

A View from Here

Bill's Sisson's weekly Trade Only blog



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Posted by Wanda Kenton Smith on July 26, 2007

My last two Trade Only marketing columns have chronicled and championed my personal motorcycling “learn to ride” experience that ultimately led to the sale of two Harleys in a short window of time. Through this amazing experience, I’ve become a vocal advocate for this concept and believe we are missing the boat and quite literally losing sales opportunities by not linking boater education to sales.

I’d like to hear from folks who may have internal or outsourced programs in place that directly link education to sales. I want to understand how your program works, and how you market it and what you charge. I’m also interested in your results, and whether you can track sales through education. What are the best aspects of our program, and what could be done to enhance or improve it?

For those who may oppose this education-to-sales concept, I’d really like to understand your objections. It seems there is resistance to introducing an educational component prior to or at the time of sale. Note – I’m not speaking of nationally or state-wide mandated educational programs here ... I’m recommending voluntary, FUN, grass roots educational programs through dealerships or boat clubs, etc. that include aggressive outreach marketing programs, that can convert boater wanna-be’s into confident new boat operators who are ready to buy ... and/or in some instances, upgrade to a larger boat.

Love to get your opinion, suggestions and recommendations.

Wanda Kenton Smith
 President
 Kenton Smith Advertising & Public Relations

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Comments

9 comments on “Linking boat sales to marketing boater education”

1. [Roger Field](#) July 26, 2007 at 4:11 pm

We agree wholeheartedly with Wanda’s views on enhancing boating enjoyment and boat sales through boating education. We have tried to convince boat dealers that education is an effective selling tool throughout the 36-year history of the Chapman School of Seamanship. They will tell you they agree, but in their eagerness to sell boats it’s overlooked.

We have trained more than 17,000 men, women and children in safe boat operation, navigation, line handling and marlinspike, preventive maintenance and rules of the road. In most of our courses, 50% or more of the training is underway, at the helm. We offer private instruction

aboard the client's vessel or one of ours, the choice is up to the client.

We would be pleased to work with any dealers to conduct such training in connection with their sales efforts.

2. [Rob Wilson July 26, 2007 at 4:50 pm](#)

Most younger families can't afford to buy 1 brand new Harley, much less *two*

3. [JR July 26, 2007 at 5:10 pm](#)

While maybe not exactly what you are looking for, in my 25 years, I have been a big advocate of "Ride before you Buy". I request a credit approval, and a deposit with a 95% success in getting both and a 99% success in a finalized sale. While it is not only a ride, I start by showing the boater, experienced or not, the process of getting a boat on and off the water safely and complete use of everything the boat has. I anticipate I have a sale and proceed with my sales process as though the person getting the ride is the owner of the boat, in other words I convince them to take ownership of this "lesson". I know some dealers have offered a test drive on the lake show, but I have to say, working at some of the more successful dealership, I still for the most part have never seen a demo ride, test drive or whatever you call it, done properly. The salesperson or a boat delivery person must learn how to do a proper demonstration. The one on one, personal demonstration ride has still been a big point of my success. – JR

4. [John Wisse July 27, 2007 at 10:30 am](#)

In Ohio, the state Division of Watercraft continues to welcome any opportunity to provide boater safety education programs to marine dealers, potential boat and personal watercraft customers, and to boating organizations. Rarely, do any of the more than 350 marine dealers and marina operators in Ohio request from the state to present the Ohio Boater Education course. The state provides the 8-hour OBEC instruction only for a \$5 fee per course participant to help cover course materials. Would tapping the boater education instruction resources of any state watercraft agency, or U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary, U.S. Power Squadrons and other certified instructors at no cost to a marine dealer or marina operator, be a cost efficient means to establish a new boater education-to-sales business model? Educated and trained boaters not only avoid serious injury and fatal accidents in far greater numbers than untrained boaters, they also can become a valued boating customer for many more years to come.

5. [Capt Russ Cohen July 31, 2007 at 7:17 pm](#)

Wanda,

You knew I could not let this Blog slip by without a comment! Yes, you are absolutely correct that the marine industry is losing sales because they don't 'link' education to the sale. As you are aware, Boatboy Marine Training (BMT) specializes in offering On-The-Water Instruction on our customer's boat, at their dock, on their waterway and we offer a full curriculum including a handbook, safety brochures & forms, boating articles and a certificate that can be used for insurance discounts. Our results have been excellent!

We do business with many fine dealers, but, the fact is that most dealers, as mentioned by Roger from Chapman, just consider training a negative topic to the sale and overlook its importance. 75% of all dealers we've approached in the last 6 years will not promote education and often downplay getting it, that's a fact! (I have sales call reports available back to 2001) It would take me awhile to compile the data, but education, especially "Hands-on", offers HUGE benefits to the marine dealer, that's a fact! (See below)

At BMT, we have over 150 testimonials from customers telling us how much we've made their Boating Lifestyle better! Because of our training, they have gone on to buy bigger boats, cruise to more destinations, buy more accessories, use the dealer for more services, introduce their friends to boating and are spending more time on the water, sometimes 20% more! What's 20% more boating worth to a customer? More importantly, what's it worth to the marine dealer? (Education will easily increase your sales 20% or more)

EXAMPLE: I just stepped off a 42' Maxum after spending a few sessions with a first time boat buyer. (Big boat for a 1st timer!) The dealer paid for 8 hours and the buyer hired us for another 8 hours + and here's what happened.

1. Explained mechanical systems and how important it was to let the dealer winterize engines and systems because of replacement cost and they're still under warranty. (Worth- \$1,000- twin diesel, generator, water systems)
2. After sea-trial, Ship's store purchases of OEM lubricants for engines, more docklines, fenders, boat hooks, charts, cleaning supplies, PFD's, etc. (Worth- \$600)
3. Took a ride and they were thrilled with driving the boat. I docked it the first time showing them how to go slow, in and out of gear, explaining wind and current. Suggested some dock padding, another fender or two, corner wheel and another dock line. (Worth- \$275)
4. The next day we fueled the boat with diesel and I went over safety procedures while fueling and explained that it's nice to buy your fuel at your marina if they're competitive and to tip the dockhands because they'll help you tie up and will remember you! (Worth- \$665 + \$5 for the dockhand!)
5. After a great day on the water, they were excited about planning a cruise to the Chesapeake in September! (Worth- \$600-fuel, \$400-slips, \$200-supplies & mechanical)

Without this type of "Hands-on" training, this dealer would have missed some of these sales totally over \$3,700! Our training cost the dealer \$450 on a \$300K+ boat with tremendous potential for this buyer to stay in boating, enjoy the lifestyle and move up to a bigger boat down the road. This is a ROI of about 800%! That's a fact!

Keep throwing your customer the keys and telling them it's like driving a car and they'll keep selling their boats, join the country club and pay for lessons from the Golf Pro! (Or maybe buy a Harley!)

Thanks, take care and as always, we'll see ya on the water,
 Capt Russ Cohen, Founder & President
 Boatboy Marine Training

6. [CG Jimmy Ray August 2, 2007 at 4:13 pm](#)

Wow, Capt Russ, you hit the nail on the head. I've been in and around the boating industry for some years, and I am currently on the buyer side looking to upgrade. I've been taking renewed interest in the manner in which my inquiries are handled by dealers. I don't let on that I am a former CG officer or a life-long boater and fisherman, just a guy with a family looking for a lifestyle upgrade. Without getting into details, my last experience boiled down to, "what boat do you have now?", followed by, "well, you came to the right place. I can get you into a bigger/nicer/more expensive ride no problem...just look at the 3 lines I carry and pick one". I see what my friends go through and hear their tales...they are BEGGING for training so they don't look like fools at the dock or put their passengers in danger. I love your fiscal analysis, this is EXACTLY what dealers need to hear.

CG Jimmy Ray

7. [Capt. Jim Battye August 8, 2007 at 9:46 am](#)

One problem with the current state of affairs in boater training (and the boater safety course does NOT provide "training") is the lack of standardized curriculum, particularly in my specialty, which is close quarters docking and departure, among piers and slips, in wind or current.

On the commercial/occupational side, though, one program, mine, is taking root. The National Safe Boating Council has selected BoatHandler as its in-house program to train agency professionals to teach close-quarters handling to new employees whose job descriptions will include handling boats. Indeed, I leave tomorrow to teach my train-the-trainer course to the Alaska Office of Boating Safety, under NSBC auspices.

Eventually, the pleasure boat education crowd will come to realize that:

- 1) A boat is a machine;
- 2) Basic skill in operating a boat is necessary to safety; and
- 3) The boater safety course does not teach skills.

Further, the teaching of these skills is way beyond the ken of amateurs in general, and had best be left to highly-trained teaching professionals.

8. [Brad Schoenwald August 8, 2007 at 3:02 pm](#)

Mr. Cohen,

Your comments are right on Tres Martin and I run Performance boat school.com and have found all the things you describe. We have three manufacturers who offer our course as standard equipment on their boats and more including dealers who pay for their customers to attend. While we strongly recommend everyone takes a NASBLA boating safety class as a prerequisite we know our advanced driving school enables them to safely enjoy their performance boating experience. This type of leadership in our industry also keeps government from coming in with unwarranted legislation.

Great Job..

Brad Schoenwald

www.performanceboatschool.com

9. [Mike Dickens August 25, 2007 at 3:39 am](#)

Great concept Wanda,

After I read this blog it occurred to me that I have been taking the education route for some time now. I have a customer that saw a post I had made on a cruising educational forum. He contacted me and asked if he could ask some questions about the cruising lifestyle aboard my trawler. I answered his questions and we've been talking almost daily since. He wants to purchase a 40-47' trawler for he and his wife to cruise to the Bahamas in. He was completely unaware of how to go about getting into the lifestyle. I have offered to have him aboard my trawler to spend a few days learning the systems and getting to know big-boat handling before he buys. He's only operated boats in the 22' size range. We are almost ready to do some serious boat shopping now.

I am convinced that my hands-on approach to the boating lifestyle has brought me this customer. It takes lots of work but I see this as a sales plus.

Mike Dickens

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