

[HOME](#) > [COLUMNS/BLOGS](#) > [MARKETING INSIGHT](#)

An IBEX summit not to be missed

The entire focus will be on new marketing strategies

WANDA KENTON SMITH • SEP 29, 2017

Ten years ago, I had a vision. I dreamed of an association for marine marketers exclusively — an organization that would provide an important voice in our industry.

I pictured a gathering of marketers who would work together to share best practices. I saw this association creating and launching an awards program to celebrate the best of marine marketing and advertising. I also dreamed that this association would embrace ongoing professional development and education for marketers, which I have always championed.

In view of how dramatically the marketing landscape has evolved over the past few years, staying on top of rapidly changing technologies and cutting-edge strategies and tactics is vital for survival.

I also foresaw this organization providing opportunity for one-on-one mentoring and networking, allowing marketers to meet others in the industry who share the same career DNA and passion for recreational boating. After all, what's more fun than having friends to hook up with at industry functions — especially friends who love marketing and boating, as you do.

I'm happy to say that much of my original dream has become reality, thanks to the tireless efforts of many marketing colleagues who share my vision. I could never have done it alone, and I'm truly grateful for the many who have been actively engaged since day one.

Marine Marketers of America (www.marinemarketersofamerica.org) has about 75 members, an awesome board composed of industry leaders from multiple segments, and many friends who attend our events. We host educational events and general membership meetings, typically twice a year in conjunction with two of the major boat shows.

But our biggest achievement, no doubt, has been the growth and success of the annual Neptune Awards, which showcase the very best work of marine marketers throughout North America. As evidence of this success: The 2016 competition (the ninth) yielded 99 entries in 16 categories, with 30 industry marketers engaged in the judging process.

Submissions came from sailing and powerboat manufacturers, charter companies, clubs and schools, electronics and gear manufacturers and retailers; from small businesses to global corporations, from in-house marketing teams to boutique and full-service advertising agencies.

When I first organized a meeting and introduced the concept of Marine Marketers of America to a large group at a boat show, I shared my overall vision, including the long-standing desire to one day host a national marketing summit that would offer a robust platform for industry marketing education.

I believed then, as I do now, that there is real value and need in providing professional development for our industry's marketers. After all, the more savvy our marketers, the better the opportunity to successfully grow our individual businesses and our industry overall. And in view of how dramatically the marketing landscape has evolved over the past few years, staying on top of rapidly changing technologies and cutting-edge strategies and tactics is vital for survival.

Although the MMA has had successes on many fronts, we have never had the financial wherewithal nor the manpower to undertake that marketing summit. Everything we do is produced by a small, hard-working team of volunteers and board members who juggle association duties with full-time jobs. So you can imagine my excitement when I learned that IBEX will be hosting a Marine Industry Marketing Summit on Sept. 18 in Tampa, Fla.

The moment I saw the post, I reached out to colleagues at the NMMA to learn more. I spoke with Carl Blackwell, president of Discover Boating, and he shared that this half-day "super session" is a direct result of the Grow Boating Summit held last December involving board members of the NMMA and the MRAA who believe that better industry education is sorely needed to enable member companies to better leverage the leads Discover Boating generates.

Last year the Discover Boating campaign tracked 3.2 million consumer visits to its website, which is pretty impressive. These web referrals were then distributed to manufacturers, based on stated prospect interests.

Some manufacturers take full advantage of these leads and redistribute them to their retailers and/or respond to them directly. I imagine that other recipients may lack the resources or internal CRM (customer relationship management) automation systems required to properly cultivate these leads or may simply dismiss them altogether.

Blackwell and other members of the NMMA and MRAA who gathered last year believe these web referrals represent a real opportunity; they are concerned that too many stakeholders are literally missing the boat.

Blackwell understands that the Discover Boating leads may land higher up in the sales funnel than those captured by a manufacturer directly, but nonetheless, he believes — as do I — that they represent a bona fide opportunity for nurturing and cultivation. He also shared with me that for every one prospect who fills out a lead form on the Discover Boating website, 1,000 will link off and then shop directly on specific manufacturer sites.

In our own business and marketing activities, many of us rely heavily on lead form fills to capture prospect data and to measure our marketing successes. Although the lead form is no doubt a

prime vehicle in the lead generation process, Blackwell — and many other marketers, including me — believe it is not the exclusive, end-all barometer for success today. There is life beyond form fills.

In fact, there are multiple emerging marketing strategies, tactics and technologies that should be viable considerations in today's marketing toolbox, including nurture marketing, content marketing and inbound marketing, among others. If your marketing staff lacks know-how in these areas, it's past time to push the throttle forward to get your team up to speed.

I believe the Marine Industry Marketing Summit provides the perfect opportunity for boating businesspeople to become better educated. The summit will address inbound and nurture strategies taught by experts in the field who have proven experience in the marine marketplace.

The summit also will share the latest industry marketing research, which should be important to all of us. Ultimately the summit organizers hope to teach industry stakeholders new marketing strategies and tactics that can be directly applied to maximize the millions of leads the Grow Boating campaign delivers.

Although the summit is geared toward boat manufacturers, Blackwell says it is open to all IBEX attendees. IBEX registration is free; the cost of the summit/super session is \$75.

Session content details were still being finalized at my column deadline, but the initial agenda and list of presenters I reviewed was top-notch. I'd highly encourage all marketers to attend this inaugural Marine Industry Marketing Summit. There is no excuse for those within driving distance not to come for the day. Business owners and managers should gladly encourage and send their marketing people to this event to invest in their professional development.

Although IBEX is not a conference generally geared toward marketers — and although your company may not be on the receiving end of Discover Boating leads — I fully believe the sessions will prove extremely valuable and can be easily applied to your own lead-generation and marketing initiatives.

I wouldn't miss it. In fact, I'm bringing several members of my marketing team and I plan to share what I learn with our franchise family of 130-plus boat clubs in North America.

I hope the Marketing Summit ultimately gains momentum and will have a broader, more inclusive reach in the future. I would love to see the Marine Marketers of America become involved in helping our Discover Boating colleagues plan and promote such an important industry effort in the days ahead. This is a truly exciting opportunity, and I applaud the NMMA and MRAA for investing the time and resources to bring marketing education to the forefront, where it belongs.

As I said, if we want to grow our businesses and our industry, we need well-educated and empowered marketers at the helm. This is a major leap in the right direction.

I hope to see you there. Register today at

<http://network.ibexshow.com/ibex2017/public/SessionDetails.aspx?FromPage=Sessions.aspx&SessionID=498&SessionDateID=22>

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