



MARKETING

Wanda Kenton Smith

<< INSIGHT

Good news and bad news in Grow Boating numbers

The first round is over and it's time to take a hard look at the results of the Grow Boating campaign.

First, let me make it clear I'm a supporter of Discover Boating. I have served on numerous industry marketing committees over the past 25 years. Unfortunately, only larger companies, major financial contributors or trade association representatives were invited to serve on the Grow Boating marketing task force. So my participation this time around has been as a minor financial donor, observer and marketing commentator.

My examination of the results shows there is reason to celebrate the Grow Boating effort. There also is room for improvement.

The industry can take pride in getting this be-hemoth off the ground and launching our first national marketing campaign. It took a mammoth effort and a lot of cold cash.

Perhaps the campaign's most notable achievement is the Web traffic it generated for DiscoverBoating.com. The National Marine Manufacturers Association says the site saw a

triple-digit traffic increase, claiming 1.6 million visits from March through September, with a million unique visitors. Those visitors spent eight to nine minutes on the site on average, tracking in the following order: DVD request center, boat selector, destinations, marina/ramps and boating activities. That Web traffic represented a 250 percent increase compared to the same period in 2005, and that's terrific.

I'm not quite as enthusiastic about a few of the other related stats, however.

NMMA vice president Carl Blackwell says the campaign and Web site have delivered 50,100 quantifiable prospects, of which 13,300 were deemed "hot leads" — people who requested manufacturer follow-up. That's a hefty \$601.50 per hot lead, based on our \$8 million ad budget. If we generated a million unique visitors but only 13,300 of them constituted "hot prospects," that translates to a 1.3-percent response rate.

I know we didn't expect this campaign to deliver a zillion boat buyers overnight and the principal goal is to build awareness and to start pushing them through the funnel. But I would have hoped our \$8 million ad buy targeted to 22 million households would have delivered more than 13,300 "hot 'n nows." Perhaps the cumulative 159,000 links from [\[ing.com\]\(http://ing.com\) to manufacturer sites will eventually translate into warmer leads.](http://DiscoverBoat-</p></div>
<div data-bbox=)

Another area to consider is the per-inquiry cost of the DVDs ... 31,000 people requested the "Get Started in Boating" DVD, to the tune of \$258 a pop. By comparison, I am an integral part of Sail America's Discover Sailing initiative. In the first year (2000), we generated and shipped 10,000 videos on a total \$250,000 investment (all costs) — for less than \$25 each.

While these comparisons cause me concern, there seem to be no red flags at NMMA headquarters. In fact, Blackwell says the established goal was to distribute 30,000 DVDs the first six months, so the metric is ahead of schedule, or perhaps the initial projections were low.

A positive Grow Boating outcome was the recognition of boating as a lifestyle option

among the targeted audience. Pre-, mid- and post-advertising awareness studies were conducted by New York's Russell Research involving 2,588 participants, and there was a notable shift from 1 in 20 who had heard about Discover Boating prior to the campaign, to 1 in 4

after the campaign's conclusion. One of the more interesting stats was that 42 percent of the initial targeted market had no interest in ever buying a boat prior to the campaign, but that percentage improved to 36 percent following. Only 2 percent had plans to buy a boat, and that jumped to 8 percent post-campaign. It appears we are making headway in influencing attitudes and driving future purchasing plans.

Looking ahead, Blackwell says there are no changes to the overall creative strategy, but the word on the street is that some new print ad executions are under consideration. We should definitely tweak the print campaign and invite the reader to subconsciously experience what boating uniquely delivers. The original print ads missed the boat — that all-important emotional link that reinforces the brand statement: Boating connects like no other.

I believe NMMA's own advertising research

See Kenton Smith, facing page

Wanda Kenton Smith is a 24-year marine industry veteran who serves as president of Kenton Smith Advertising & Public Relations Inc., a full-service agency in Orlando, Fla., and Marine Marketing to Women Inc., an educational/training/seminar firm.

KENTON SMITH *from previous page*

bears this out. The TV spots scored 76 percent in ad likeability, while the print creative lagged behind at 68 percent. More telling, however, is that 23 percent of the target audience was aware of the TV spots, while only 9 percent were aware of the print ads. A major creative overhaul and a boost in frequency would help.

Speaking of media, Blackwell said next year's mix will include a combination of cable TV, print and Internet advertising. It is scheduled for committee review in November.

Some good news: The original two-page ad spreads with fractionals will be reformatted to less-costly single-page ad units to deliver greater frequency. In addition, more ad dollars will likely shift to Internet advertising, based on the results this year. Banner ads on the NCAA men's basketball tournament webcasts, coupled with marketing on Yahoo, Google, CNN.com, Disney.com, weather.com, and weatherbug.com, were all top Web site lead generators. Makes sense.

I noted in a previous column that the marketing committee had elected not to specifically address the identifiable slice of prior boat owners — 3.3 mil-

lion of them — who had left our ranks, but who fall within the 22 million target audience. I still advocate research to learn why we lost so many, and to understand what it would take to get them back. I would think these findings would prove helpful in protecting our current and future foundation.

I asked Blackwell if new metrics had been established using the initial findings as a benchmark. By the conclusion of the campaign in 2009, the goal is to achieve a 40-percent awareness factor from our target audience — an increase of a million more boating participants and a sales goal to match the year 2000 levels. Short-term, the goal is to distribute 40,000 DVDs in the second year, elevate brand awareness to 30 percent and boost the PR impressions.

While we are off to an impressive start, we can improve the second-round results by totally reworking the print creative, sharpening the media mix and spending valuable time analyzing how to drive home more hot leads and get more DVDs in the prospect pipeline.

And while we're at it, we should also seriously consider how to recapture those valuable but seemingly forgotten former boat owners.

wanda@kentonsmithad.com