning, data base management, along with Web 3.0 technology (social networking marketing, mobile marketing are coming of age) must be contained within any marketing plan. Not only to generate viable and active leads but to reduce marketing cost while increasing the return on investment of any program.

Aggressive programs tied to existing customers (vertical, horizontal, upselling or add-on purchasing) must become part of the mix. Past program results and responses need to be data mined and surveyed to determine if they are potential sales. The marketer must build a valid business case that provides the lowest cost per lead, linked to an after lead program to convert that lead into a sale and an after-sales effort to keep that customer happy.

Reduction of a marketing budget is the extreme, but is the common response.

What is needed is a shifting from high-cost media to targeted and focused programs that measure results online and immediately determine the success or failure of a program. The need to examine data in real time, say prior to a show or just after one can only be handled effectively online, linked to your web site and to your sales, dealer or distribution network.

An old adage, is that a firm that maintains or increases its marketing budget during an economic downturn will increase its market share, research has proven this to be correct.

Versioning, variable data printing, personalization, linked to an aggressive marketing effort are proven tools in the sales of high end items, traditional direct mail results are under 1 percent, yet personalized direct mail linked to a website are sailing in at 4.5 percent and higher. The more you personalize the higher the response.

Cutting the budget may be the knee jerk response, but the money spent down the line to rebuild the market share loss (some say you can never gain the market back) will in many cases add to your marketing budget without adding to the lead to conversion factor.

The smart money goes with a plan to allocate marketing dollars with a business case and plan in hand. No one wishes to waste money, it is so hard to come by, but today one must measure the cost against the return and start the plan with a profit-generating response rate in hand.

No one wishes to waste money, it is so hard to come by, but today one must measure the cost against the return and start the plan with a profit-generating response rate in hand.

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Getting the most out of your media plan.

Ask the right questions to take your marketing: From “spray and pray” to a well-executed plan.

By Caryl Behmoiras,
Mascola Advertising

You may already know that the best way for brands to maintain their share of voice, and even to grow market share during a down economy, is to maintain or even increase their advertising presence. But there is also the reality of meeting the bottom line. One of the most important factors in maintaining a marketing budget, regardless of economic factors, is for advertisers to have a plan that works, and to work the plan.

If your media plan looks like last year's, which looks like the year before, and so on, it is time to take a fresh approach to planning. Especially in light of recessionary economic forecasting and the downturn in the marine market.

With 10-percent circulation losses annually, 80 percent of traditional newspaper readers are turning to digital news, and Live Earth is changing the television landscape by setting new records for digital video viewing. One of the biggest mistakes brands make is repeating exactly what was done last year – even if it worked. Today is a new day.

Alan Schulman, Senior VP/Executive Creative Director of imc2 said in a recent Mediastop article that as we head toward a deeper recession, most advertisers fall back on the “ol' tried and true” and that “fear and control” become advertisers’ buying motivations. That doesn’t mean brands should change their media plan just for change’s sake. Advertisers need to be meticulous about the choices they make.

I recommend going back to the basics – those simple enough to be taught by my high school journalism teacher. In order to get to the heart of your brand story and your brand plan, answer the 5 W’s (and an H): who, what, where, when, why and how. It sounds simple, but it works.

The “who” is your target audience. Who is most likely to want or need your product? Classify them by gender, sex, education, income, life stage, and/or mindset.

The “what” represents your message. What are you saying to your consumers? What makes your brand stand out among your competitors? You can buy all the media in the world, but if your message doesn’t resonate with your audience, you are flushing money down the toilet.

Determine “where” your target audience lives. There are numerous technologies and services available to help you electronically map out where they live. Use these types of services or some other method of mapping your target area, so your message can be taken directly to them.

Then you need to determine “when” the best time to reach out to your target is. Don’t limit this answer to weeks or months; consider specific days, times of day and frames of mind.

Why does my prospect notice my advertising? Does it stand out based on placement, positioning, clutter, lack thereof or competitive factors? Should it?

Then comes the financial decision: deciding “how you will reach your target audience. In order to successfully do so, you’ll need to answer the following questions: What do they do to pass time? What ways do they prefer to receive your marketing message? How engaged are they in different media? And how do you determine that?

As a marketer, there is an alphabet full of secondary research available to you – accessible by partnering with an experienced agency that invests in analysis tools, such as: ABC, Arbitron, BPA, MMG, MRI, Nielsen, PAR, Simmons, Snapshots and SRDS to name a few.

Another “how” question you need to ask is, “how much money do you need to spend to achieve a minimum level of impact?” You can determine what level of impact is necessary by

examining your product’s awareness and understanding in the marketplace. In the stages where basic recognition and recall have been established, a lower level of impact and advertising can be maintained. When the product is in the learning and research stage, advertising impact needs to increase, and more so when perceptions are negative, or direct communication is necessary.

If marketers can answer these questions honestly, and from the perspective of their customers, then this should become the filter through which all media buys are made. Does the media opportunity and the spend fit into the parameters of the media plan? If yes, then the buy is worth executing and waiting out for success.

From all of this, marketers are able to develop a thorough media plan that can thrive, even in down times. Perhaps even more importantly, a written, 12-month plan actually helps advertisers budget more wisely and effectively in the long run – a much better approach than piecing together a patchwork of special advertising opportunities that add up to a random “spray and pray” media execution. Marketers often make this mistake, squandering money and ultimately hurting their brand.

Just stick with the basics, partner with a media team that has access to the best planning and analysis resources and you’ll be able to weather the stormiest of storms.

Caryl Behmoiras is media director for Mascola Advertising, a media company that specializes in building brands in affluent markets. You can reach her at 203/469-6900 X140 or caryl@mascola.com. Find Mascola Advertising on the Web at www.mascola.com.



Don't give up on marketing

Make your message resonate.

By Alan Wendt,
Wendt Productions

Advertising and Marketing have always been among the first budget casualties at retail dealerships, and to some lesser degree on the manufacturing side during past economic recessions. Yet there is academic evidence that points to market share gains for well-positioned companies experienced in successful marketing who don't shelve advertising efforts.

Wal-Mart introduced "Everyday Low Prices" campaign 2000-2001

The recession of 90-91 gave birth to Intel's campaign "Intel Inside."

According to research by professors at Penn State's Smeal College of Business and the University of Texas, "firms with a strategic emphasis on marketing, have already put in place the programs that help them derive value from their marketing activities. These include well-recognized brands, differentiated products, targeted communications, good support and service, etc." The white paper entitled "Turning Adversity Into Advantage," drew conclusions by surveying more than 150 leading businesses utilizing data from the last recession.

When gasoline reached \$4 a gallon, it signaled that the days of going for a ride past a dealership are just about over. Interruptive forms of advertising, radio and TV are expensive, except for some very finely tuned cable TV opportunities. Newspapers no longer reach the masses. In fact, the latest surveys show that the generation just now approaching the typical boating buying demographic doesn't even read the paper. Rather they turn to the Internet.

Now spend an hour with your teenager or grandchild at the computer and have them show you Facebook, My Space, a blog, YouTube and some of the cool features on their cell phone.

Don't try to figure out how marketing a boat fits into what we call New Media. The kids will do that for you – only if your message resonates with their dreams and desires. MasterCraft serves as a good example of this with its Web site, www.mastercraft.com. While I can't see company CEO John Dorton rocking out to the music, his group understands the boat company's audience, has fine tuned its product line, boat graphics, and as you can see, its Web site to appeal to a niche group. More importantly, the company has cleverly started a two-way dialog with customers, posted pro-staff videos and created a reason to return frequently.

From the retail side, examine your Web site. Be honest, many

dealer sites are sterile, lifeless cyberspace billboards with the only updates coming from an inventory side. You can and should do better. Frequent updates are critical touch-points with new and repeat customers. Just about everyone has a digital camera now. Take pictures of your customers at play throughout the year and post them. Create excitement. Create a dialog. Be brave and let the customer post their own videos from trips. You are doing trips, right?

Until we all figure out what higher fuel prices mean, raft ups, dock parties, and free clinics are all easy, affordable methods to build an atmosphere for the single most important customer today – those who already own a boat. Be open to inviting other brand owners as well. Repeat customers and referrals are going to be your best source for business over the next two years. Embrace them, love them, and go boating with them. Think relationships.

Get involved in your community. The people with discretionary dollars are successful business people who have a favorite charity. Donate a half-day of boating or cocktail hour cruise and perhaps partner with a local waterfront restaurant to include dinner. This will provide exposure at the charity fund-raiser and certainly will attract several couples who have the water gene.

Cause-related marketing tugs at the heartstrings of a generation of Americans who want to make a difference in this world. Thunder Marine in St. Petersburg, recently partnered with the Green Armada, a volunteer organization dedicated to cleaning up waterways. Now in five states, recognized on Oprah and CNN, the group is gaining plenty of free PR for all parties that associate with them. A word of caution here though! Joining the green movement or linking to any charity should only be done because you really believe in the cause. People can smell a phony.

B&E Marine in Michigan City, Ind., turned a demo days event into a community fund raiser and solved a staffing problem at the same time. By involving a local Rotary Club and the Boys and Girls Clubs, they found volunteers who would put on a pancake breakfast and then serve burgers and hot dogs for lunch. For every person that came out for the demo days, B&E donated \$1 to the civic group staffing the event at that time. This push-pull method earned free ink, the civic kudos we all strive for, and new customers to the waterfront to consider the boating lifestyle.

Leverage partnerships with these charities and complimentary businesses. Share databases to promote the events. Your ad dollars will go much further and the lasting effect will pay handsome dividends in the years ahead.

Alan Wendt is Editor of the Marine Design Resource Alliance magazine, Marine CEO, and creative partner for Wendt Productions, a marketing and public relations consultant for the marine industry.



Transactional marketing vs. relationship marketing

How to successfully sell the relationship.

By Bob Gonsalves,
R. Allen Group

I have a favorite car wash. Every time I roll in, the manager comes outside and greets me by name. He remembers what I like, and every now and then, he cleans the carpets without charging me. Despite the fact that he sees hundreds of cars each week, he makes me feel like I'm the only customer there. And even though there is another car wash right next door that is slightly less expensive and does an equally good job, I look forward to seeing "my guy." All this for a \$20 car wash.

I used to own a \$40,000 sports car. The dealership was fabulous to work with while I was buying the car. They made me feel like a million bucks ... up until the time the ink dried on the contract. After that, I was just another stranger off the street. They had no idea who I was, nor were they concerned about how often I was inconvenienced when my car was not ready for pick up after routine maintenance. They were always polite and courteous, but so is the cashier at the grocery store. I learned to hate that car, and I hated the dealer more.

The first example above is that of relationship marketing and the latter is transactional marketing.

Relationship marketing is giving sufficient attention to the needs of the customer. The beginning of the relationship is founded on a genuine effort on behalf of the seller to know the buyer on a personal level, and excellent service is used – and needed – to build trust

and confidence. The result is that of a personal bond between the buyer and seller that can last for a very long time.

Transactional marketing exists mostly in low-priced, low-profit margin business. The seller provides a product or service, and the buyer pays for that product or service. The relationship is based purely on convenience to the buyer. No more, no less.

I think that we can all agree that there is no place in our business for transactional marketing. No one in our business today has the luxury of such a cavalier attitude that could push a prospective buyer toward a competitor.

There isn't a marketing solution that can improve falling home values, lower gas prices, or ease the credit crunch. On the other hand, we have 100-percent control over the manner in which we choose to market our services to our customers. Marketing 101 ... create a barrier between you and your competitors. That barrier is the strong bond between you and your customers, founded on excellent customer service. Make no mistake about it; this is marketing at its best.

I visited a local boat dealer the other day. There was not a lot of action on the sales floor. However, around the back of the building, the service techs were busier than ever. Obviously, many boaters are making due with what they have, and others are choosing to buy used boats, but the good news is that they are boating. And the good news for this particular dealer is that these customers were choosing his

dealership for service.

Every challenge presents an opportunity. We know the challenge of current economic times, but we also need to recognize that the opportunity for increased revenue is right around the back of the building.

Your service department is arguably your strongest marketing asset. It's the point of contact where your dealership can really shine if you take the time to build a relationship with your customers. It's also the place where you are most likely to lose a customer for life. It's more profitable to grow your business incrementally through existing customers than it is to fish for new buyers in tough economic conditions.

Is your sales manager working closely with your service manager? Do your service customers know about current new boat promotions and accessories sales? Are your managers taking the few short minutes needed to make your customers feel special so that when a neighbor asks your customer about their boat, they say, "you need to see my guy, he's the best."

Your sales floor may be slow, but you do have customers coming to your dealership. It's easy to become myopic when sales are down, but when you become fixated on the customers you don't have, you lose sight of the sales opportunities growing in your own backyard.

It's easy to become myopic when sales are down, but when you become fixated on the customers you don't have, you lose sight of the sales opportunities growing in your own backyard.

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Lead Generation in Tough Times

How CSI/NPS Scores Can Be Used

By John E. Dillard, Jr., Ph.D.,
The AVALA Marketing Group

More and more marketers today are realizing that customer satisfaction and recommendations, once thought of simply as a "feel good" measurement, or a place for consumers to vent, can actually provide a source of positive leads – something we can all use in these tough economic times.

But how? Let's briefly examine the process.

Customer Satisfaction Indexes (CSI) are typically calculated from questions such as: "Based on your recent (sales experience/service

**Even if you sell only
a few additional
boats a year, isn't
it worth it?**

experience/ownership experience), how satisfied are you with your (selling dealer/servicing dealer/product)"? In a standard CSI survey, consumers will respond to this question via a 5- to 11-point scale. The overall CSI score is determined by taking the arithmetic mean of all respondents. For example, if you have three respondents, one of whom rates you a 10, another who rates you a 9, and the third rates you a 4, your overall CSI score is $10 + 9 + 4 / 3$, or 7.67.

Net Promoter Scores (NPS) are usually based on a single 11-point "likelihood to recommend" scale as follows: "On a scale of 0 to 10, with 0 being 'not at all likely' and 10 being 'extremely likely,' how likely is it that you would recommend (dealership/product) to a friend or colleague?" NPS is calculated by recording responses into three groups (detractors, passives and promoters) and subtracting the percentage of detractors from the percentage of promoters.

What is the value of CSI/NPS respondents in developing leads in tough economic times? Before we address that question, let's briefly look at how certain responses might be interpreted. In most CSI programs, 50 to 70 percent of all customers are "completely satisfied" with whatever they are being surveyed about (sales, service, ownership experience, product, dealership, etc.). Any response below a 9 is, therefore, not necessarily a disgruntled customer but is certainly suspect. NPS has a similar way of categorizing respondents: 9s and 10s are promoters and everyone else is simply a different shade of negative. Thus, with either of these two instruments, highly positive customers respond with either a 9 or 10.

Since we know these customers are very positively inclined to the product and/or the dealership, this knowledge can be leveraged to generate leads in a number of different ways:

1. **Contacting these customers directly** and asking them

to recommend one or more persons that might have an interest in boating. These leads can be followed up by e-mail, direct mail and/or by phone.

2. Hosting an event where the highly positive customers are invited to attend and asked to invite one or more friends they know who either: a) enjoy boating but don't own a boat; b) own a competitive boat; c) own a pre-owned boat; or d) enjoy the water. This type of event can be hosted around a boat show, introduction of a new model, or during a "demo-day" where there are several sizes and types of boats available for test drives.

3. Focus an event on capturing only new "leads" and their families with the invitation to the event coming directly from the highly positive customer.

Each of these approaches has been successful, but the one that will work for you might require a bit of experimentation. We recommend starting small and trying different approaches. For example, who should first contact the highly positive customer might depend on the context of the survey. If it's a post-sales survey, the salesperson might be best; for a post-service survey, either the service manager or service advisor. The owner of the dealership might also be good.

Will a simple invitation work? Again, some experimentation is required. You may need a traffic incentive to get the "leads" to attend. Part of it will depend on the relationship the lead has with the highly positive customer. We recommend trying it both ways. And track your results so you know what works and how effective it is. Know how many people you invited, how many showed up, how much money you spent, how many leads you got into a "selling" situation, and how many boats you ended up selling.

This may require several months of planning and then several months of tracking leads. But armed with this knowledge, you will quickly be able to determine the effectiveness of any program. Once you know what works, keep at it. Even if you sell only a few additional boats a year, isn't it worth it? In high-end industries, converting prospects to sales can translate to millions in profit. This more than justifies the amount of effort spent on mining your CSI program for new leads.

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A time for change

New approaches and tactics will deliver success.

By Valerie Ziebron,
VRZ Consulting

Quiet is supposed to be relaxing, but when you are inside a dealership during working hours and there is no foot traffic and no phones ringing nothing could be more pit-of-the-stomach unsettling. As dealers are pushing through slower times, business as usual is being replaced by some crafty innovation and reallocation of marketing resources.

If you want different results you must take different actions and sometimes this means switching up job descriptions. It is critical that all members of the dealership staff understand that their role is actively tied to selling. Selling service, sales, accessories and F&I must be done by everyone from the support staff to upper management. An example of this kind of creative best practice came from a dealer who was not sure what to do with his staff during a slow spell. He saw his tech cleaning his bay trying to look busy with no available work orders so he told the guy to put on a clean t-shirt with the dealer logo on it, grab a stack of business cards and head down to the local dock to help people unload and load their boats. They have used this ‘customer service approach’ to help answer questions, lend a hand and educate customers about their boats and proper operations. It doesn’t matter if you send a tech or a salesperson. Any available staff can help start a new customer relationship. Customers that learn something are more

likely to like and trust you. This leads to more sales for all departments.

In order to get your staff comfortable with selling you want to create as many learning opportunities as possible.

“We have a 15-minute training session every day,” says Alan Lawson, general manager of Outdoor RV and Marine World in Greer, S.C. “I’ll pick one feature or a competitor and explain it. Then the staff will present a feature. We all learn from each other.”

One of the most inexpensive ways to stretch your reach and marketing dollar is to spend some time

on the Internet. More dealers are getting serious about their presence on the Web using not only their own site, but also using blogs, chat rooms and social networking sites like MySpace.

Free print marketing is also possible by getting to know your local sports and outdoors writers who provide articles for your local papers. They have deadlines weekly to provide fresh stories, and you can become a source that they can count on to provide quotes and event information. Having your dealership quoted in these stories can build awareness and credibility.

Both the internet and local paper examples can be assigned to staff members who are interested in taking these unusual assignments on. You might be surprised to learn who at your dealership spends hours on the Internet after work or who has always enjoyed writing. Allocate these jobs to people who enjoy them and you are likely to get better results

from your marketing, and extra employee satisfaction as a bonus.

Not all marketing can be done for free, so when it comes to spending dollars you have to look closely at the return on your investment. Most studies show that it costs far more to attract a new customer than to keep an existing one. Applying this concept would suggest that our marketing dollars would be best used on generating sales from our existing, profitable customers. It is important to include the guideline of “profitable” for these existing customers since some customers tend to cost us more than they bring in. Tough times are bad times to cater to squeaky wheel customers who take all the grease.

Taking a good look at your customer database allows you to come up with properly targeted promotions. What is the average boat age of our customer? How do most of our customers use their product? What events would appeal to the majority? What accessories create the most buzz? We hear a lot in the media about consumer confidence, and the truth is it changes drastically area to area. Get a pulse on your customers’ confidence and the areas that are most important to them. Would a free gas promotion draw them to action or a local charity event?

I’ve heard it said that the only people who like change are wet babies. This may be true, but the changes that dealerships make now in the form of new approaches and tactics learned during a down market coupled with perfecting our business process so they are as efficient as possible will propel dealers forward with increased CSI and profitability when the market turns.

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Finding a marketing partner

Innovative efforts can lead to short- and long-term gains.

By John Wisse, Ohio Division of Watercraft

Marine Marketers of America

When faced with tighter operating budgets, a sagging sales climate and increased advertising costs, what options might be available for retail marine dealers to more efficiently leverage and optimize their marketing and promotions dollars?

One answer may be in attaining a marketing partner who can readily fit into a modified branding and marketing effort to attract potential customers and generate additional sales leads. Let's look at how a Cincinnati, Ohio-based marine dealer has pursued just such an option in

finding a marketing partner.

It's really a perfect relationship to match up our Toyota products with the boats sold by Hern Marine.

Eric Davis
Beechmont Toyota

In many conversations between boating customers and sales staff, towing issues are directly involved in the sale of recreational boats almost without exception. Having a reliable tow vehicle that can readily handle the important task of towing a boat and related gear is every bit as important as having a well-built and reliable boat in the first place.

"We have more than 40,000 vehicles a day pass by our dealership, and the

majority of those are pickup trucks and SUVs," says Wayne Stewart, manager of Hern Marine's Rivertowne store location along Kellogg Avenue on Cincinnati's east side.

Hern Marine has partnered with Beechmont Toyota in Cincinnati to share in marketing and promoting the sales of recreational boats and Toyota trucks. At the Great Outdoors Show held May 17-18 at the Coney Island Amusement Park, Hern Marine and Beechmont Toyota displayed six separate truck-boat-trailer packages and shared their vendor display costs.

"It's not that we are trying to sell Toyota trucks or that Beechmont Toyota is trying to sell our boats," Stewart explains, "but our goal is simply to work together to increase awareness and generate sales leads for each other based upon a very natural relationship between trailerable boats and trucks."

In fact, it was 2004 when announcement was made that Toyota Motor Corporation became the official truck and SUV of Tracker Marine Group and its subsidiary, Bass Pro Shops. The national partnership program encouraged development and growth of community-based partnerships between Toyota dealers and Tracker dealers. Hern Marine, headquartered in the Cincinnati suburb of Fairfield is the largest Tracker dealer in the

Buckeye State and greater Cincinnati TriState metro region that also includes northern Kentucky and southwest Indiana.

"It's really a perfect relationship to match up our Toyota products with the boats sold by Hern Marine," says Eric Davis, spokesman for Beechmont Toyota, "including some of the larger non-Tracker brand boats they sell."

Hern Marine also sells Cobalt, Crownline and Maxum, in addition to Tracker's Nitro, Sun Tracker and Tahoe brand boats from its dealerships at the Rivertowne and Fairfield locations and in nearby Florence, Kentucky. In fact, Hern Marine also has forged a partnership with a local Cincinnati-area General Motors dealer to expand its cross-marketing diversity.

"What is appealing here at our location is to show off new Toyota truck and SUV products that are capable of towing trailerable loads up to 10,000 pounds," says Davis. "When a prospective customer sees the natural pairing among truck, boat and trailer, well then that has great curb appeal when viewed at a truck dealership in addition to a boat dealership."

While cross-marketing trucks with trailerable boat packages may not be a new concept, there are many dealers in the Cincinnati TriState area and elsewhere across the region who are not participating in such shared marketing partnership opportunities.

"We seem to be the only boat dealers here in Cincinnati wanting to do this type of cross-marketing effort," says Stewart, "and it's odd because we have an abundance of truck dealers in the TriState."

The key, however, is in displaying trucks and boat packages outdoors close to where the daily motorist commuting action occurs. Both Stewart and Davis agree these specialty truck-boat-trailer packages are far better suited for outdoor displays instead of inside dealer showrooms. Producing high visibility products in high traffic locations seems to be the key to a more successful strategy.

"We are definitely seeing more customer interest," Stewart says. "For a newly developed effort that's less than two months old, it already has become a positive outcome for us at Hern Marine and for our partner Beechmont Toyota."

By taking an innovative approach to shared marketing and promotions efforts, marine dealers have an opportunity to develop local partnerships that may produce long-term as well as short-term benefits. If the old adage "two heads are better than one" applies to creative idea specialists, then perhaps two partners and two expenditure budgets are better than one?

John Wisse serves on the board of directors of the Marine Marketers of America and co-chairs its Pro Bono Special Projects Committee. He also is assistant manager of the Public Information and Education section for the Ohio Division of Watercraft based in Columbus, Ohio. You can reach him at 614/265-6695 or john.wisse@dnr.state.oh.us.



Finding hidden treasure

Nine tips to seek out those co-op dollars now.

By Wanda Kenton Smith,

Kenton Smith Advertising & Public Relations
Marine Marketers of America

Every client I've ever had in the marine industry shared one common desire: they all wished they had more dollars for marketing. From global manufacturers to marine dealerships, no one ever seems to have all the funding they'd like, to do all things they want to do.

Marketing budgets are often considered "discretionary" and as such, are the first to feel the noose in a tightening economy. As such, marketing champions have to get smart about how to extend and maximize their working budget.

Over the nearly 30 years I've spent as a marketing professional in the marine industry – both on the corporate and agency side – I've learned a few tricks about how to find hidden pots of gold. You may have to do some digging to find it, but the loot is often there, just ready for the taking.

I served as vice president of marketing for a major boat manufacturer for 11 years, and one of my areas of responsibility was dealer co-op advertising. I was amazed by the few dealers who took full advantage of the program, with most allowing thousands of dollars to slip by.

I often asked dealership principals why they didn't take advantage of the available programs, and the normal responses included "no one to handle it" or "too much work involved." I can attest at the time that the paperwork requirements were extremely simple and straightforward. Either the extra money just wasn't a priority, or perhaps the benefits weren't well enough understood.

On the other hand, there were those savvy dealers who clearly understood the benefits of co-op advertising. They squeezed every last red nickel out of the program and maximized their marketing dollars. They were on the ball and their marketing programs literally turned on a dime as they cashed in

every available dollar to their advantage.

What's the difference between the haves (have co-op) and have nots?

The most important component for success in making ad co-op programs work is to first have management buy-in. If management understands the direct bottom-line benefit of co-op advertising and makes it a priority for the dealership, the dealership has the potential of yielding excellent new-found funds. Management, however, must realize the downside of losing these dollars, as well as the upside of capturing them.

The next step is to designate a detail-oriented individual at the dealership who will manage all aspects of the available co-op programs. Avoid schlepping this job to someone who can't chase the details or who doesn't understand the financial ramifications, or the initiative is doomed to fail. Once your co-op champion is designated, make sure all manufacturers are given the appropriate contact information with instructions to copy this person on any future marketing/co-op program updates.

The person tapped for this job must research to understand how to earn funds, what requirements are in order, and when/how to submit claims (most have deadlines and you lose out if you snooze). Since most dealerships carry multiple lines, program criteria often varies somewhat by manufacturer, so study all programs individually.

There are usually specific requirements associated with co-op activity that are designed to jointly benefit the manufacturer and dealer. These requirements can be simple or complex, but usually involve specific logo usage and language applications, space allocations, plus submission protocols, documentation and deadlines. The terms of such programs are often spelled out in the small type of your dealer agreement or in a dealer handbook, or may be available on a request-basis only. If you can't find the program details in your dealer materials, ask for it.

Another important co-op tip: understand

9 Tips for co-op success

- 1 Gain management buy-in
- 2 Designate detail-oriented person to manage co-op funds
- 3 Know the requirements of co-op activity
- 4 Understand the rules of multi-brand co-op
- 5 Use external resources to build a strong ad
- 6 Plan for co-op use in advance
- 7 Develop relationships with manufacturer marketing counterparts
- 8 Go for the gold with winning projects
- 9 Collect your money

requirements for multi-brand application. Some programs only allow for the "solo" manufacturer and dealer application, excluding other boat brands; engines are often the exception. Since dealers often advertise multiple brands together, be sure to know the rules to avoid claims rejection.

There are ways around this requirement, in terms of how you build and segment your ad. If you don't have a marketing expert or designer in-house, at the very least, ask your ad rep to help you create strategies to overcome the challenge.

The best approach is to be strategic about your co-op. Decide in advance where and how you'll apply your funding. Perhaps you have a few major projects where you'd like to apply your funds. Choose in advance which manufacturer you will partner with by project, and wherever possible, get advance approval to ensure your funds will be forthcoming. Develop relationships with your manufacturer marketing counterparts; you will often find them to be very

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PR or Advertising? What works best?

What works best is using them both.

By Mike Walker, Walker Agency
Marine Marketers of America

There's an old argument about the differences between public relations and advertising and their relative contribution to the success of a brand or a business. This is one of the great endless arguments no matter the industry or products involved.

Talk to an ad manager or representative and you get the mantra that without advertising, all is lost and business will grind to a halt. Talk to a PR person, and they'll dismiss advertising as too expensive, ineffective and you'll get chapter and verse on the value of PR because it has credibility that advertising can't touch. The argument goes on and on, but both sides are right on some of these points.

I believe that both PR and advertising are critically important to the success and even survival of brands, and the executive who ignores one in favor of the other lessens the company's chances for sustainable success in the marketplace. Each discipline brings different benefits with it, and while they are similar in that they help businesses grow. They are different because they have different jobs to do and goals.

While most marine businesses understand the importance of advertising, many overlook the potential that a structured public relations campaign can offer them. In my observation, the advantage of public relations in comparison to advertising can be seen this way:

■ **Total market reach for maximized coverage:** PR does not involve the use of expensive paid space or time. This allows the budget to be spread efficiently to reach many different media, often where ad budgets cannot reach, and in some marginal media, should not reach. This is not to say there aren't costs associated with a PR program. People who say PR is free advertising don't understand how a PR program works. This assumption is further proof that PR has credibility, because that person clearly believes what he read is news, not an ad.

■ **Credibility:** Newspapers, magazines and trade publications are purchased and read for their editorial content, not their advertising content, no matter what ad agencies say. Therefore, the reader assumes that all editorial matter is published because it is judged to be important by an editor. This results in an implied endorsement from a trusted source as received by the reader.

■ **Improved Advertising Environment:** Regular editorial appearances can boost the effectiveness of advertising by making your company's products and brand more recognizable and believable. News coverage also enables the manufacturer to document product claims through a more credible medium. Note that the opposite is true, advertising content can boost the effectiveness of editorial appearances.

■ **Issues Management:** A coordinated public relations program allows companies to set the agenda for editorial coverage, a "proactive" rather

24 ways to increase your exposure

Think there's little to be said about your company in the news? Use these ideas to get the message out about your company.

1. New Sales Records

- Peak sales over previous years
- Sales records for the industry
- Human interest stories on sales records

2. Product Usage

- How to use products
- New uses for products
- New features added to design
- New materials in construction
- New service added
- Formula change or improvement

3. Promotions

- New department heads added or promoted
- New officers elected
- Distributors appointed
- New salespeople

4. Unusual Sales

- Difficult installation or special custom installation planned or accomplished
- Unusually large sale made
- Sales made to unusual markets or foreign countries

5. New Trade Names

- Stories about your company's trademark or logo
- Plans to redesign your trademark or logo
- New slogans
- Change in trade name
- New package design

6. Famous Visitors or Customers

- Celebrity or VIP visits your office or store
- Celebrity present at special event
- Trade group visiting your business or facility
- Foreign group visiting your business
- Local student or school group visiting your facility

7. Catastrophe News

- Fires, floods, explosions or wind damage
- Future plans to avert or correct conditions
- Offers of aid for victims of catastrophe

8. Convention/Trade Show News

- Company officials and representatives at convention
- Trade shows attended
- Interesting sales made at show
- Report of talks given by company personnel before industry groups

9. Interviews

- Press interviews with company personnel
- Opinions on government controls, shortages, cooperation, etc.

10. Historical Data

- Milestones such as anniversaries or length of service awards, One-Millionth product (or other significant milestones) produced, with photos of "way-back-when" products, plants and personalities

11. Retirements

- Ceremonies for retiring personnel
- Stories on retirement of equipment, systems or methods

12. New Literature or Product Arrival

- New catalogs or brochures available
- New sales presentations
- New lines carried
- New models arrival



>> Marketing tactics

13. Price Changes

- Forecasts on price structure
- Decrease or increase and why
- Explanation of a price breakdown

14. Contests

- Announcements
- Updates
- Results
- Award ceremonies or presentations

15. Open House Or Clinics

- Tours for special groups
- Opening of new warehouse, sales office, additional store location

16. Oddities

- Human-interest stories of products used
- Unusual letters received
- Humorous happenings in your store
- Coincidences

17. Published Articles

- Stories on speeches or papers presented by company personnel at trade meetings
- Stories about "state of the art" in your industry as predicted by you or your staff

18. Business Expansion

- New buildings, additions, branches
- New equipment or tools added
- Modernization
- Mergers
- Appointments and promotions
- Announcement of long range plans

19. Human Interest

- Unusual events occurring in course of day's work
- Firsts or new accomplishments
- Stories involving babies, animals, etc.
- Citations or awards received
- Contrasts: World's largest shown with world's smallest, for example
The unexpected: Man bites dog

20. Testimonials

- Customer testimonials on products or services
- Long-term customers
- Testimonials by trade groups, publications, societies, etc.

21. Special Meetings

- Sales meetings
- Dealer meetings
- Company events
- Industry conferences

22. Letters To The Editors

- Commending the publications for excellence or fair play
- Taking issue with the publications
- Correcting or adding facts to a published story
- Suggesting a new need
- Whimsical or humorous observation on a current topic of the day

23. Tie-ins

- News of the day affecting or affected by the company
- Sales promotions
- Merchandising
- Joint promotions

24. Employee Accomplishments

- Personal honors and achievements
- Participation in affairs in community, church, fraternal and service organizations, clubs, etc.
- Suggestion awards
- Service awards
- Manufacturer recognition (CSI, top sales or finishing training schools)
- Unusual hobbies
- Retirements

than a "reactive" stance towards the media.

After working with marine dealers for more than 30 years, I can attest that these businesses seem to use more advertising than publicity in building and maintaining their business.

However, dealers who understand the value of making publicity a very effective tool for growing their business are enhancing their standing in the community. They understand the difference between these two methods of promotion and use both to their advantage.

Those dealers who rely solely on advertising are missing out on one of the best tools available to them. I'm convinced that despite the high costs of advertising, dealers use it because it's familiar to them, as comfortable as an old shoe. Publicity is a stranger to them despite all the efforts their suppliers make to educate them about PR.

There are some in the marine industry who do understand the power of publicity and make exceptional use of it as a marketing tool, just as there are some who see the power of advertising. But those who grasp the advantages of harnessing both advertising and PR and use them both are ensuring the long-term health of their brands.

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interested in your activities and willing to help wherever possible.

Finally, I'll share valuable advice that has worked on numerous occasions, earning my clients hundreds of thousands of extra dollars. If you've expended your co-op funds but still have a great project or two you'd like to undertake, here's how to go for the gold.

Prepare a detailed proposal outlining your program's goals and objectives. Fully explain the marketing program you have in mind, and express how it will ultimately sell more XYZ product (their brand). Include key strategies and tactics, along with the relevant costs. Estimate return on investment. Explain what's in it for them, and then provide a specific request for funding.

This doesn't have to be a Pulitzer prize-winning submission, but it needs to be professionally prepared. If you don't have the expertise to prepare this yourself, ask your proposed media/marketing partner to collaborate with you to produce it. Once you are ready, set up an advance time to present this proposal to the marketing decision-maker and review it 1:1, preferably in person, but at the least, over the phone. Never send it cold.

While there is no guarantee that manufacturers will hand over a blank check, your chances for reward are much better when you've clearly done your homework and have a smart, mutually-beneficial plan in place, customized especially for them.

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Winning PR campaigns on a shoestring budget

Discover how to favorably position and pitch your business.

By Susan O'Reilly and Betsy Kinsey

Kenton Smith Advertising & Public Relations

Marine Marketers of America

Gaining favorable publicity or public relations for your business without a big budget to hire a high-powered PR firm can be easier than you might think. But like any worthwhile enterprise, it will take an investment of your time, resources and energy to build relationships with the media that will ultimately result in great publicity for your company.

To be successful, you'll need to discover what works with the media, what doesn't, and how to favorably position and pitch yourself and your business to capture the media's attention.

Why is PR so important?

Public relations is the art of persuading print, broadcast and online media outlets to feature your business in their editorial copy. For marketing professionals, public relations is increasingly becoming more important because it's a very effective way to reach consumers.

When your business is featured alongside other news or feature articles in a magazine, newspaper or on a Web site, consumers generally regard it with more credibility and trust than a traditional ad. In essence, positive media coverage can act as a type of third-party endorsement for your business. That's why many boating and marine businesses spend the time and budget to ensure that their new boats and marine-related products are featured prominently in national boating and sailing publications and Web sites.

Some examples of favorable publicity for a marine business can include:

- A newspaper or magazine article that describes the opening or expansion of a marine business, or the addition of new services.
- An article by a sailor or boater on a boating blog describing the great experience he had visiting a marina or buying a boat from a local dealership.
- Magazine article with photos about a celebrity America's Cup sailor, wakeboard or fishing pro, or other celebrity visiting a local dealership.
- Newspaper article with photos highlighting a marine business's special boaters' rendezvous or sailing event that is benefiting a local charity.

Many novices make the mistake of thinking that public relations is

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the same as advertising. It's not. In fact, to gain the media's attention and trust, you'll need a quick course in Journalism 101, to understand what reporters and editors will value as news from you and your marine business.

One of the quickest ways to learn the types of stories the media is interested is simply to start reading local, regional and national newspapers, publications and online Web site and boating blogs covering marine stories. Review the types of stories covered, so that when you're ready to pitch an article, you'll know who to call or e-mail. If you like an article, or can add some information to a reporter's or writer's story or knowledge of the subject, e-mail him or her, introduce yourself and take that first step toward making a strong contact with a member of the media.

Dealing with the media also requires investing in developing an in-house spokesperson with a back-up staff member also trained to serve as his or her replacement. The best candidates for this job are top-level executives or managers who are well-spoken, at ease in front of a camera and who possess an insider's knowledge of your business and the marine industry.

Your business's media spokesperson should know in advance about every media idea being pitched and every news release being distributed. Also, when you're distributing a news release, be sure that a media spokesperson is reachable, even after business hours, to handle any follow-up media calls. If you don't have someone that qualifies for this role, invest in professional training.

Never underestimate the power of a great database

Great sources and contacts in the media are invaluable and essential to compile before you embark on a pitch to successfully steer your news release to the right editor or reporter.

Your database list for news release distribution should include the standard names and addresses of key editors, including telephone numbers and e-mail addresses. Many media prefer to be contacted by e-mail first, but at larger metropolitan newspapers and magazines, security filters may bounce your e-mails back to you, so always get a back-up telephone number.

Depending on the story that you're trying to place, more than one reporter or editor may be on your list at certain media outlets. To find this information, search the Internet, or look at the magazine's masthead, or the publication itself. Be sure to update and double-check names and information every three months to keep the database current.

Your list should include:

- Local newspapers (outdoor or sports editors; news and business editors, feature and calendar editors and photographers on staff).

Also don't miss out on possible opportunities on the editorial page,



>> Marketing tactics

where a column or letter written by you on a marine issue would position you and your business as the local expert on the subject.)

■ Marina-based giveaway publications (Offer to write a free column on local fishing, boating or marine concerns with a byline and information about your business.)

■ TV and radio stations (Quick tips: read biographies of local anchors and reporters on the station's Web site to discover if any of them have a boating interest already and follow-up with a personal invitation to your next dealership event. Add weather anchors to your list, if you can offer them opportunities to do the weather from your picturesque marina or dealership. Get to know your local TV videographers; in some markets videographers will work solo to cover stories. Key personnel to pitch stories to at many TV stations are the assignment editors, who are often the gatekeepers for making story assignments and directing the station's broadcast videography crews and trucks.)

■ Regional boating publications

■ Business publications (Great for placements of promotions with photos; expansion news; service additions; special, unique business development events.)

■ City magazines (Note: magazines have a longer lead time than newspapers, so be sure to get any upcoming boating events to them two-three months ahead of time. If you have a celebrity-studded boating event, this is great placement for a preview article and after-event photos.)

■ Boating Web sites and blogs (Informally survey your customers to discover which ones they enjoy and read. But note that blogs are very informal and usually require a more casual, personal approach in sending information than a standard news release so tailor your news accordingly.)

Understand the media's resources

At the heart of any successful relationship with the media is understanding that they are usually time-pressed and on deadline, juggling multiple assignments. To gain their trust, speak their language.

Send information to them in a professionally written news release that highlights, without hype, the five W's essential in all news: who, what, when, where and why. The Internet makes it easy to discover examples of news releases or to hire small or medium-sized PR companies or freelancers who will handle this task for you.

Learn what their specific deadlines are and how they prefer to get

information. Many editors and media prefer to get news releases via e-mail with photographs sent separately in a high-resolution format that can be sent via a jpeg compressed computer file, but ask to determine what works best for them.

Many media outlets, especially newspapers, are battling very difficult business times themselves, often dealing with in-house cutbacks. Don't be surprised or annoyed if a reporter or editor cannot cover your event on a weekend because his media outlet simply isn't staffed for it. Instead, ask him how you can send follow-up information to have the event covered, or what can be done next time to ensure coverage.

At the same time, understand that the media can move to cover your story without much advance notice. A videographer may be in your neighborhood because he's covering another story nearby and now wants to stop by to do that story you suggested two weeks ago about the dealership. Don't question the deadline, just roll with it and get the information needed in time to meet his deadline.

Turn the media's limitations to your advantage by understanding their needs. For example, wonderful, eye-catching photography of boating or sailing is always something that can be pitched to photo or news editors at local newspapers, especially with an informational caption that notes the location of your marine business.

Keep abreast of new industry trends affecting boaters and suggest ideas to feature editors for future reference. In general, editors are very receptive to covering civic events, so if you're having a boating or sailing event to benefit a local charity, be sure to include calendar editors who cover charity events on your invitation list.

Most of all, the cardinal rule any PR professional knows, is to follow-up with the media. Don't assume the reporter or editor received the e-mail blast about your event or the mailed news release. Especially at the start, follow-up with a phone call to discover if your news release was targeted to the right journalist. Provide back-up cell information and honor your commitments to the media.

Once you've succeeded, do some great PR of your own and ask the media publication or outlet for permission to run the article on your business's Web site and enjoy impressing your current and prospective clients with your successful media coverage.

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to your advantage by
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How PR supports sales

You have more to promote than you think.

By Kelly Flory,
Martin Flory Group

The theory, "If you build it, they will come," may have worked for Kevin Costner in the movie Field of Dreams, but it's not the smartest approach for business. Your marketing efforts drive your sales – how can people buy something they don't know exists?

When customers spend money, they need to know why your products and services are better or faster, more durable or less-expensive, or whatever it is that meets their needs and tips them to choose you over others. This segment of your business is called "sales and marketing" for a reason. They truly go hand in hand.

Yes, the industry is in a tight spot: Sales are down, and budgets are being examined with a microscope. Marketing programs and dollars are typically the first thing to get cut. But before you get out the machete and start slashing away, remember that you're cutting your lifeline to customers.

Likewise, consider that those who continue promotional efforts and get aggressive about sales in tough times usually end up snapping up market share – from those who pull in their horns. Consider the words of sales and management guru Dale Carnegie: "The person who gets the farthest is generally the one who is willing to do and dare. The sure-thing boat never gets far from shore."

In highly competitive markets, you're more conspicuous by your absence than your presence. Do you really want anyone to think, "Gee, I haven't seen anything about (insert your company here), I wonder if they're still in business?" Or worse yet, just forget you?

Marketing programs don't need to be a budget-buster. Basic publicity, for example, is an economical way to broadly enforce your brand and affirm your viability.

The media is always looking for a story. Press releases about new products or services, existing products that solve a specific problem, new business relationships and other company growth are useful to a variety of publications and freelance writers. An educational-type press release about choosing or installing a type of product elevates understanding of more technical items.

Take a look around your company and product line. You have more to promote than you think.

When print publications and online media use your press releases, it creates third-party credibility. This can be more powerful than any advertising or direct marketing program, as publicity proliferates

through a wide array of editorial outlets.

You also empower your sales force by sharing your press releases with them. It helps them understand your current company message, and they can then use your materials in their local sales and marketing efforts. Current and targeted customers benefit from sharing in your news, too. How's that for value, re-usable PR that directly supports your sales?

Your public relations success hinges on providing relevant information with the appropriate support materials, as well as targeting the proper contacts. If you're helpful to editors and writers, they'll often seek you out the next time they're working on a related project.

Ensure the media has a way to contact you with questions. Provide quality photography with press releases, and deliver your message in layman's terms, not engineer-speak. For retail items, include a price. People need to know if something costs \$1 or \$1,000. If you don't provide it, editors will come back to you for it, or just toss your press release.

Include your Web site and sales contact details in your press release. When that editorial coverage occurs, customers reading the magazine article need a vehicle to learn more about your company.

Categorize your contact list so press releases go only to those who will find it relevant. The bass fishing magazines and boat builders don't care about a new spinnaker pole for sailboats.

Providing a regular flow of information to the media and your contact list continues your brand building, but don't risk becoming abusive with your contacts. Sending four press releases every day can cause recipients' eyes to glaze over, and your valued information winds up in the recycle bin.

Public relations is a key component of your overall sales and marketing strategy. When used with other tools, such as advertising, direct marketing and your Web site, it enforces your brand and helps drive sales.

The most minimal of public relations efforts can be undertaken directly by a small company. But it can take some time to find the relevant media contacts and develop relationships with them. Hiring professionals to do what they do best is an economical decision in the long run.

Kelly Flory is general manager of Martin Flory Group, a Gurnee, Illinois-based public relations firm concentrating on the marine, outdoor and RV industries. The 46-year old company focuses on delivering worldwide editorial coverage for its clients through its targeted, affordable programs. More information is available at 847/662-9070 or info@martinflory.com.

Public relations is a key component of your overall sales and marketing strategy.



When budgeting, mix it up

Be Creative with Traditional Marketing Tactics

By Mark Kellum, Kenton Smith Advertising & PR
Marine Marketers of America

With tightened marketing dollars, many traditional marketing activities may need to be curtailed. It may make sense to reduce media buys, revisit trade show participation and consider traditional public relations carefully. Just like the ethnic stews, if you cannot afford expensive ingredients look for alternative means to mix up the recipe.

Basic ingredients don't have to be complicated. The term, "guerilla marketing," was first coined by Jay Conrad Levinson in his best-selling book titled "Guerilla Marketing" published in 1983. Levinson argues that small to mid-sized businesses need to adopt a more "sweat equity" style of marketing. Essentially, work harder and smarter and spend less.

The reference to guerilla is not the animal; it is the style of warfare. Guerilla-warfare is conducted by under-funded armies that must use unconventional tactics to achieve conventional goals. Levinson is a proponent that smart marketers will spend their time, energy, imagination and information to develop "weapons" or tactics in lieu of money to create sales. One tactic that Levinson strongly espouses is "follow-up," or continual contact with existing clients to create opportunities for repeat and referral business.

Another tenet of guerilla marketing is to help potential clients visualize how they will feel after the purchase. Don't rely on the old feature/benefit sales approach. He submits it is better to help the prospect envision the experience of ownership. Whenever possible, allow the potential client to demo the boat and experience it firsthand.

In his most recent edition of "Guerilla Marketing," Levinson offers 100 weapons (tactics) to employ in order to attain your business goals. While we don't have room to cover this here, I recommend you buy the book – it's a great read. However, he also pres-

ents the seven questions any marketing plan should answer and we do have room for this:

- 1** *What physical act does your marketing plan want the potential customer to perform? Log onto a Web site, visit a dealer, request more information, etc.*
- 2** *What competitive advantage does your product offer? What benefit does the product offer that the competition does not have?*
- 3** *What is your target audience(s)? Make sure you consider all potential demographics.*
- 4** *What weapons (tactics) will be deployed? Email, direct mail, events, etc.*
- 5** *What is the niche your product will fill? This should be a positioning statement.*
- 6** *What is your identity?*
- 7** *What is your marketing budget? Most companies set aside 4 percent of projected gross sales as a working budget.*

Events and promotions are good examples of tactics that create interest and in turn generate sales. To reduce the costs of promotion, get vendors and outside organizations to sponsor and help underwrite events and promotions. Make it worth their while to get involved.

Another key to marketing on a tight budget is maximizing today's technologies to improve the results of traditional marketing tools. With today's computers and printers, custom brochures and flyers can be easily developed as first-rate marketing tools. Not everyone can master great design or learn desktop publishing techniques. However, in your organization there is probably at least one frustrated designer. Give them the tools and some direction. There are also freelance designers, boutique design studios and smaller ad agencies that can be very cost effective. With modern laser printing, print-quality brochures and flyers can be produced on-demand, not incurring the traditional cost of larger print runs and storage of the collateral material.

Don't underestimate the power of a personal letter. Old-fashioned personal letters can add a powerful punch to your marketing program. In today's world of high-tech marketing tactics, a personal letter stands out and can open the door to stronger relationships. Make it a personal letter, not a sales letter. We in the boating business are in the relationship business. Keep the letter short and sweet, and resist the temptation to make a sales pitch. Adjust the text to address the relationship that exists, be it directed to a past client, new potential client, influencer, etc. Always keep it genuine. If you send out a personal letter twice a year, you're on the road to solid relationship building. This base rapport and trust creates the opportunity for developing a steady flow of new clients as well as an increase in the level of referral and repeat business.

Finally, customer service done right is cost-effective and not costly. Never forget the long-term value of customer service. Customer follow-up and outrageously good service will pay for itself with future transactions.

The budget and schedules are to provide a predictable and controlled level of expenditure, incorporating expense and human resources/labor.

Finally, have all stakeholders sign off on the plan so everyone can work together to achieve the marketing goals. It is important to remember that a marketing plan is a "living" document, not something cast in stone. As market conditions change, the marketing plan needs to be reviewed and periodically adjusted.

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How to become the marine expert in your market

Ideas for expanding your exposure.

By Greg Proteau & David Pilvelait, Home Port Marine Marketing

Marine Marketers of America

An abundance of marketing and communications materials is available to boat dealers and other marine businesses to customize for their own use. And, much of it is free, accessible on the Internet or on the shelves in the reference sections of local libraries.

If it's "basic" marketing and promotion you seek, build a plan utilizing these sources and put it to work. If it doesn't ring the bell, then hire a professional. You'll find a directory of marine marketing pros at the Marine Marketers of America Web site, www.marinemarketers.org.

Big issues are those that have widespread interest to a general audience, and they can be fine-tuned for literally any marketplace. Doesn't everyone want more meaningful leisure time? Isn't everybody concerned about the environment? Wouldn't boat safety tips be useful at the beginning of the season? Of course, the answers are yes. And it is to your business' benefit to take the generic details, make them relevant to your area, and in the process become known as "the source" for media contact when similar issues arise.

The boating industry has invested millions of dollars over the years in efforts to Grow Boating, the latest campaign aimed squarely at promoting the boating lifestyle and improving the boating experience. Everyone in boating should leverage the resources of this campaign, details of which can be found at www.growboating.org. Consumer information that gently leads prospects from merely the idea of going boating to deciding which boat is best for them to finding water access near home is based at www.discoverboating.com. Under the "resources" tab, find articles zeroing in on power or sail or fishing, details of ownership, how-tos, and even links to promoting boating on holidays. Most of these can be "localized" for businesses to provide special expertise about boating in their backyard.

Fishing specific resources are in abundance at the Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation site, www.rbff.org. This non-profit organization is dedicated to growing participation in fishing, boating and aquatic stewardship and offers a storehouse of research, marketing materials and event planning guides to underscore angling's and boating's common heritage and theme of fun. RBFF also manages the consumer-side, www.takemefishing.org, a graphically stunning site that informs consumers how to fish and boat, where to fish, provides state-by-state boat-fish pages and offers conservation education. Use these resources to become known as the retail gateway to fishing information

in your region.

Want to remind the community that boaters and your business are concerned about the environment? The BoatUS Foundation maintains a Web site, www.boatus.com/foundation/cleanwater/, and programs designed for marine firms, especially marinas, and offers tips for boat owners on how to be eco-friendly on board. Sea Grant colleges around the U.S. focus on more local concerns and offer a number of education programs found at www.seagrant.noaa.gov which you can promote.

On-water safety is a topic of concern to just about everybody using a boat and before and during the boating season. A rich Web site that focuses on both the annual Safe Boating Week and key year-round safety issues is www.safeboatingcampaign.net.

Choose from a complete press kit, customizable releases, suggested scripts for broadcast mentions, a photobank, and links to others involved. Studying the issues and materials will make you and your business the source media can turn to whenever water safety is in the news.

Other good sources for communicating about boating include manufacturers whose brands you sell, local and regional marine trade groups of which you are a member, and national groups that keep track of statistics and trends.

Industry publications, like *Boating Industry* magazine, are a storehouse for articles and "White Papers" that discuss water access, industry certification strides, affordability issues, and so on. Borrow the information, cite the source, then add your perspective to bring it home.

Much of the material mentioned here is close to being turn-key ready, where you would simply have to add a business name or appropriate quotation. Other sources may require a small investment of rewriting or digging for more local facts and figures. In either case, providing the media with regular and useful details about the wide world of boating will bring a wider world of customers to your door at a remarkably reasonable cost.

Greg Proteau is an award-winning boating writer, currently serving as the president of the Boating Writers International. He writes an F&I column for Boating Industry magazine, and he also serves as a consultant for the National Marine Bankers Association. He can be reached at 847/736-4142 or gproteau@msn.com. David Pilvelait is founder and COO of Home Port Marine Marketing, a marketing consultancy dedicated to helping marine products suppliers and related organizations. David can be reached at 804/436-9002 or david@homeportmarine.com.





An old marketing plan for a new era

Utilizing free, third-party exposure through a public relations effort can be a simple, practical – and economical – alternative.

By Alaina Weimer and Sonny Whittaker,
ASA Electronics

In today's struggling economy, many businesses are facing severe budgetary concerns. For many, reducing its marketing efforts appears to be an easy solution to saving the bottom line in lieu of personnel cuts, decreasing its sales force or raise/hiring freezes. That means marketing departments are being forced to cut back on high-priced products such as print, television, radio and Web advertising.

This financial crunch has put these departments in a dubious state of affairs that requires resourceful thinking. So, many have been forced to come up with imaginative solutions. One feasible line of attack to finding a cost-effective resolution to this marketing dilemma is the timeless practice of public relations – with relations being an operative term.

Managing the flow of information between a company and its target audience with a public relations strategy is a cheap, reliable and an immediate solution to the grim reality of budget cuts. In conventional public relations, the marketing plan consists of getting your company's name and products out to the public or potential customers through print or digital media outlets. This is effectively done by ramping up press releases transmitted by e-mail, phone, fax or postal mail.

Getting your company's name out in this manner can be as valuable as advertising but at relatively no cost to the company. In addition, you can gain that independent, third-party endorsement that is so valuable. Also, using the media to pitch your story ideas or contribute to feature articles is a helpful way of getting your company name or product out where influential eyes will be able to see. Through PR, you are positioning your company as the go-to industry, thus raising the potential of your company to be featured in publications.

Intensive research of information provided by the numerous marine publications is imperative to this type of marketing. Knowing editorial schedules is vital in creating and distributing viable information that would be useful in both print and Web publications. Along with this coverage comes the benefit of your company's name being circulated on the Internet and coming up in search engines, Web alerts and RSS feeds. This, in turn, can lead potential customers to the company's Web site and perhaps sales leads or in a best-case scenario added business for your company.

Building a working relationship is essential when dealing with the media. Finding that medium is critical though. Bombarding a potential or current editor/writer can be detrimental to your marketing cause. Carefully treading that boundary between excessive and insufficient is fundamental to the process.

So what becomes of the marketing departments that do not adapt to the reality of the ever-shrinking budget? What choices will they have when they are no longer able to use traditional advertising as a marketing tool? Going back to straightforward public relations is a cheap, simple and effective alternative way to get comparable results.

In order for companies to market effectively in today's world of tight budgets and limited resources, marketing departments need to employ a bit of ingenuity, practical problem solving and relationship building that will be beneficial to getting a company's name into the public realms. Straightforward PR is a completely simple, yet monetarily sensible way of marketing your company and products.

Alaina Weimer and Sonny Whittaker are public relations specialists with ASA Electronics, a marine industry manufacturer and supplier of the Jensen Marine brand, specializing in stereos, speakers, remote controls and LCD televisions for marine use. Sonny can be reached at 574/266-3181, swhittaker@asaelectronics.com. Find them on the Web at www.asaelectronics.com.

Building a working relationship is essential when dealing with the media. Finding that medium is critical though.

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