

A View from Here

Bill's Sisson's weekly Trade Only blog



[A View from Here](#) > [Marketing](#) > Introductions to boating could lead to sales

[Introductions to boating could lead to sales](#)

Posted by Wanda Kenton Smith on May 30, 2007

First – my husband and I would never have even thought about motorcycling had my good friend Jim Krueger of Mainship not given me that fateful and phenomenal spin on his Harley. As I considered the impact of his referral on my life, I couldn't help but apply it to our market. There is supreme power in personal referral, of introducing friends to the sport and lifestyle of boating. What strategies and tactics might we consider as an industry to motivate our existing boat buyers to take their friends boating? I believe if we can get more prospects out and on the water with boating friends and family, we dramatically expand the pool and potential for sales. Suggestions?

Second, while the industry is investing in national advertising to bring awareness of boating as a recreational lifestyle option, I believe we need to create and promote a national "Learn to Boat," "Learn to Sail" or "Learn to Fish" program directly at the dealership level to help potential prospects next-step the process. My experience at Orlando Harley-Davidson as I described in my column allowed me to easily shift from interested prospect to committed, hardcore buyer in less than two months, at a minimal initial investment. One of the key successes is the dealership's Learn to Ride program that took me from a enthusiastic motorcycling wanna-be with absolutely no experience, to turning s-curves in a tight box within two days. Confidence fueled my passion to buy.

I know there are plenty of Coast Guard and Power Squadron courses out there, along with numerous outstanding specialty schools. However, I believe that an easy and relatively inexpensive educational link sourced directly through the dealership makes all the sense in the world. Is anyone out there doing this, or partnering with a program onsite? I'd love to know what is working to connect the dots from prospect to buyer through boating education.

Finally, do you agree we should have a nation-wide marketing component that is promoted at the grassroots dealership level?

Wanda Kenton Smith
 President
 Kenton Smith Advertising & Public Relations

Like Tweet

Comments

15 comments on "Introductions to boating could lead to sales"

1. [Wiulson Wright](#) May 30, 2007 at 3:32 pm

The interesting or perhaps phonominal part is that Harley has branded their product in such a way that their customers are almost a cult.. The

brand project the image of exhilaration and sells virtually everything associated with the name, apparel, jewelry, art, just to name a few. One day Chris Craft will return to the glory days when their name rivals Harley.

Wilson Wright
Executive Director
Chris Craft Antique Boat Club

2. [rob shirley May 30, 2007 at 5:21 pm](#)

Wanda, No words could have been spoken better. Remember when Master Craft was building their brand? We did it thru incourging famlies to get involved in water skiing. Showing them how to operate an inboard boat, & run the slalom course, barefooting etc. having fun with friends. I think it had to do with love & passion of the sport of boating & skiing. Ski clubs sprang up all over the country . Same as the Harley following. Harley buyers are created by friends, no doubt. Boat buyers are created by the desire to have fun with the family. Certainly, fear plays a part in the purchase of a boat, just like cycle riders. The dealers & manufactures that take time to “show how to have fun” with importance on safety will always be the winners. Congrats on your “new way” to have fun. Rob Shirley

3. [Kent Little May 30, 2007 at 5:47 pm](#)

Wanda,
Is correct and I have been saying this for years, our “try sailing” days we’ve done in the past few years are a great success. However to my knowledge there is no manufacturer who is trying to catch the possible boat buyer (power or sail) when they are in the beginning stages of trying to find a leisure activity. By the time they think of a boat they have probably already bought a boating magazine and then they see what a Sea Ray or a Beneteau is and then they are perhaps lead to the dealer from there. Who, though, is trying to reach the buyer in the very beginning stages of when he’s just looking for some leisure activity to do? We are all competing with backyard swimming pools, beachfront condos and country clubs. No one is selling or showing the lifestyle of boating to the general public. The RV manufacturers did it by promoting Go RVing on TV.

Kent Little
Sea Lake Yacht Sales
Houston Tx

4. [Patrick Sweeney May 30, 2007 at 5:55 pm](#)

Wanda is right on point regarding the significance of enhancing the customer experience from basic education through post sales support. The level and quality of that investment directly influences customer and brand loyalty. Harley-Davidson gets it!

With Stephen Julius at the helm of Chris Craft as well as the Indian Motorcycle Company, his experience in re-launching companies with well known brands should help Wilson feel good that Chris Craft is on course and steady as she goes... Check out the Chris Craft line of bone porcelain china! 😊

Patrick Sweeney
The MIC

5. [Capt. Bob Armstrong May 30, 2007 at 7:33 pm](#)

Amen, Wanda, Amen!! Despite the industry’s long-standing insistance (at least in certain quarters) that education is a deterrent to sales, I have been pointing out for nearly 30 years now that other leisure-time industries such as music, golf, skiing and tennis have long used free lessons for their promotional value and as incentives to buy equipment. It is so good to see you report that such a closely ralated (high adrenaline), power-driven activity as motorcycle riding is doing it also. Maybe, if enough people holler about the value of hands-on education, we’ll see it happen one of these days in our industry as well.

Capt. Bob Armstrong
Tired old boating writer & captain

6. [Jim May 30, 2007 at 7:50 pm](#)

The interesting or perhaps phonominal part of what Wanda Kenton Smith wrote in her article is what she wrote. For the first time in a long time..or better yet ever...do we have someone in this Marine industry that is very well respected finally put in writing for EVERYONE in this industry to see. YES IT WAS PUBLISHED IN BLACK AND WHITE IN TRADE ONLY MAGAZINE...This goes to you Mr. Brunswick CEO, and you Mr. Genmar CEO. You are the biggest players with the smallest ears. You don’t hear what the industry professionals are saying, the dealers that you could not survive without are saying and most important the consumers that without them none of us would be here are saying. THANK YOU WANDA KENTON SMITH for your idea. I along with 99.9% of the real working members in this Marine Industry thank you. Every past, present and future boating consumer thanks you. After reading this I felt like a new person. Finally someone with influence in our industry gets it. Then I thought why not go out and celebrate. Why not go have a drink and toast to this great idea. Funny thing happened though. While at the bar, I found myself taking with a local “boating expert.” You know the type. Sitting at the bar. Listening to your conversation. Knowing nothing about what your saying but always taking the other side. Then it hit me. I got to get outta here and tell someone that cares. But before I could leave he said in a drunk and word slurring shout.” hey, it sounds like a great idea...ya too bad your a nobody! all you RICH boat people can kiss my &%*. nobody cares about your stupid idea!” Imagine the nerve of this guy. Who the hell was he to say that about all us “boat people.?” Before I got out the door I ran into one of my former customers just coming into the restuarant. I said hello and asked him how was his boating season going. He said it was just great this year. Before I could say that was good to hear, his wife’s best friend and her husband at the same time said “THEY FINALLY GOT RID OF THAT MONEY PIT”.....”I CAN’T BELIEVE WE ALMOST BOUGHT ONE TOO!” WHAT A WASTE OF TIME AND MONEY.” I’m not sure if I passed out or not, but I saw a flash of light and found myself outside on the sidewalk. When I looked up I saw a 2 guys, one wearing a hat that said “Feed the poor, buy MerCruiser”...and the other

guys shirt read "I'm with STUPID>" Thank GOD it was all just a bad dream...NOT!

"There is supreme power in personal referral, of introducing friends to the sport and lifestyle of boating. What strategies and tactics might we consider as an industry to motivate our existing boat buyers to take their friends boating? I believe if we can get more prospects out and on the water with boating friends and family, we dramatically expand the pool and potential for sales. Suggestions?"

Brunswick/Genmar are you listening?

7. [Bill Gardella, Jr. May 30, 2007 at 11:42 pm](#)

Wanda- The shared-use model dovetails beautifully with Discover/Grow Boating.

We take newbies into our Club, teach them to boat on brand-new Sea Ray 240 Sundecks, and it has been very well received. We do a 4 hr orientation after their 8-hr Ct safe boating cert course, and the members then are ready to go out and continue learning and of course, go boating. Shared-use lowers entry barriers, and we are creating new boaters!

8. [warren lally May 31, 2007 at 9:23 am](#)

I dont want to rain on the parade however new motorcycle owners share none of the issues facing the new boater except a potential lack of knowledge and training that can lead to serious injury or death ..New boaters have to deal with the EXPENSE of filling a large fuel tank ..higher insurance costs ..waterfront access problems or having to pay a fee in some cases to store the boat year round (slip fee)..don` t forget property tax and repairs and then the kicker ..resale value Oh I am sorry there is another common trait ..most cases weather will play a part in both activities .. Wanda , I like some of your idea`s but let me know a year from now if you are happy paying for a bike you don` t have the time to use or in the event you decide it`s not for you having to take it in the pocketbook to get rid of a bike in a flooded market ..It is even worse here in the northeast !!!!

If we want people to get into or stay in boating ..improve waterfront access ..lower gasoline prices and get more trained repair personel in the field and keep em!

9. [Mark Whitt May 31, 2007 at 9:55 am](#)

Wanda, I have to agree with your article and your opinion on the drawing you in approach your HD dealer used. If I may, I would like to add this. In 1970 AMF owned Harley Davidson and most die hards refered to the bikes as "Bowling Balls" and the company was in trouble. In that same year, the company bought itself and started the revolution. If it were not for the inner core working men and woman of HD, they might not around today. The same goes for the boating industry. Today it`s not the husband buying the boat or, in your case the bike, it`s a family event. Walk in to any HD dealer, the entire staff believes in the product and stands behind it, why, because the labor force, the management staff and the drivers delivering the product stand behind the product. That`s what makes HD a cult and draws your family in, total commitment to be the best in the industry, not the cheapest but the best. All of us in the boating industry should take a self examination, are we a total package, are we prepared to stand behind the product, our dealers and most imprtant, our retail end consumer. Are you committed to true grow boating or just growing dealer inventories? Trust me, if Wanda wasn` t happy and satisfied by the total experience, their would not be a Harley in the garage.

10. [Janet Lane May 31, 2007 at 12:20 pm](#)

I have no problem with motorcycle riders, and in fact i think they are helping the overuse of our resources. Most other manufacturers and even some Harley owners maintain quiet bikes. I always watch out for them even when they do not ride safely. I just wish the Harley riders would be more respectful of the rest of the world who often do not wish to be surrounded by their horrendous, illegal in some cases, noise. It is miserable for us to sit outside on a nice Sunday afternoon, or for some, to try to ride a horse down the road to a trail as the noise is frightening and deafening at times.

Please remember that as the world becomes more and more crowded, we all need to respect each other`s right to peace on the planet and save the noisy bikes for parades. Thanks, Janet

11. [rob shirley May 31, 2007 at 3:19 pm](#)

UNBELEIVABLE COMMENTS FROM SOME PEOPLE WHO CAN` T SEE PAST THEIR OWN NOSE.

PEOPLE , WANDA IS TRYING TO GIVE SUGGESTIONS ON HOW TO IMPROVE SALES.

SORRY WANDA, MAYBE IT` S THESE PEOPLE THAT HAVE THEIR ANCHOR STUCK IN THE MUD. I CAN` T DO ANYTHING BUT SHAKE MY HEAD & WONDER. IF THEY ARE IN BUSINESS, I` LL BET THEY BLAME THE POTENTIAL CUSTOMER FOR WALKING IN THE DOOR.

12. [Capt. Jim Battye June 4, 2007 at 8:40 am](#)

I` ve said it before (you can hear in on the Today Show, this June 22):

A boat is a machine.

Basic skill in handling a boat is a necessary part of boating safety, and of enjoyment of the boating lifestyle.

Many people leave boating because, at least in part, they never gained enough skill to enjoy the boating lifestyle.

Capt. Jim Battye

Another tired old boating writer and captain

ps: As for an introductory curriculum, check with Virgil Chambers of the National Safe Boating Council. They have the best program around. I should know...I wrote it.

13. [John Wisse](#) June 7, 2007 at 7:44 am

Wanda —

Research indicates that most people engaged in a particular activity, such as boating, fishing, motorcycling, golfing, parasailing, etc. etc. became involved in their sport and recreational activity because they were introduced to it by a friend or family member. There are many wonderful programs established to introduce folks to various leisure and recreation activities.

One of these programs, Discover Sailing, has succeeded in introducing thousands of people to sailing. In Huron, Ohio during the June 2-3 weekend, Harbor North and its sailing members hosted over 200 people who each donated a \$10 fee to help support the local United Way chapter and enjoyed a one-hour introductory sail ride on Lake Erie’s western basin. Over the June 8-10 weekend, this same marine dealer is hosting 30 women for a specialized live-aboard course of sailing instruction during “Women’s Weekend”.

If more marine dealers would embrace the concept of outreach and stop making excuses for why they can not host such events or expand upon the Demo Days concept, the industry would then see positive results. More importantly, understanding why it should be necessary to return former boaters and customers to their stores and how to achieve that goal seems to me — a key to future business success.

14. [Kenton Smith](#) June 7, 2007 at 12:06 pm

Interesting feedback so far! I may want to base a future column on industry success stories in the areas I’ve focused on ... so wanted to ask if Rob Shirley could email me a more detailed description of the water skiing promotion that was done in the early days involving how the learn to ski program worked ... I’d also like to know about the successful Try Sailing promotions that Kent described and what they do and how they market/promote it, and the results they have enjoyed ... I’m VERY interested to learn more about the Shared Use concept that Bill Gardella spoke of ... what is this program, how does it work, who teaches the course, how do you charge for it, and what have been the results? The more we can “mindshare” successes, the greater the opportunity to open eyes to the industry for innovative ways to sell and market our products and services. Ride on! I hope to hear back from you ... either post or email direct.

Wanda

15. [rob shirley](#) June 11, 2007 at 3:09 pm

Wanda, you have struck a musical cord. congratulations! I view boating & motorcycling as “ENJOYING LIFE”. Along with many other sports that make a person happy. “FUN” is the key word. People buy boats to have “FUN” & “ENJOY LIFE”. A promotion including these words will stimulate families sales. I know many people who are avid boaters & cyclers. They are all happy people. Some have a lot of money, some don’t. But they enjoy life with boats.

The Water Ski promotions that stimulated inboard sales in the 70’s, based most advertizing on “Keeping the family together having fun with friends “. The key to boat sales is to convince the buyer that boating is a vehical that can help keep the family together. Very few people stop boating. Very few sports involve the entire family—especially kids.

You are the best, keep that harleys dirty side down. Rob

Leave a Reply

Your email address will not be published. Required fields are marked *

Name *

Email *

Website

Comment

Comments are moderated and generally will be posted if they are on-topic and not abusive. For more information, please see our [Comments Policy](#).

- [Home](#)
- [Dealer Outlook](#)
- [A View from Here](#)
- [Recent News](#)
- [Resources](#)

Search

Search for:

Categories

- [Boat Shows](#) (12)
- [Boating lifestyle](#) (15)
- [Boating safety](#) (7)
- [Coastal Zone Management](#) (2)
- [Customer Service](#) (4)
- [Dealer/Manufacturer Agreements](#) (5)
- [Dealers](#) (7)
- [Eco-friendly products](#) (1)
- [Economy](#) (11)
- [Education](#) (6)
- [Environmental issues](#) (7)
- [Finance](#) (3)
- [Fisheries](#) (1)
- [Gas Prices](#) (10)
- [Government](#) (7)
- [Grow Boating](#) (7)
- [Internet](#) (2)
- [Inventory](#) (1)
- [management](#) (1)
- [manatee](#) (1)
- [Manufacturers](#) (6)
- [marinas](#) (1)
- [Marine industry](#) (2)
- [Marketing](#) (11)
- [New Media](#) (2)
- [Sailing](#) (1)
- [Sales](#) (2)
- [Security](#) (1)
- [Taxes](#) (1)
- [Trade Shows](#) (2)
- [Uncategorized](#) (193)
- [Warranties](#) (1)
- [Water Access](#) (5)

Search Boats for Sale

Keywords

Manufacturer

Price

From

To

▼

▼

Length

From ▼

To ▼

Year

From

To

 Brokerage Listings Powered by BoatQuest.com



- [Privacy Policy](#)
- [Terms of Use](#)
- [About Us](#)
- [Career Opportunities](#)