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Leads to nowhere
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Boating INDUSTRY

Marketing Master

MasterCraft CEO John Dorton has brought leadership and innovation to his company and the industry.

CHALLENGES & SOLUTIONS:

- Marketing survey results
- Tips for marketing success
- Dealer best practices





Busting Out of the box

Web
exclusive

This interview has been edited for content and length. To read the full text of the interview — including lots of additional marketing tips and advice — visit the “Web Exclusives” section of www.boating-industry.com.

Many boating businesses are stuck in a marketing rut, or — even worse — cutting back on marketing to cope with tough times. In an interview with *Boating Industry* magazine, Wanda Kenton-Smith, president of Marine Marketers of America and Kenton-Smith Advertising — and new Harley owner — shares smart strategies for investing in marketing and growing your business.

Boating Industry: *When market conditions are challenging and boating businesses are forced to cut back, many reduce their marketing and advertising spending. Is that a good idea?*

WANDA KENTON SMITH: Reducing your marketing effort and budget in lean times is the absolute worst thing you can do. Even in a down cycle, there are still buyers out there. In addition, enthusiasts will continue their activity, even if they hold off on purchasing major products until their confidence returns. When your company slashes its marketing budget and “goes dark,” you quickly lose your top-of-mind awareness with the buying public and send a negative signal in the marketplace. Research supports the fact that those companies who continue to mar-

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line, that kind of focused commitment to marketing innovation kept his show team constantly on the lookout for fresh and dynamic ideas, with new components introduced each and every year. We should have that same approach to our own marketing.

BI: *Is there a good or bad time to try out a new marketing or advertising idea? It seems like a risky move, especially when money is tight.*

WKS: There is no time like the present. Now more than ever you need to be aggressive in your marketing efforts. If you are doing what you've always done and you're not moving product, it's obvious that you need to do something different. I am surprised how often I hear about dealers who are continuing to pay high floorplan on inventory sitting in their dealership instead of spending those dollars or a portion thereof to market and promote the product in order to move it. The longer it sits there, the harder and tougher it is to sell it.

Unfortunately, many dealers seem to have the mentality that they can't spend any marketing dollars until they move the product – the classic chicken vs. egg.

BI: *I understand you recently purchased two brand new Harleys after a boating client introduced you to the lifestyle. Your story is a testament to the power of personal referral and word of mouth. Do you have any advice for dealers on how – above and beyond providing their customers with an outstanding buying experience – they can better motivate their customers to share their boat buying experience and boating lifestyle with their friends?*

WKS: The absolute best time to capitalize on referral opportunities is immediately prior to and upon purchase/delivery. The excitement and enthusiasm is never higher than those days preceding and right after delivery when new customers are so high about their new purchase. I would make a point to ask a direct question like this: "Liz, I can see just how excited you are about your new boat. Do you have

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friends or professional associates who you think might be interested in the boating lifestyle, too? I'd love to provide them with an introduction to boating and line them up for a free ride, compliments of you." My follow-up call to the referral would go something like this: "Hey Ken, I spoke with your good friend Liz Walz who just bought an exciting new boat from our dealership.

We offered to provide a free ride to a few of her special friends to introduce them to the fun and exciting boating lifestyle. Would you be interested in taking a free one-hour (or whatever) ride as part of our introduction to boating program?"

One component is to always reward those customers who provide referrals that turn into sales. I intro-

duced two of my close friends to motorcycling within 30 days of buying our Harleys and both of them have since purchased bikes from my salesman. I didn't mind one bit getting two \$100 gift certificates in the mail from the dealership ... that just brought me back to buy more stuff. And you can bet I am more than happy to refer anyone and everyone who has an interest in motorcycling to my Harley dealership and to my salesman because I had such a fantastic experience.

Bottom line - ask for referrals. The personal touch and relationship is where it is at. Reward those who refer and they will become your best champions.

BI: *Are there any further comments you'd like to add?*

WKS: Perhaps my biggest pet peeve is the lazy, casual attitude that many in the industry seem to take as it relates to marketing and sales. I have spoken over the years with dozens of manufacturers and literally hundreds of dealers who whine about the lack of business, yet when was the last time they picked up the phone and called their customers and prospects? Asked for or rewarded referrals? Wrote a personal, handwritten note? Provided a real incentive or legitimate and compelling reason to buy now?

We seem to often adopt a defeatist mentality that becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy. Instead of complaining about the woeful lack of sales, we need to take that energy and get innovative, figure out how we can motivate and generate sales. Call your customers and invite them in to see your hottest new product. Ask for referrals and then follow-up. Host an event - stage an open house. Have an appreciation party. Sponsor a seminar series at the dealership featuring industry experts. Have an advertised demo day with special promotional deals. Take your product and services out of the dealership and to new venues. Cross promote with other businesses. Send regular emails promoting special sales and customer promotions. Don't just sit around and wait for someone to walk through your door ... do something! 🐘