



MARKETING

Wanda Kenton Smith

<< INSIGHT

A chance for marine marketers to finally speak with one voice

The idea first came to me when I was vice president of marketing for a major boat manufacturer.

I had been bothered by the fact that rarely was there an opportunity to interact with my counterparts at other marine companies. How helpful it would be, I thought, if there was an organization for marine marketing people — a vehicle for networking and professional growth. In all my years in the industry, I have not seen anything in the way of development initiatives specifically tailored to those of us in marine marketing.

When I left corporate life and started my own agency 11 years ago, I made it a point to meet marketing people in all areas of our business. I also felt I would benefit by getting to know some of the people from competing agencies who do good work in our business. I've met some really smart and savvy marketers who share my passion for things marine.

I've seen the benefits of networking firsthand. Through the connections I've made, I've referred dozens of people for sales and marketing jobs, and I've linked prospective clients with other qualified agencies when there was a conflict with an existing client of ours. I've also been on the receiving end of great leads through such professional connections.

Throughout the years, I've thought of starting a marine marketing organization that would serve multiple purposes. I know what's involved in getting a start-up association off the ground and the amount of work required.

Earlier this year, I decided to test the waters.

I invited about a dozen agency principals and marketing specialists, along with National Marine Manufacturers Association vice president of marketing Carl Blackwell, to a brainstorming session at the 2006 Miami International Boat Show. I included Blackwell because several agency people had complained about NMMA's policy of not hiring marine agencies and about our inability to contribute ideas and feedback to the Grow Boating initiative.

Blackwell was advised in advance of these concerns so he could be fully prepared to respond. His predecessor's position was that the NMMA should only work with outside agencies to avoid a conflict of interest among marine specialists who are dues-paying NMMA members. Meanwhile, lots of NMMA cash was being

spent on monthly PR retainers, and qualified industry PR firms never had a shot at the work. As a dues-paying NMMA member, I personally took umbrage. I explained that those of us in my line of work understand competition. Our complaint wouldn't be that we lost out against another good shop — our complaint was that we couldn't even compete.

In addition, many of us gathered in that room in Miami last February were frustrated that we were unable to participate in the Grow Boating effort. Only those in major corporate or association positions had been tapped. We felt we had a lot to offer as experienced industry marketers who breathe and live the business.

Blackwell brought a splash of optimism to our meeting. He was a horse of a different color. Not only had he hired industry agency specialists (including a few of those in the room) for a variety of projects, but he was totally open to the concept and didn't perceive a conflict. He also felt a legitimate, organized marketing association such as what was under discussion could, in fact, find a voice in the Grow Boating initiative.

To me, this discussion was an important first step. As a small group, we were able to communicate concerns about important matters in an organized fashion. Some of the brightest marketing folks I know articulated thoughts and ideas. An association would allow us to have a voice and a presence outside of our own little corner of the world.

Since that meeting, a few of us have been working to develop a strategic plan for the association, which would be open to corporate marketers, advertising agencies and public relations firms, publishers and independent marketers.

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are willing to address industry organizations on a variety of marketing topics. We'd also provide moderators and panelists for marketing presentations. We've discussed a program that would help educate young marketers new to the marine industry who could use some networking resources.

Another area under discussion is an achievement and awards format for marine marketing work. Corporate and agency people produce some phenomenal work, and short of recent Web site award programs, there is no vehicle for industry recognition. We'd also like to create a membership Web site, so those seeking marine marketers have a one-stop shop to find them.

Virtually all the marketing people I've spoken with are willing to give back to the industry, and many already do. One form of that could be pro bono services to fledgling organizations or nonprofits in an annual project involving multiple members.

We're in the embryonic stages now, but there is positive momentum and enthusiasm for going forward. We're planning to host an informal meeting in Miami, so if you're a marine marketer and you want to learn more or have ideas of your own to share, be there.

More details will be forthcoming in an announcement next month ... but remember, readers, you heard it here first.

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