MRAA

OPERATION:

Keep Your Customers Boating

MRAA'S GUIDE TO A WORLD-CLASS CUSTOMER EXPERIENCE

Build Your Customer Experience Strategy

6 Easy Steps to Great Customer Follow-Up

Case Study: 13 tips for Moving to Video Marketing

CSI Drops as Sales Climb

Phone scripts, worksheets & process maps for follow-up

How You Can Create Customers for Life

Dear MRAA Member,

In Minnesota, a salesman admits that boat deliveries and walkthroughs are compromised by the overwhelming number of customers who need to be cared for. This, despite the fact that he's selling boats to customers who've never even been in a boat, let alone have never owned a boat. In Florida, a dealership principal endures sleepless nights knowing his customers aren't receiving the care and attention they deserve. In Ohio, it's plain and simple, a dealer's "CSI scores are going to take a hit," because of the frantic pace of boat sales and service.

Boat dealerships face a culmination of pressure points that make it impossible to keep up. Leads have increased exponentially, new customers are swarming dealerships, and boat sales are surpassing record numbers. What started as a sales season rife with panic and concern on a level not seen since The Great Recession, quickly transformed into a prolific boat "buying frenzy" that has boat dealers overwhelmed, staff on the verge of burnout and inventory depleted.

First-time boat buyers have been leaving boating at a clip of about 40 percent in their first five years of boat ownership — during normal times, according to a study released last year. Today's dealers risk that this sudden pressure on their businesses will cause them to fail to deliver the world-class customer experience people expect when parting ways with their discretionary income. And they risk more customers than normal will become one-and-done boat owners.

The opportunity, then, is that we can capture these first-time boat buyers for life. With their eyes opened to the escape boating can provide, it's your chance to show them how being on the water can change their lives for good. That effort begins with you, and a little bit of the right effort will ensure the ownership experience is worth recommending and returning for.

The MRAA is here to help ensure that you capitalize on the opportunity in front of you and that you overcome all risks to the long-term profitability of your business.

Introducing "Operation: Keep Your Customers Boating," a step-by-step guide to helping you ensure the boat ownership experience exceeds expectations, and creating an environment where your customers will develop two-foot-itis in a year or so and will be in to trade up on their boat. This guide captures and shares some of the leading insights our team has garnered over the years. We've tapped expert advice, dealer best practices, and industry trends to help you manage the customer experience.

In this publication, you'll gain critical insights on topics like post-sale follow-up, processes for taking care of first-time boat buyers, service shop efficiencies, and digital engagement. You'll also gain access to resources like call scripts, process maps and key job descriptions. It's a robust, step-by-step guide for not only taking care of your customers but also for helping you capture future business.

The important part of this is the commitment you need to make for your customers:

1. Acknowledge that the customer experience and the future prosperity of your business are at risk;
2. Tap into the resources MRAA provides and;
3. Put them to use in your dealership starting today.

Your new customers might already be on the water, but it's not too late to ensure they have a world-class boating experience. You decide if that happens. The time to act is now.

Matt Gruhn

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The No. 1 Tactic for Retaining First-Time Boat Buyers

By: Matt Gruhn, MRAA President

As long-time boating enthusiasts and professionals, it's easy for us to forget how much first-time boat buyers don't know about boating.

Last week, for example, I watched as a new boat owner tried more than a dozen times to back his trailer down the ramp to retrieve his boat. He gave up and asked a fisherman who had been standing in the parking lot drinking a beer, to back the trailer into the water for him. After he obliged, and the wheel wells were submerged down the ramp, the novice had one more question: "How do I get the boat onto the trailer?"

No matter what your personal boating history, and no matter if your customer is a first-time buyer or just a new-to-them boat buyer, there are a number of unknowns. And let's face it, there are numerous issues — What's wrong with my trolling motor? Why aren't the lights working on my trailer? How do I get these things fixed? — that either we're not aware that the customer is experiencing or we gloss over them because of our years of dealing with and fixing those issues ourselves.

But these are the exact reasons why post-sale follow up is the No. 1 tactic for not only ensuring a quality ownership experience, but also for gaining repeat business. As that customer's dealer, you are also their closest ally in an enjoyable boating lifestyle. You are the authority on boating. You are the guide to help them get the most out of their new purchase. And you are their resource when something goes wrong.

Unfortunately, when something goes wrong, boaters today are more likely to voice their discontent on social media than they are to pick up the phone and call you.

I know you don't have time to follow up with every customer, especially in today's overwhelming sales environment. But you need to *make the time* in order to keep these customers in boating and to bring them back to your business when it's time to upgrade.

We often think of the sales process as a relationship building effort. But, really, the customer needs the relationship after they trailer off your lot or idle away from the dock. That's when they're really going to need you. Will you be there for them?

Here's a six-step approach for prioritizing follow-up and creating an outstanding ownership experience:

1. We're all running short on inventory and the sales season is beginning to slow. Take the time to create a plan to ramp up your follow-up procedures. Make the shift from a sales mentality to a customer experience mentality.

2. Decide your approach for which team member(s) will make the calls: Typically, it would be the sales contact or a sales manager or a customer service representative or some combination of them all. The "who" is not as important as actually making the call because it's the care and concern that matters. Just make sure they have a customer service mindset.

3. Start with your sales log. Pull a list, to include name, contact info and the make and model of the boat that was purchased, for every boat buyer since the beginning of the year. Start with the first boat and call every customer in order of purchase.

4. Log every conversation in your customer relationship management (CRM) tool.

5. Create a task calendar for issues that need to be followed-up on, and make sure those tasks get assigned to someone and followed through on.

6. Don't forget about service. Demonstrating that you care that your service work you completed has been done satisfactorily is a great way to build rapport and strengthen your relationship with the customer. (Follow the same process as above, beginning with a list of every service customer.)

Your follow-up strategy doesn't need to be elaborate. The important thing is that you ensure that post-sale (and service) follow-up is conducted so that the customers know they have an ally in your dealership … and someone that they know will take care of them when it comes time to upgrade their boat.

Can't Follow Up Yourself? Get Some Help!

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

Your most recent customer has just pulled away, the owner of a shiny new boat. You know the next step in your sales process is to follow up. But how?

You're swamped! The phones are ringing; the online leads are pouring in; the bell at the door keeps dinging; and you haven't eaten in six hours!

Now is the time to invest in your dealership's customer experience. You can do this either by hiring a short-term, contract employee, or thinking long-term about a customer experience representative or manager to have on staff. You need someone who can run through your customer relationship management (CRM) log and call your spring and summer customers one by one. And the time to do that is now.

There are plenty of people currently looking for jobs, as they were recently laid off or furloughed due to COVID's effects on businesses, and many of those people have worked in the service industry. Hire someone to take the time to call your customers, to check in with them, assure they're having a high-quality experience, fix any issues and ask for referrals.

So, what do you need to get started?

- Consider if you will be hiring this person for short-term, contract work, or long-term work. If you're hiring a contractor for the first time, check the federal and state laws on contract work. If you work with any type of human resources company, or if you have an HR person on staff, they should be able to help. Assure you're hiring this position legally and following all of the rules for their type of employment.
- Create a job description for that person. The MRAA Certification Team has developed a **sample job description** for a customer experience representative that is available for MRAA members here, along with more than 50 other job descriptions. Create your job posting, and make it clear what type of position this is and where the person will be working
- Prepare the working environment. Depending on how you want this employee or contractor to access your CRM, dealer management system, or other technology, this job could be done from your dealership, or they could work from their own home. Consider what technology you would need to provide for them to work, including a computer, phone system, a customer experience email address, etc.
- Create a plan and set metrics. Develop a system for passing information to the customer experience rep and having them pass the information back. Ideally, this would be some system within your CRM. Also, set realistic metrics for how many customer touches the person is expected to make each day or week and a method of measuring those touches.
- Interview and hire. Look for an enthusiastic attitude. Find someone who doesn't mind being on the phone for hours on end; not everyone is up to the task.
- Onboard and train. Hopefully, you'll be able to get this person up to speed quickly, because we know you want to reach out to these customers ASAP. Make sure you provide training on the systems the person will use, information about the dealership and its culture, and scripts and templates they will need.
- Check-in. Once they get going, check in and assure the right work is being done and that the person still has the tools, information and training they need to get the job done right.
- If you have time and have enrolled in the 2019 Continuous Certification Curriculum, watch the Q3 course: **Align Your Dealership with Today's Customer**. And if you don't have time today, bookmark that course for the future, as you consider opportunities to offer a better customer experience within your dealership. This course offers you information on a range of options from hiring a customer experience representative to creating your own Business Development Center.

By hiring this new person, you'll take a huge load off of yourself and your team, so you can continue to focus on bringing in new revenue. On top of that, you'll have the opportunity to reach your new customers in ways other businesses aren't, securing that customer's loyalty, business and recommendations going forward.

Meeting Customer Needs With Digital Document Management

By Jerrod Kelley, MRAA Content Manager

For marine dealers all over North America the need to improve consumer convenience and streamline processes has never been so important. New buyers have shown great interest in boating in 2020, with a one-third of them being all-new to boating.

As you know, each customer interaction includes new paperwork and processes as well as record keeping. Now is the time to capture every customer transaction in a digital format.

MRAA recently spoke with Rob Grant, Director of Manufacturer Solutions for Lightspeed at CDK Global, to gather valuable advice for marine dealers that want to enhance customer satisfaction by conducting more digital documentation and management.

Grant said not enough dealers are incorporating a digital system, and he suggests that only 10 to 20 percent of dealers use some type of electronic documentation. But even that, he adds, is probably subjective, because the level of digitization can vary. He also notes that during the COVID-19 concerns, the entire social distancing and touch aspect of customer interactions are at the forefront of discussion and any effort that minimizes risk, dealers need to explore all digital solutions that are available.

Grant said a top rule or approach to digital documentation is the commitment to go all-in and remain consistent throughout your dealership.

"One of the key factors would be to have that consistent experience through each department," explained Grant. "If you're going to do this, commit to it in sales, in service and also in your parts and pro shop areas. That way, regardless of which department that customer is interacting, they are receiving the same and consistent interaction; electronic or otherwise."

CDK Global recently worked with Automotive News on a white paper on this very subject. While marine dealers may differ from automotive dealers in many ways, consumers' trending habits don't, so the need to offer your customers more convenience, improved accuracy, efficient processes and better record keeping is a must.


DIGITAL DOCUMENT MANAGEMENT IS DRIVING SUCCESSFUL CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS

A document management process that includes the digitizing of documents translates to real customer satisfaction. Digitizing workflows prevents errors, provides convenience and opportunities for upsells in the future. Consumers are more likely to return and recommend your dealership to others when they have a seamless, streamlined transaction.

1/3

CDK Document Management provides solutions to meet the management demands of today's dealers. Ditch the paper today!

A sample from CDK's White Paper "Improving Your Customer Experience with Digital Document Management."

Convenience for Most Customers

Paper files continue to grow over the life of the customer and ownership history, so giving customers the ability to choose between an all-digital documentation and storage system or more traditional hard-copy paperwork is the first and most important step. Grant says you have to understand your customer, their abilities and, ultimately, their personal preferences when it comes to the entire documentation process.

"Within our Lightspeed system we have a customer preference on how they want to be communicated with," said Grant. "Do they like email or text messaging or a person who picks up the phone or shakes hands kind of scenario?"

You could have a customer who would prefer an entire digital file that's accessible online or via their phone. Some tried-and-true customers still prefer traditional hard-copy files — and that's perfectly fine and should also be accommodated — for their personal record keeping needs. Dealers have to be willing to adapt to market trends and consumer desires. The ability to remain flexible is key, allowing your customer and staff to meet demands.

Grant also noted the mobile service aspect of the marine industry as being a key digital solution that can improve the customer experience.

"With lake-type service, having the digital ability and remote accessibility, from a technician or dealership perspective, to be able to do bill outs right there on the spot, on the water," he said explaining a key difference with marine vs. automotive. "Get a digital signature on site, email files direct to the customer and store a soft copy at the dealership, simplifying the process."

Shared File Storage

Trending information from CDK's white paper expresses the need for dealers and customers to share in their record keeping. This includes sales, service, declined services, accessory sales, billing and more. A system, like CDKs Lightspeed for marine dealers, is essential for automatic and electronic file processing and storage. Dealers need to have the ability to share the files electronically, as more customers prefer to receive documents on their cell phone or computer, especially now that many also work remotely.

Digital documentation can also showcase its value by creating historical perspectives of your customers. This simply means from their first purchase to their most recent visit you will have everything in one customer file. It can eliminate digging into an archaic filing cabinet for records or a call to the service department to inquire about declined repairs/maintenance items.

"This historical overview is great for the customer, but it also gives your dealership the ability to start off from where their last visit ended – no surprises," explained Grant. "If their last visit was for service, your accessories team will know that, too. It eliminates the guess work."

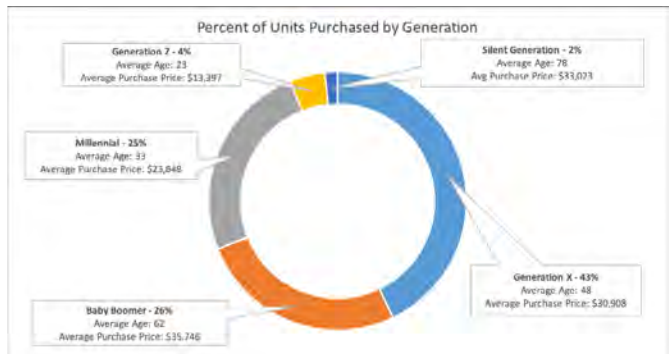
Improved Accuracy

Digital files also can alter a customer's view and impression of the dealership. Accurate paperwork and immediate gratification through digital document viewing are essential to some customers' overall satisfaction. In fact, it could become a key benefit of why they like working with your dealership.

Grant says most consumers make multiple visits to the dealership to take care of one transaction or due to an error or missing information, when in it should have been just one visit. This multi-step task tends to turn people off, he says.

"During that sales and F&I process, that boat buying process for the consumer, if you're able to offer me a DocuSign process, it ensures that there are not any missed signatures because it doesn't allow them to finalize the package and send it back to the dealer before everything has been properly signed within the document," he said. "That's one interaction versus having to go back and forth to correct missing info."

While he admits errors can happen, dealers that go digital can weed out most of them and may just be able to earn a lifetime customer.



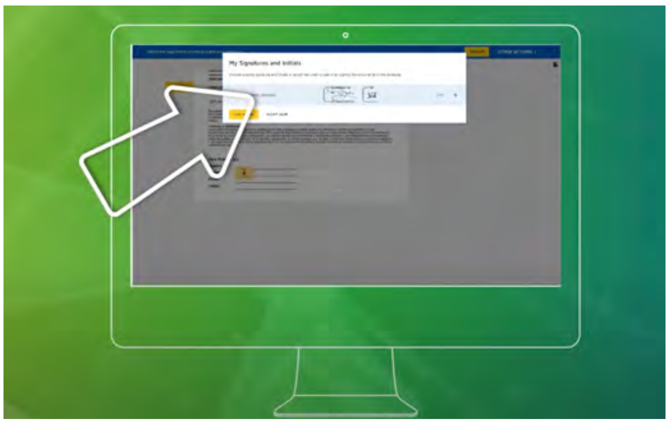
Provided by CDK, this chart indicates the percent of units purchased by generation and as you can see, the percentage of Millennials buying boats is on the rise.

Millennial Customers Matter

CDK says it's important for dealers to know their customers. Millennials are buying boats, too. In fact, CDK examined boat sales by dealers on their system over a one-year period and reported that 47,000 new boat purchases were made. Grant says that ownership demographics revealed that Millennials have started to surpass Baby Boomers in purchasing percentages. Millennials view lengthy hard-copy paperwork signings as a deterrent and also prefer digital records for the ability to review, sign and receive copies quickly.

"The millennials and younger generations are usually more tech savvy and apt to want to use mobile devices and even soft copies as opposed to just hard copies," said Grant. "And there's that convenience factor; we're all busy. Whether you're traveling, stuck at home or whatever it is, just that convenience aspect of doing things electronically or remotely makes it overall a better consumer experience."

Digital can also reduce the amount of traditional hard-copy mail and that process of customer communication. Limited business and mailing hours, postage and unforeseen delays from both the dealership and customers can sometimes be deterrents. It can also convey that a dealer has environmental awareness because it's reducing its footprint by using less paper and creating less waste. CDK attributes the digital documentation framework as also contributing to faster payments to accounts receivable.



The new Docu-Sign feature in CDKs Lightspeed platform.

"The communication aspect of it between customers can be done, text, email, pick up the phone or send them a hard-copy piece if you want. The same for PG&A and pro shop," explained Grant. "From sales and F&I perspective, we have a basic solution now and it relies on the dealer to set up some things, mainly a DocuSign account as example. Our Lightspeed platform can generate those documents in a PDF-type format that can then be added to a DocuSign envelope so that they can then be sent over to the customer and they can e-sign and send the documents back."

Don't Fear Change

Grant says it's always good to remember, inherently, change is tough. Going to digital is a process that takes time, commitment and patience.

"A reminder that this is going to be a learning process and there can be ups and downs during the implementation of it," he adds, "but when you stick with it and in the end when you look back it will be great."

He says CDK's Lightspeed program guides you through the entire process for the most part with prompts. His other reminder is to be sure to use the customer support portal and customer support team contact resources to gain even more insight, information and experience using digital platforms. Training varies based upon the role of the person at the dealership and their ability to learn and understand everything.

"We have some training videos that are about 15 to 20 minutes in length," he notes. "That is, time and investment wise, what it will take dealership personnel to start to be able to use the tools that are there."

Customized to Match Your Specific Dealership

"We scale the program according to each dealership and their needs and it can vary," said Grant, "because dealership sizes and scopes run the gambit."

He explained that, in some coastal regions, there may be some businesses that are mainly service-oriented, say in a marina environment, and things operate on a contract-type basis. Often times, smaller service-only shops can benefit greatly by going digital because of the nature of their location, business and operations. A mobile app can help greatly, too.

"We have a mobile app within Lightspeed and it can be downloaded," said Grant. "Dealers can check in, snap photos, track their time and how much they need to bill for services. All of it can be done on the mobile device. They can clock on and off their jobs to track labor hours. Everything can be tracked that way."

Dealerships that have prospered by going digital also give off a modern and innovative vibe and true devotion to customer convenience. They are also organized and more efficient so customers are more apt to offer referrals about the business, which can create new leads and new buyers. Remember, going digital should be about improving your customers' experience, but it should also allow you to streamline operations and grow profitability.

Outsourcing Follow-Up Offers Fast, Reliable Response

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

You know follow-up is that last, important step in your sales process, but you're still busy and wondering how you could possibly find the time to follow-up yourself or hire someone else to do the job.

If you're feeling overwhelmed by the need to follow-up with your new boat buyers, and you're unable to hire someone to lead the effort for you internally, outsourcing these services is a way to get a follow-up program started quickly, as well as to get access to detailed reports on how your dealership is performing.

> **"First-Time** boat buyers will always have questions, and they need to feel confident they can come **to their dealers for answers."**

In a perfect world, we can do everything for our business ourselves, but that's not always how things work. We all contract with vendors for a variety of things, from shipping to lawn care and from cleaning to human resources. Follow-up could also be contracted.

Hiring a company to complete phone campaigns for you takes the work off your plate and offers the outreach that your customers need.

To learn more about outsourcing follow-up calls, we reached out to MRAA Partner and benefit provider CSI Inc., which offers dealers calls after delivery, alerts on issues, WOW reports on praise for your staff and monthly reports that track your team's performance.

Becky Thompson, president of CSI, Inc., said that by following up and addressing issues, dealers can create lifelong customers. "Everyone knows that happy customers make lifelong customers, and lifelong customers will put a nice profit on anyone's bottom line," she said. "We all know it's more costly to gain new customers, so why not invest to make sure every customer is so impressed with the care and concern they are receiving, that they wouldn't go anywhere else for service and future sales?"

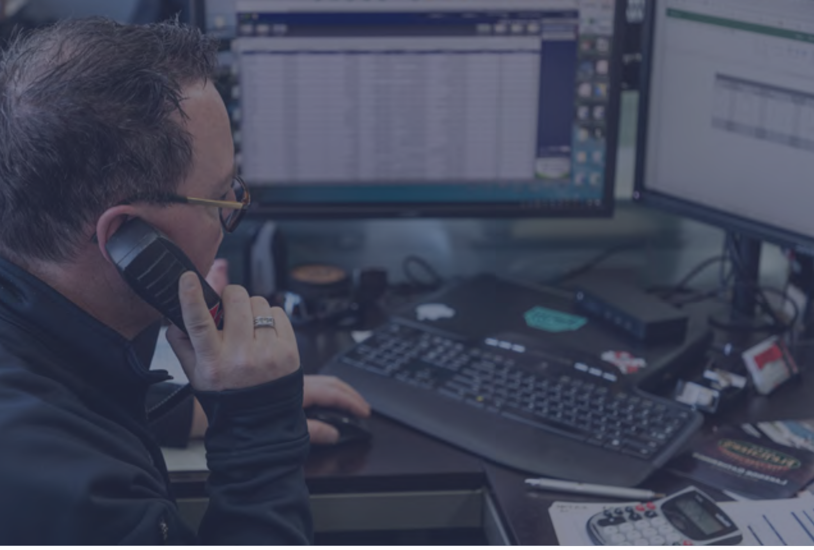
Follow-up is recommended with returning customers, service customers, and of course, first-time boat buyers.

"First-time boat buyers will always have questions, and they need to feel confident they can come to their dealer for answers," Thompson explained. "Build that trust, share their excitement, quality control check, and you will build lifelong customers."

Following up with customers and gaining feedback has a variety of benefits. Those include:

- Fix problems quickly, thereby saving customers with the intelligence obtained during the follow-up call. Result: Added profit to your bottom line!
- Build a stronger relationship with customers because the call sends a signal that the dealer really cares about their experience.
- Identify broken processes, so they can be corrected, saving issues with the next customer.
- Identify broken staff processes so retention can occur.
- Tracking employees' performance, enabling recognition for the employees who are providing exceptional service.
- Learn what your Net Promoter Score is.
- Learn what your Customer Satisfaction Index rating is.
- Identify which marketing avenues are driving customers to the dealership.
- Reveal needed improvements that might otherwise be invisible. These are golden nuggets!

Follow-up is so crucial to building up your customer base with loyal, raving fans, and their referrals. So, finding a system that works for you is important. Outsourcing just might be that route, if you're looking for an efficient program that takes the hard work off your hands.



Let us handle the follow-up, you keep selling boats.

MRAA has partnered with Customer Service Intelligence, Inc. to create a Virtual Business Development Center to offer a program that will help you build on your customer relationships and capture value.

Don't let the opportunity of loyal customers slip through the cracks when they opt to sell their boats and never come back because they didn't have a good experience at your dealership.

How it works

	Your role	CSI's Role
1. Report customer and sale to vBDC.	✓	
2. Send thank you email to customer.		✓
3. Text customer to establish preferred communication method.		✓
4. Customer's feedback immediately emailed to dealership for your response.		✓
5. Address customer comments/needs with staff after you receive customer feedback from CSI.	✓	

Improve the Customer Experience,
Build Loyalty and Use Feedback to Enhance Relationships

ENROLL TODAY

For more information on this program
call CSI at 800.835.5274 or email bthompson@tellcsi.com

CSI

MRAA

On the Fence About Scripts? Winging it is a No-Go

By: Bob McCann, MRAA Lead Certification Consultant

I've been telling dealers for years to move their sales conversations to the phone because tone of voice is a big, damn deal. It has a major effect on how prospects perceive you.

So, how do sales call scripts fit into that perception?

We believe that there are three core elements in effective face-to-face communication, and tone is a big one: Experts suggest it accounts for 38 percent of how your message is perceived — 38!

Believe it or not, scripts can help you with tone. Here's why: As a sales rep, you should know what you are going to say during a call before you pick up the phone. Maybe not word-for-word but at least know the talking points, so that you can make good use of both your time and the customer's time. Maybe you can wing it and do that, but most of us need a little help.

If you have a powerful script, you'll know what to say and how to say it every time and increase your chances of a totally successful phone conversation. A well-tuned script will help you avoid mental hiccups that can result in time wasted and missed opportunities.

Personalize your script (to avoid the robot effect)
Over the years, you've developed certain key responses or phrases that are always ready to go when you're talking to people — that's a script.

A common misconception about sales scripts is that they're robotic and rigid. Word to the wise: They will only be that way if you make 'em that way. You will want to tailor and personalize a script for different settings and conversations without steering away from your core message.

38%
of how your message is received is based on your **tone of voice**.

Martial arts legend Bruce Lee has a great quote about training that applies here: "Absorb what is useful, discard what is not and add what is uniquely yours." So, when it comes to a script, it's about adding your own flavor without eliminating the things that have to be said.

The first step to personalizing is actually knowing the script well. That way, you can put your own spin on it and not completely go off-message. When you follow and personalize a script, you:

- Make your points consistently,
- Don't miss opportunities,
- Build better rapport,
- Seize your calls to action.

People who don't like scripts say things like, "I'm a natural. Scripts just hold me back from connecting with people."

Final thoughts: You have to guide (not control) a conversation. You know where you're going already — lean on your script to help you guide your customers to where you want to go. Stick to the script and start using it to your advantage.

DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCE

SAMPLE PHONE SCRIPT

We developed **a phone script** for you to use to make it easier for you to connect with people. The power of using a script is that it helps remind you of talking points that will help make a better connection with the customer by focusing on the fun of boating vs. the pain of the problems.

Personalize the script, so you can provide value within a short period of time. That's what people want. That's what I think scripts are powerful for — you know what to say, without thinking about it.

DOWNLOAD

Create a Post-Sale Follow-Up Process Map

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

We all have what feels like one million things going on at all times, at work, at home. It's hard to remember everything we need to do. Heck, sometimes I can't even remember why I opened the refrigerator.

That's why process maps are so important. They keep our business tasks on track, assuring that, if followed, no step will be missed. Post-Sale Follow-Up is one of those key areas where a process map can help immensely. With a Post-Sale Follow-Up process map, you can put in place schedules, checks and balances to make sure each customer gets the same follow-up, from handwritten cards to the 5-day thank you call and more.

Luckily, you don't have to start from scratch. MRAA's Certification Team has developed two resources that will help you create your Post-Sale Follow-Up process map and execute on that map.

The first is an Example Post-Sale Follow-Up process map, which you can adopt completely or adapt to your dealership's specific needs.

The second is a Post-Sale Follow-Up worksheet. Pulled from Certification's new Guide to Improving Your Sales Process Map, developed alongside the 2020 Continuous Certification course **"Fill the Gaps in Your Dealership's Sales Process,"** this worksheet gives you tips for your Post-Sale Follow-Up, along with a Standard Operating Procedure Checklist.

DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES

Example Post-Sale Follow-Up Process Map


Example Post-Sale Follow-Up

Customer is Indicated "Delivered"

Next Day Thank You Letter or Handwritten Cards

5-Day Thank You Call

DOWNLOAD

Post-Sale Follow-Up Worksheet


Post-Sale Follow-Up Worksheet

These Post-Sale Follow-Up tips and Standard Operating Procedure are excerpts from the Guide to Improving Your Sales Process Map, which is available through the Marine Industry Certified Dealership program.

Post-Sale Follow-Up — By now, you are waving goodbye to your customer as they drive away with their new boat you just sold them. You can take a breath and chalk up another sold unit this month, but you're not done with them yet.

This is truly the first step of selling the next boat to this customer or sooner to one of their friends or relatives. There is not a post-sale follow-up process that fits all; the touchpoints should be dictated by your relationship with the customer and your efforts on noting milestones in the customer's boating life and showing a sincere interest in them by following up on those events. That being said, there should be a few touchpoints required for all customers buying a new boat from the dealership and empowering the salespeople to schedule future follow-up. These immediate and mandatory follow-up points could be:

- Handwritten thank-you note

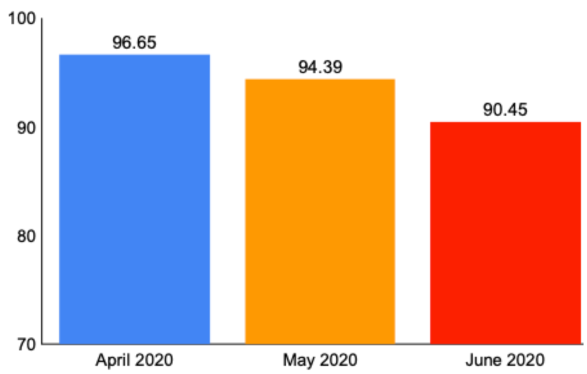
DOWNLOAD

2020: CSI Dropped as Sales Cimbed

By: Matt Gruhn, MRAA President

There's lots to celebrate related to industry momentum when it comes to interest, sales and participation in boating and fishing. But there's also a dark side to this story: the customer experience.

As sales leads have increased in some cases by 300 and 400 percent, and sales continue to hit record levels, the normal metrics we chart our success by continue to climb. But the bar charts related to the customer experience are on the decline, almost at an inverse rate.



CSI scores in 2020 plummeted from 96.65 percent in April to 90.45 in June, a drastic peak-season drop compared to normal years.

According to MRAA partner Customer Service Intelligence, Inc., which charts customer satisfaction indices on sales delivery and service for 30 to 50 marine dealers, CSI scores for this group has declined by more than 6 full percentage points since April. In the first month of the quarter, those dealers scored a 96.65 CSI score related to sales delivery; in the second month, it dropped to 94.39; and in June, the third month, it hit a low of 90.45.

In a normal year, the peak season always sees a slight dip, according to Customer Service Intelligence, but that dip typically represents only a 0.5- or 1-point drop, not a 6-point drop. It's worth noting here, that any dealer who engages a company like Customer Service Intelligence and pays for additional CSI monitoring (above and beyond the manufacturer CSI program) is a dealership that you can expect to be focused intently on driving quality customer experiences. And if those dealers are close to dipping below the 90-percent CSI threshold, it's scary to think what's happening to those dealers that don't put as much emphasis on CSI.

Those dealers' net promoter scores, a measurement of loyalty with the dealership, dropped from scores in the mid 90s back in March to less than 75 in June. These are still solid NPS scores, but a 15-point decline is notable. Comparably, the 12-month Net Promoter Score in the second quarter of 2019 was 83.1 vs. 2020's second quarter, which was 76.88, "a substantial decline," according to Becky Thompson, president of Customer Service Intelligence, Inc. "Dealers need to focus on correcting customer issues to bring this NPS number up."

A quick look at individual questions on the CSI surveys shows the culprit leading to poor customer satisfaction: Follow up, or a lack thereof.

Questions like "were you satisfied with the explanation of features, etc.?" and "were you pleased with the overall condition of the boat?" and "did your sales person treat you with courtesy and concern?" all garnered great scores: 95.5, 91.5, and 99.3 respectively. But **the question of "Has your sales person contacted you since delivery?" received a rating of 77.17, dragging the customer experience index down significantly.**

"It's scary to think what dealers' ratings are when they don't have a follow-up program in place," explains Thompson. "How many first-time buyers are never returning because of a mistake that was made just because the dealer is too busy to follow up and ask how things are going?"

There's no doubt that with how busy dealers have been over the last quarter that mistakes are being made. CSI programs like this give you the ability to correct issues and save the customer. But they also require that you adjust your tactics in order to positively influence the results, and in this case, the numbers, as well as Thompson's expertise, suggest a need to improve follow-up to create loyal customers.

"The customer can be saved when you are aware of the issues they are having and you take the opportunity to make it right by the customer," Thompson explains. "And that in return brings you customer loyalty."

Slow Down and Create Customers for Life

By: Matt Gruhn, MRAA President

In any summer selling season, you feel rushed. There are leads to nurture, customer questions to answer, trade-ins to evaluate, and deals to finalize.

Your sales team tries to hand the baton to service to take care of your customers. You feel the tug of competing priorities: Taking care of your boat buyers vs. moving on to selling the next boat. Meanwhile, boaters everywhere are hitting the water, service requests are piling up, parts and accessory orders are on the rise, and staff tries to meet every demand. How do you keep up?

Stand out from the crowd with a hand-written, sincere thank you for their business.

The pressure of a summer selling season at a boat dealership resembles a juggling act amidst a frantic race to the end, as priorities shift between sales momentum, service efficiency, and customer demands, not to even mention workloads, overtime, summer vacations and the need for more help.

That's just a normal year. In 2020, all of this is magnified by an overwhelming number of leads, sales, factory shutdowns, depleted inventory, work-from-home mandates, appointment-only boat sales, social distancing requirements and more. Running a boat dealership demands a balance that is tricky to navigate.

I have two words for you: slow down. It may seem contrary to how we've needed to react to this crisis, but there's great value in simply slowing down and refocusing your attention on what matters most.

At this moment, it's the customer experience that matters most. With such an incredible influx of new boat buyers, it's our job to help ensure their ownership experience keeps them in their boat and encourages them to upgrade that boat.

How important is it? If you put value on customer service, you'll see that as boat sales have risen, customer satisfaction scores have been heading the opposite direction — driven mostly by a lack of follow-up. That shortcoming is a result of not slowing down and taking care of the customer.

It's time to slow down and refocus our attention on those customers. Offering them just a little bit more on their experience and satisfaction can pay big dividends on your business. There's never been a better time to try.

Here are a few ideas on what you can do:

1. Share unique insights that you have about the boat or the brand that they've purchased.

2. Connect them with other boaters or an owners club from your dealership or the brand they purchased.

3. Make sure you use your customer relationship management tool and the FORMAT process that Sam Dantzler teaches in MRAA's online courses, to help you personalize their experience.

4. Follow-up with boat buyers and ask how they are enjoying their boat, or check in with them after a service appointment.

5. Send customers ideas on how they can get more enjoyment out of their boating experience through a new part or accessory, the reassurance of a maintenance package, or a new waterway to explore.

6. Schedule a reminder to text the customer to stay in touch and provide another reminder that you're available to them.

7. Stand out from the crowd with a hand-written, sincere thank you for their business. I promise you this will have an impact.

There are plenty of options for you to explore with this and the pause, will give you and your team the opportunity to take a breath and provide significant value to the ownership experience. And it just may create a customer for life. Give yourself and your team permission to slow it down and focus on what matters most: The customer.

Don't Skip the Demo

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

When your appointment book is filling up with both prospects looking to buy and customers needing delivery, it's easy to look for ways to shortcut the sales process.

Skipping a demo could save you hours, between prep and the actual demo. But, it could also lead to a customer who doesn't understand the operation of the boat, is frustrated — or even worse, causes an accident — because they don't grasp what they're doing.

Your customers come from a wide range of boating experience.

Some have been using a friend's boat for years, and they're now looking for their own. Others are simply looking to upgrade their longtime boat.

But then there are those new to modern-day boats and first-time boat buyers. Some are upgrading from their used, aluminum fish boat with an old Johnson outboard. Others are buying for the first time after being a passenger for decades. And yet others may have never even been on a boat, let alone driven one.

Regardless of which boating background your customers come from, it's likely the boat they're buying from you is new to them in operation. Boat technology has changed a lot over the past few decades, and when they're moving up from a '90s pontoon to a 2020 wake boat, or making any other kind of change, there is going to be a learning curve.

Here are a few things to think about when performing a demo focused on an improved customer experience:

Assess the situation: By delivery, you should understand your customer's experience with boating and should have noted that in your customer relationship management system. But make sure you ask again, to assure you're providing them the right guidance. Also, probe and ask them to be honest with you. We all know egos can get in the way, and someone may say that they know how to drive a boat, only because they don't want to admit that they can't.

Getting customers on the water to experience life on their possible future boat can not only be the deciding factor, but it can also be the difference between selling a base model or one with upgrades.

On-land demos: If you absolutely can't do an on-water demo because of your location, or time, or any other factors, make sure you at least offer a demo on land. Walk the customer through the controls and safety features just like you would on water, making sure not to skip any details. If the boat is being trailered, show them the features of the trailer and how to get the boat on and off the trailer.

In-water demos: An in-water demo is ideal. Spend an hour or more on the water with the customer. Show them the features and then let them take the helm, giving them pointers as you go along. Remember to compliment them twice as often as you critique them, so they'll be more receptive to your feedback.

Trailer usage: If the boat is being trailered, and you can do a demo at a ramp, show the customer how to back the boat into the water, release it from the trailer and load it back up. If they've gone through this entire process in their own vehicle with you as a guide, they'll feel a lot more confident the next time they go out on their own.

Demos in the time of COVID: Remember to maintain social distance, keep everything clean and respect your customer's wishes when it comes to safety. The MRAA

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has developed a Sample Boat Demo and Delivery Policy and Boat Demo/Sea Trial Do's and Do Not's to help you develop a safety plan to perform demos that make both your staff and your customers feel comfortable.

Don't forget the safety tips: New boat buyers may not know the rules of boating in your area. So make sure you tell them. This is key for them to have a safe experience and lower the risk of accidents. Explain to them the local life jacket law and explain the importance of wearing a life jacket. Talk about things they should be aware of on the waterway they'll be exploring, whether it's information on no wake zones, locks and dams, sandbars, or current COVID restrictions.

Personalize the demo: Show them the features they'll be using frequently. If the customer told you they'd be fishing, show them how to use the live well and the fish finder. If they'll be wake boarding, show them how to use the ballast. If the boat has a speaker system, demonstrate how it works and explain how noise levels affect others nearby. This will get them excited about the lifestyle they're about to embark on.

Don't leave them stranded: Offer them a way to reach out, if they have any questions. Sometimes the initial demo is overwhelming, and the customer may forget some key things you showed them. Offer them your mobile number, or a number within the dealership that will allow them to get quick, clear advice on their boat.

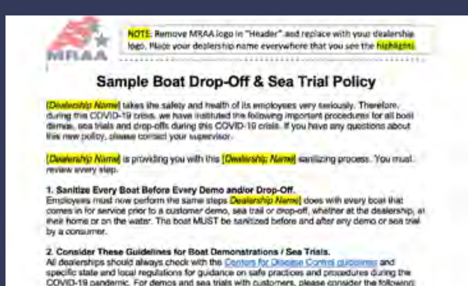
While a demo can seem overwhelming to complete when you're busy, the presentation of the features of the exact boat your customer purchased will make them a better informed, safer boater, who is more satisfied with their purchase.

No one wants to be the person out on the water with their family, confused about their operation of the boat.

So make them the hero by teaching them, and they'll thank you with their loyalty.

DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCES

Sample Boat Demo & Delivery Policy


Sample Boat Drop-Off & Sea Trial Policy

DOWNLOAD

Boat Demo/Sea Trial Do's and Do Not's

DOWNLOAD

Boat Dealers: It's Time to Embrace Digital Retail

By: Bob McCann, MRAA Lead Certification Consultant

Boat dealers are feeling the digital pressure from all sides as the marine industry rapidly evolves under the pressure of the COVID-19 pandemic and most recently the significant influx of new boat buyers that have entered the market.

As an industry, we've been touting digital marketing for years — since at least the time I came on the scene in 1999 calling it e-business. Those who have been sharpening their digital tools over the years were prepared when the market place changed dramatically in March. In reality, it shouldn't have taken a pandemic to get dealers to look closely at digital retailing.

The systems, processes and tactics included in defining that engagement and full-fledged digital retailing remain fuzzy, at best, for most dealers. So, let me start by telling you what it's NOT. Digital retailing is not digital marketing. It's not your Facebook page, or your online inventory, email campaigning, chat bot or online payment calculator. It's also not a button, "Get a Quote!"

Digital retailing is the customer's ability to go deeper into the boat buying process online. Even if some car marketplaces, like Carvana and Vroom, allow 100 percent online sales, 95 percentof customers still buy their vehicles in a dealership. It's becoming clear that buyer expectations are changing rapidly, and consumers are increasingly becoming impatient with a disjointed buying experience, both with the technology and the lack of dealership engagement. Digital retailing is the future of selling boats, and it's ready for you to engage with today.

For boat dealers, digital retail requires a hybrid of online and offline boat-buying experiences. It gives boat buyers the ability to start the buying process online and then complete the purchase in-dealership — or vice versa. It's giving consumers a complete set of shopping tools across both a dealer's digital and physical showrooms and delivering a convenient, faster shopping experience.

A digital retailing experience should allow boat shoppers to build a deal online that reflects a realistic buying scenario. That includes mapping out standard

The retail environment has changed drastically over the years allowing for shopping to happen with the click of a button.

and optional equipment with applicable destination and rigging fees, taxes, trade-in vehicle values and add-on protection plans.

Digital retailing platforms also transfer most if not all physical paperwork online. Customers can complete paperwork on a tablet in the store, or log-in and finish the process from the their home. Whether at the dealership or at home, digital retailing streamlines the boat-buying journey while giving customers the flexibility and control they desire.

Outflanked by tech-savvy retailers with deep wallets, boat dealerships everywhere are faced with a choice: Adapt to this new reality or become irrelevant.

Here's some real-world context:

1. In 2000, car buyers visited an average of five dealerships before pulling the trigger. Today, you're lucky if a customer visits two dealerships during their search.

2. Customers know what they want to buy and where they want to buy it long before they show up to the showroom. Boat buyers are in search of a familiar way to buy boats, and the dealership is going to play a different role.

3. If it feels like the Internet is pulling control away from your dealership and limiting your influence in the

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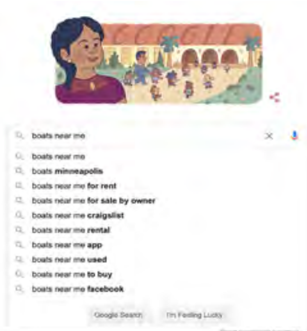
boat buying process, you're not wrong. Your sales team's chances to interact with their customers are arriving later in the process, and when they do finally get face time, key decisions have already been made under the influence of online content. Dealers are losing some of the control, but that doesn't have to be a bad thing.

It's time for boat dealers to embrace digital retailing as the new standard for the dealership experience. Fortunately, a handful of new tools are helping boat dealers get into the fight. Digital retail platforms make it easy for them to upgrade the customer experience to keep pace with automotive, the larger marine dealer groups and the evolving expectations of the online marketplace.



With retail at a consumer's fingertips, it is important to have a good online presence.

As some boat dealers remain wary of moving more of the boat-buying process online, it's important to note that digital retailing doesn't replace the showroom; it extends the experience to a powerful new channel for reaching more customers. Digital retail is a major opportunity for boat dealers that will have long-term benefits for early adopters.

Personalizing the buying experience
Executed thoroughly, dealers in the digital landscape capture more customer intelligence up front, giving them a greater chance of closing the deal later. So digital-focused dealers are more informed and empowered when relating with a customer through the insights learned from digital retailing technology. Sales conversations can now include unique buyer information gathered well before a customer walks onto the dealership showroom floor.

Providing the right digital retailing experience means leveraging detailed shopper information to transform the customer relationship. The online workflow should remember boats browsed by a consumer and serve up other relevant options. Their searches and budget parameters should be saved and reapplied when returning to the site and used to market to them. For instance, I'm a 24-foot center console kind of guy. When manufacturers and dealers know this information, sending ads by email or in my social media feed featuring a new 65' yacht is a complete waste of effort that leads to me opting out of future campaigns.

It's difficult for me to write this today — because I remember having to twist boat dealers' arms to display their inventory online — but a static website with boat listings doesn't offer the detailed, personalized experience that today's consumers want. Personalized buying experiences are, quite simply, the expectation, and today's digital-first marketplace gives dealers more powerful tools to deliver on that.

The marine industry is going digital. Are you?
A strong digital retailing experience seamlessly integrates your dealership and online presence, and gives you a new way to leverage customer data, build trust, generate leads, and increase your closing ratio. The best part is that when you do it right, you can close more deals and service more boats with less effort.

Boat dealers stand at a crossroads. As retail changes around them, every owner and GM must make a choice: Do we change with the times, or stick to "business as usual?" Regardless of the road you choose, the digital retail evolution is not stopping for anyone. No one can imagine a future where boat dealers aren't required to adopt digital marketing tools.

Here's the good news: it's not too late to evolve. Every dealer in business today can still adapt to the modern boat-buying experience. Not only will digital retail help you keep up with fast-moving competitors, but it will give you an early-mover advantage over other boat dealerships.

Thanks to modern digital retail platforms, any dealership can offer a top-notch customer experience. We can't control where the marine industry is going, but we can control how we respond to it.

Video is King

By: Bob McCann, MRAA Lead Certification Consultant

Use of videos for promoting products and services has become extremely common. As the world goes digital, it's clear: Videos sell boats. So, it's obvious that a boat dealer would also jump on the bandwagon.

As a boat dealer your goal should always be to discover new and effective ways of making people aware of the boats you are offering to sell, but without spending too much money. Advertising and promoting the boats through videos is probably the most cost-effective way of reaching a huge customer base.

Video isn't exactly the next big thing, and although it's a huge part of any good marketing strategy, we're not going to try to pretend that digital retailing is just a new buzzword for video marketing. So, I figured we'd gather some of the best tactics we've seen and heard about and share them. Dealers know that the boat business is all about standing out. These video marketing tactics will help you do that.

Investing in a camera and space to record will ensure the quality of the video for your dealership.

1. **Use video because that content is getting Google's attention.** When we think of SEO-boosting-content, we normally think of blog posts first, but ignoring the SEO potential in video marketing is a good way to miss out on attracting the attention of boat shoppers. Providing boat buyers with information is a great way to attract them to your dealership. Providing boat shoppers with information in the quick, helpful, and digestible form of a brief video is the perfect way to combine the research they want with a medium they enjoy. Google is well aware of the benefits of video and has begun to rank videos highly for many queries. And creating helpful and informative videos that are local specific will help boost your rankings with your local SEO efforts.

2. **Feature your boats.** Customers want information, and good dealers give shoppers the information they're looking for. One of the best ways to do that is to feature walkthrough videos of the boats on your site and in your showroom. A good walkthrough video should be a quick overview of the boat with a focus on the features that make the boat interesting with a good voiceover. If you have a phone that can shoot video, a steady hand, and a pleasant voice, you can create videos easily for each of your boats. Once you have produced these videos, you can add them to your YouTube channel and embed these videos to your site's listings. Now take full advantage of your efforts and tweet them, post them on Facebook, share them on Instagram and link to them from your prospecting emails.

3. **Bring video marketing to your Service Department.** Service departments tend to get neglected in marketing, but video marketing is a great opportunity to get your service department some attention. Videos about DIY boat maintenance, advice on common maintenance warning signs, seasonal service needs, etc., are great ways to drive boaters into the service department. Your service team knows the questions they hear on a daily basis and probably already have the answers. By making videos answer those questions, and more, you can capitalize on the opportunity to build credibility, trustworthiness and become the authority on local boat service.

4. **Create staff profiles.** Staff profile videos can help prospective customers feel more connected to your dealership as well as providing them with an advanced opportunity to get to know the person who is going to help them with their experience within your dealership. These videos further humanize your team and make them more approachable in the eyes of boat shoppers.

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5. **Think mobile.** You've heard by now that mobile connectivity is outpacing the connections from our desktops, so we won't go on about that too much more here. But really, mobile is important, especially as a platform for video marketing. Video can be particularly well suited to mobile if the content is suited for video-friendly mobile platforms, like Facebook and Instagram. Rule of thumb, some say 45 seconds for Facebook and just 15 seconds for Instagram. These videos are a great way to reach an audience that is interested in a boat but haven't yet embarked on the deep research part of their journey. Start by sharing a short video about the boating lifestyle. From there, they can be directed to your website or YouTube page if they want to see more of your boats, service videos or check out what else your dealership has to offer.

6. **Share live video walkthroughs.** Some innovative dealers are using their smartphones to perform live video presentations and close deals while they have the prospect on the line! When a prospect calls to ask if a dealership has a boat in stock, salespeople will often respond in the affirmative and ask the prospect to come in for an appointment to take a closer look. Since the health-concerned marketplace set in, dealers have found that that they can keep that prospect on the phone and conduct a live video walkthrough using their cell phone. If you're close to the boat, offer to do it on the spot. If not, offer to call the prospect back in a few minutes. And use our handy guide and action plan to effectively shoot boat walkthroughs.

7. **Use video for quicker service authorizations.** For service writers, the dreaded voicemail can really hold up the service schedule when trying to get an OK from a customer to do the work. Instead of leaving a voicemail, record a video showing the problem while explaining the repair and the price and then text it to the customer. Remember, 98% of all text messages are opened and 95% are read within 3 minutes of receiving them!

8. **Invest in a chat app.** To perform a live walkthrough or service video calls, you'll need a video chat app on your smartphone. The iPhone's integrated video chat app is FaceTime. If you have an Android or Windows smartphone, the best apps to use are Google Hangouts or Facebook Messenger. It's a good idea to have several apps on your phone and to know how to use them all. That way, odds are good you will have a video chat app that is compatible with your customer. Ideally, at some point you will want to use texting applications such as Kenect or Co-Video that allows for numerous customer and dealer benefits. Check out this webinar MRAA hosted with Kenect.

9. **Boost your dealership's Wi-Fi.** While it's possible to do video chat calls using a cellular data plan, it's not very reliable. Cell service can be spotty and can lead to a less-than-ideal sales experience. To offer this type of service to your customers, your dealership will need an external Wi-Fi network that reaches to the inventory and shop. This is also a big help for salespeople out on the lot with customers to look up product information, message their manager or find the answer to any question using a mobile phone or tablet.

Video is a great way to engage customers and just maybe, get them excited enough about the boat to want to come in for a sea trial or help the seasonal boater to get back on the water quickly. It's helpful to have a mixture of content, but video can tell a story in greater depth than text alone. Using these suggestions, your dealership can stand out in the sea of fiberglass and aluminum using video marketing.

DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCE

Ask the Expert Webinar: How To Maximize Client Communication & Revenue with Texting

VIEW WEBINAR

The Video Game: 13 Tips for Moving to Video Marketing

How a one-location, Canadian dealership became the industry leader in educating boaters around the world.

By Jerrod Kelley, MRAA Content Manager

How does a small, one-location, Canadian dealership become a world leader in educating customers? The answer is quite simple and yet quite challenging at the same time. But for any dealer looking to invest a little sweat equity, growth, market share and financial stability await you on the other side.

Sean Horsfall can attest to that. He is the first to admit he's no guru when it comes to producing video, but today he beams with pride over the nearly 1.6 million views his video series has garnered on YouTube.

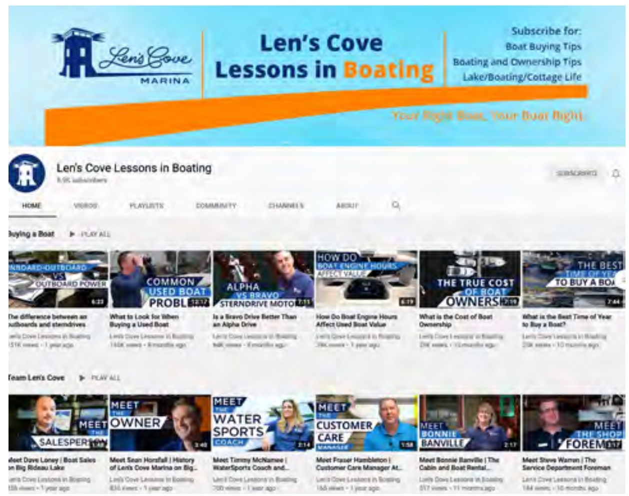
The third-generation owner of Len's Cove Marina, in Portland, Ontario, Canada, admits it wasn't a necessity to start shooting videos for his customers. It was an inspiration he received from a marketing expert about four years ago. More than 40 videos later, the popular "Len's Cove Lessons in Boating" video library has become one of the most informative boating series on YouTube.

Inspiration & Perspiration

Inspired by keynote speaker and author Marcus Sheridan, Horsfall didn't act immediately. Instead, it took seeing Sheridan and hearing his message at the MRAA's annual conference, a second time — and some internal reasoning — before he decided to go for it.

"I became very intrigued by what Marcus was saying the first year that I heard him speak," Horsfall explains. But then, "talking to other colleagues and, more importantly, looking at other marine dealer websites and YouTube channels, I realized that everyone thinks that Marcus is smart and has great ideas, but no one was taking his advice."

Len's Cove battled with many of the same questions all dealers have when considering a video strategy: How would I do this? Who would shoot the video? Who will edit the videos? How would the content be written? And ultimately, will the effort pay off?



A view of the "Len's Cove Lessons in Boating" YouTube page that boasts 8.9 K subscribers.

With few answers to those questions out of the gate, Horsfall consulted with Impact Marketing, where Sheridan is a partner, and the plan came together. He hired a videographer, got to work and subscribed to a "learn-as-we-go" effort.

From the "that's a great idea" moment to mid-2020 took four years, but today, the investment has driven the Len's Cove YouTube channel to more than 8,000 subscribers and nearly 1.5 million views since he started the video initiative.

The all-in video effort is challenging, presenting all the hurdles you might expect. The thought of being on camera can make you uncomfortable. Writing scripts and planning shoots takes time. Shooting schedules can be exhausting. But done right, the rewards can be phenomenal.

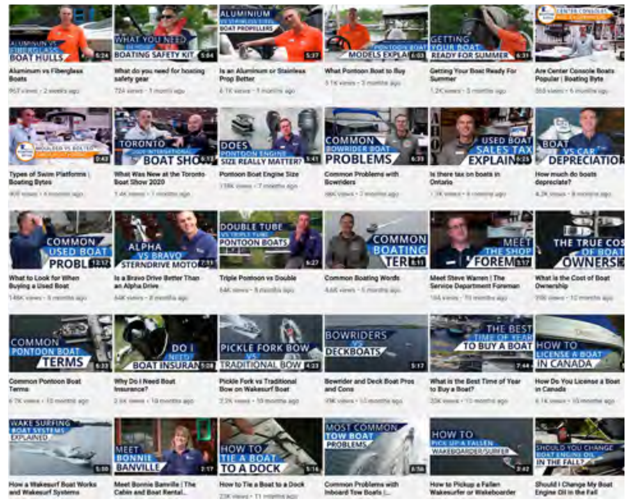
This is the story of how Horsfall did it right.

How To Do It

Incorporating videography into your content marketing strategy is not an earth-shattering concept.

With the astronomical rise of video consumption, you should have video already built into your regular marketing, to help you reach, educate and interact with your customers. But implementing such a plan takes strategy, patience and determination to turn the vision into a reality, and even more so to meet or exceed expectations for your reach, marketing value and brand credibility.

Horsfall had a bit of a head start with the effort, as he had begun writing a regular blog and used his social media efforts to help educate customers. He knew the value and parlayed his comfort level into video one he heard Marcus' convincing examples of why video carries the full power of your marketing efforts. Use blogging to help you get acquainted with your voice if you'd like to start slow.



A screenshot of the vast amount of videos available on Len's Cove Marina's Lessons in Boating YouTube page.

Tip 1: Commit to the Effort

Producing video is like a lot of things: If it's worth doing, it's worth doing well. The hardest thing to figure out is if you're going to be able to dedicate the time necessary to do it well. Between learning about the process, hiring a videographer, writing the scripts, shooting the videos, and approving the final product, the time devoted expands. But it gets easier as you learn to streamline your process.

"I probably spend the equivalent of three days a month on this," Horsfall says. "Between setting up the date, time you do it, writing the script, researching the topics, researching the keywords for the YouTube videos, a day of shooting and once the film is to the videographer, he makes it and then asks for your input, and you give feedback, and then it eventually goes on YouTube."

Tip 2: Don't Skimp on Content

Lens' Cove produces eight-to-10 videos per month because you have to build enough content or people are not going to follow you or subscribe to your channel until they see a complete library of content.

"If you're not going to shoot 20 to 40 videos a year, minimum, then it's not worth it. You won't get any channel authority or growth," Horsfall explains. "That was true for us. We got excited when we started getting 600 views a day, and that happened after we had about 20 videos. Now, we are into the 10,000 to 20,000 views a day on our videos and our most popular video has about a half a million views."

Tip 3: Hire a Videographer

While there are companies that exist to just show up and film for you, Horsfall — and Marcus — would recommend you hire a full-time videographer to support your efforts. Horsfall suggests most dealerships would find middle ground by hiring and keeping a lot of the process internal. Local universities and colleges with marketing, videography and film school programs can serve as potential resources and talent outlets.

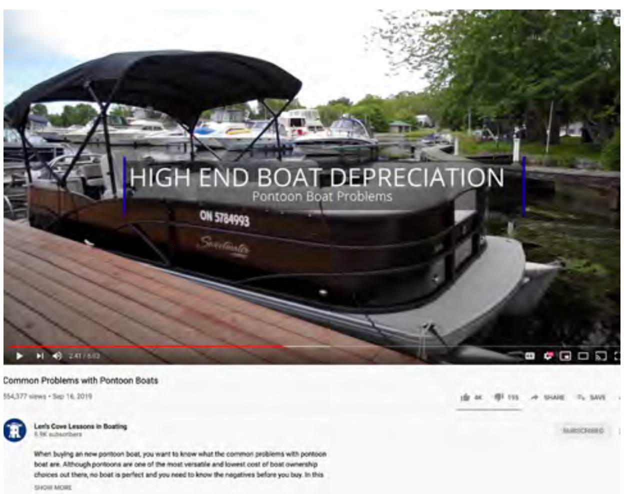
In order to shorten the learning curve, find someone who fits your team, the industry and understands how you do business. They don't have to be a boating expert, but if they have any type of boating experience, it can pay dividends because they can help you avoid mistakes and catch potential errors. If they are filming and editing, they need to know when the person on camera messes up — and mistakes will happen.

"You have to find the person who is willing to speak their mind and put up with some of your criticism if you don't like the video product and you need them to redo it," Horsfall says. "For us it was really about asking lots of questions and trying to get the right personality and someone who understood our industry,"— ideally, someone who can speak up and interact with your leadership is critical.

Tip 4: Solve Customer Problems

Go to Google and type Pontoon Boats into the search function. You'll likely see Len's Cove's "Common Problems With Pontoon Boats," pop up with the No. 1 or No. 2 video in that search. He said they kind of watched their most successful video grow for a while and truly hoped for 10,000 views. Today, it has more than 550,000 views.

"Those were exciting times when it was growing from its infancy; it was like, wow that's really cool! I had no idea," Horsfall said. "The pontoon one really floored me. And Impact Marketing said that they guaranteed that our biggest videos will be the ones where we talk about our biggest problems. It's true because people want to know what sucks about things, like a couch, chair or microwave or what are the common problems with Ford F-150s. We are planning a whole bunch more of these types of videos."



One of Len's Cove Marina's most-viewed video, talking about the most common Pontoon boat problems as mentioned in Tip #4.

Tip 5: Say "No" to Sales Videos

Even Horsfall can admit, the companies that perform the best with their videos on YouTube aren't typically the companies that are selling boats, and that, he suggests is the key difference in their success, compared to a sales-driven video from a dealer. So there's ample opportunity to set yourself up as the go-to expert as Horsfall has. The number of hours of Len's Cove content that consumers absorb is not a result of the videos featuring a bunch of nice looking boats or sales speak, but rather because it's educational.

"People who sell boats like to talk about how great their boats are," he explains. "While I'm sure those types of videos are worth something, that's not the kind that is turning the dial and jacking up the trust level. It's really hard for a marketing and sales people not to talk about this or that great boat, its exciting features, its color, the price or to say we're an amazing dealer and we've been here a hundred years ... blah, blah, blah, like we all do. Up until last year, that's exactly what we did."

Educational and informative videos work best according to Horsfall.

Tip 6: Don't Fall Into the Click Bait Trap

Authentic and thorough views is what you're after, versus higher views with huge drop-off rates. Horsfall studies his YouTube analytics and particularly his drop-off rates (where you can see where viewers stop watching the videos) to understand what the "views" actually mean. He shares an example that you might see high views for a video featuring a pontoon boat and a girl wearing a small bikini in the thumbnail, but the drop-off rate might be almost immediate. He likens this to click-bait videos and YouTube can recognize the issue (and the drop-off rates) and rates them lower on the search function. You want good follow-through rates and want keywords that are at or near the top.

"You have to make good content that people watch to the end, and that will eventually start climbing those ranks," he explains. "And it's going to get harder and harder as more people get better at it. My goal is to get Len's Cove Lessons in Boating to the point where it is the gold standard for marine education videos."

Tip 7: Don't be "on brand"

These videos should not be commercials for you or the brands you carry. You want them to be focused on educating your customers and sharing your insights into boating. This strategy helps establish your trusted voice because the second a viewer spots your sign in the background or you say the boat brand you carry the best ever, your credibility drops off instantaneously.

"I try to keep the videos very non-brand oriented. And when I talk about problems, I don't say this brand has a problem and this brand has a problem. I talk about the types of problems that some pontoon boats, or bow riders or some used boats, have. Often, I'll use a customer's used boat or a boat that's in for service and that's the boat I'll use for the video and not even put our brands in the video."

Tip 8: Shoot Multiple Videos at Once

You could shoot just one video each time out, but as long as the camera's out, the setting works, the issues are under control in the dealership, you might as well try to knock out a few videos at a time to maximize efficiency. Horsfall says some days he can shoot up to eight videos, exhaustion is just part of the effort. He says it can be mentally and physically draining, but worth it.

"When you get to the filming level where it starts to stick, it's a huge jump in how much time you've spent, the effort to figure it out, learning how to do it yourself or hiring someone else to do it – there's definitely a financial aspect to it as well," he explained.

Tip 9: Invest Dollars Into Video. NOW.

In a time when most dealers will shift their marketing dollars to re-doing their website or increasing ad buys, both of which can offer good results, especially with boat shows out of the picture in 2020, it would make it even more rewarding to have a strong video game.

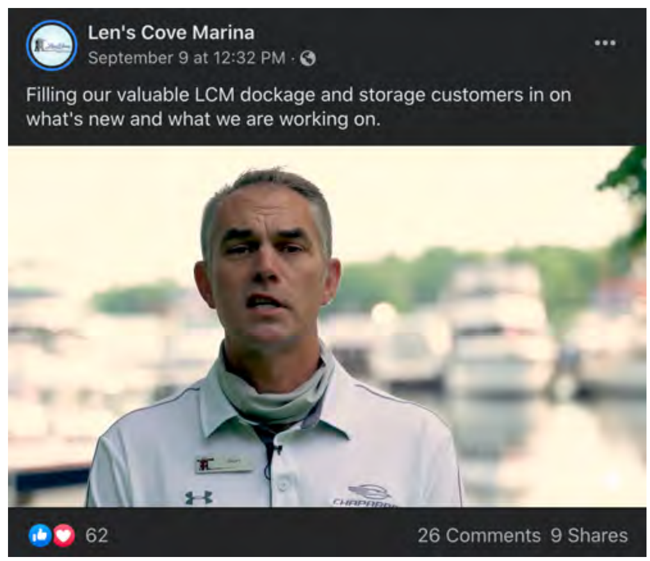
"There's barely any inventory left in North America. It's not hard to sell boats during a pandemic and when a boat-buying boom hits," Horsfall suggests. "Here's the opportunity: Most boat dealers' bank accounts are healthy right now, so if there was ever a time that they could afford to stretch their marketing budgets and do video, it's now. When this drops off and the market softens, it will put us in a really good position of still being front of mind and the trusted voice when the number of buyers has reduced. It will help mitigate the eventual economic storm, which is going to come."

Tip 10: Involve Your Team

If you desire the full benefit of the video strategy, then all of your team members should chip in, including sales, service, PG&A and marketing. Horsfall gets recognized by consumers at the Toronto Boat Show as "the guy in the videos" and he receives calls from around the world with people wanting his advice.

"I'm getting people walk in the door and say, 'we've been watching your videos and we realize there's nowhere else we'd rather want to buy a boat.' You will eventually get noticed if you do it long enough."

The same goes for your entire team. Done well, the videos can assist in exposure for you dealership on a level you've never experienced, and customers will recognize your team's presence and expertise in those videos, ultimately positively impacting the success of the business and those team members.



A sample of a video that Len's Cove Marina used on Facebook as well as their YouTube platform.

Tip 11: Think: Social Media

Don't fill your social media pages with boats you want to sell, Horsfall warns. Rather, use those channels to help, educate and inform customers. Talk about things that are important to them, such as what type of insurance you should have for your boat, or pictures of boating in the marina, or sharing community-related topics that matter. "My social media is about building community," he said. "Because when I do put a fresh trade up there it gets a lot of attention." He adds that he sometimes posts some fresh trades and usually sees greater reach than the competition but doesn't make it his main strategy.

Len's Cove Marina also takes advantage of using the educational content they create via video through a blog format as well.

Tip 12: Shoot "B-Roll"

Your videographer should capture lots of B-roll footage and categorize and catalog it. "A video of me standing there talking is boring, but if you can interject B-roll of someone out on the water surfing or boating or docking — and as they compile that — it speeds the process up," Horsfall added. "The more time they spend at it and when they are around the marina doing the shoot, they also video the service guy on a forklift launching a boat, the customer on the launch chatting with another customer or us at the front grabbing a phone call. All this becomes content that they can then sprinkle in." B-roll also comes in handy during the offseason or winter, when you're on-the-water content has dried up.

Tip 13: No Excuses

The day-to-day grind of working in a marine dealership and all of the busyness can act as a deterrent, preventing you from carving out the time to bring this video strategy to life.

Len's Cove Marina General Manager and 3rd Generation Owner, Sean Horsfall.

"The time right now is hard to find because we're all working at full throttle," he said, "but it's a good time to also start getting ready, because when the downturn or slowdown occurs and the seasonality of selling will happen."

The Customer Experience

Through his educational "Lessons In Boating" videos and common dealership practices, Horsfall believes he's contributing to preserving the future of boating. Video is the best way to educate customers and tell stories of boating — for multiple dealerships; not just Len's Cove — although Horsfall admitted he was leery to share all of his secrets in fear of giving up his competitive advantage.

When you give customers vital information and educate them, you line up their expectations with reality, which, in turn, keeps them in boating longer. But he notes that for every 50 marine dealers there are in North America, only one or two actually give a video strategy a try. And that number may be optimistic, despite the opportunity.

"I'm doing this because I truthfully believe a happy boater — which is one that is well-educated and came in with their eyes wide open and made a sound, smart choice for themselves — is ultimately, going to be a happy person and a better customer who is going to stay in boating longer. That's not only for Len's Cove, but for the whole boating industry," he said. "I hope there are spin-off benefits for boat dealers across North America. If you help all boaters, it eventually trickles down to having a better industry."

Arm Your Customers with the Resources They Need

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

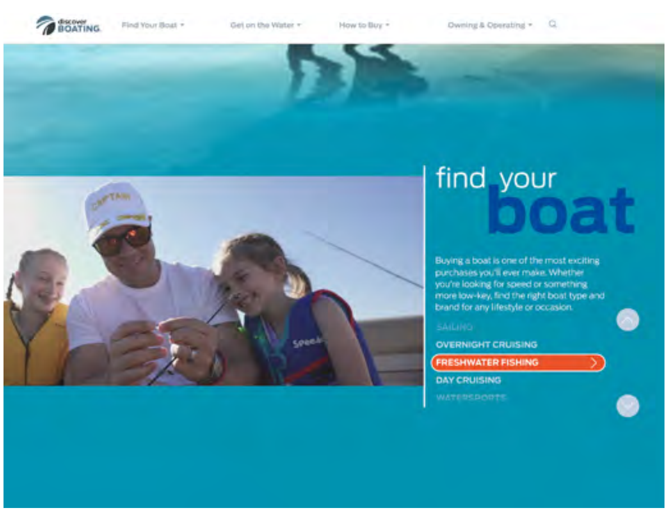
To those of us who have been boating for decades, operation of a boat may come easy, and knowledge of boating etiquette and laws are common knowledge. But the same is not the case for the first-time boat buyers you've sold to this year.

In fact, boating can be downright scary and intimidating to the amateur or novice. There are a lot of complexities: how to trailer the boat, how to launch from a ramp, how to drive the boat, how to use all the features of the boat, how to navigate the waterways, how to pull into a dock. I could go on and on with a list of things that new buyers are scared of and need to be trained on.

Previously, we talked about the importance of the demo at delivery. But, we should also be arming our customers with additional resources and information.

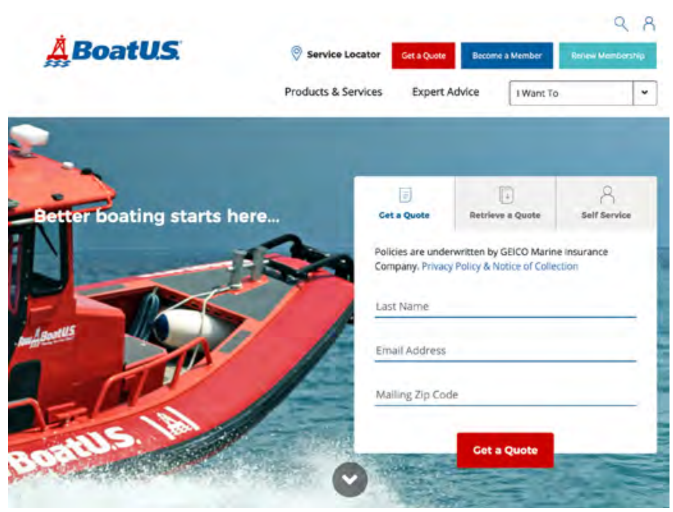
The great thing is that many of these resources already exist. You just have to curate the ones that work for your area and your customers. Or, you can make a few of your own to really personalize the message.

Here are several places you can find resources to share with your first-time boat buyers:



The "Find Your Boat" section of the Discover Boating website.

Discover Boating: Discover Boating is a huge resource for boat shoppers, but did you know Discover Boating also has materials you can send your dealership's new boat buyers to help them become more comfortable in their boating lifestyle? Under the Owning & Operating section of DiscoverBoating.com, you'll find customer-facing information on insuring a boat, towing and trailering, storage, boat maintenance, safety, boat etiquette and more. There are also articles about fishing, information on recommended accessories, tips on wake surfing and more.



The customer resources on the Boat U.S. website.

BoatUS: Drawing from the *BoatUS Magazine*, the BoatUS website has a slew of articles that could be helpful to your customers. The content includes information on: boats and tow vehicles, how to do it yourself, safety and prevention, technology, lifestyle and seamanship.

Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation: RBFF provides resources on where to fish and boat, how to obtain a fishing license, resources for young anglers and much, much more.

Sea Tow: While many of Sea Tow's blogs focus on the organization and membership, there are also plenty that non-Sea Tow members may find useful, including those on safety, maintenance and other boating tips.

Water Sports Industry Association: If your customers will be participating in water sports aboard their boat,

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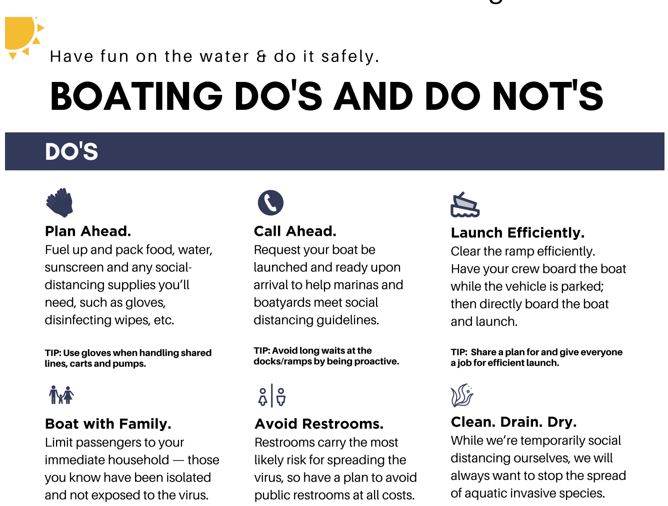
WSIA has resources you can share with them, including materials from the Wake Responsibly campaign.

U.S. Coast Guard: The Coast Guard offers recreational boaters a number of resources with a focus on safety.

Boating Magazines: Keep an eye out for helpful articles that your customers may appreciate. Or search a boating magazine's website for any specific topic you'd like to touch on. Magazines, like Boating magazine and Salt Water Sportsman, for example, are constantly producing new content for consumers, much of which is informational. Rely on these resources to keep your customers in the know.

Local Resources: While much of what's listed above pertains to a wide variety of boaters, a few local resources would also be helpful for your customers. Again, you should be able to seek out some resources that are already available. Check with your area marine trades association, Department of Natural Resources, lake associations, boat clubs, marinas and more for materials. You may want to provide your customers with information about fishing and boating regulations, maps of area waterways, details on area boat ramps and/or marinas and more.

Build Your Own Resources: Personalizing the



Have fun on the water & do it safely.

BOATING DO'S AND DO NOT'S

DO'S

Plan Ahead.
Fuel up and pack food, water, sunscreen and any social-distancing supplies you'll need, such as gloves, disinfecting wipes, etc.
TIP: Use gloves when handling shared lines, carts and pumps.

Call Ahead.
Request your boat be launched and ready upon arrival to help marinas and boatyards meet social distancing guidelines.
TIP: Avoid long waits at the docks/ramps by being proactive.

Launch Efficiently.
Clear the ramp efficiently. Have your crew board the boat while the vehicle is parked; then directly board the boat and launch.
TIP: Share a plan for and give everyone a job for efficient launch.

Boat with Family.
Limit passengers to your immediate household — those you know have been isolated and not exposed to the virus.

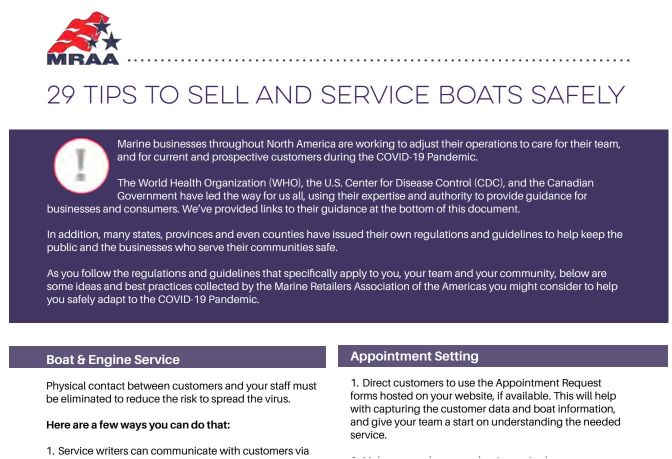
Avoid Restrooms.
Restrooms carry the most likely risk for spreading the virus, so have a plan to avoid public restrooms at all costs.

Clean. Drain. Dry.
While we're temporarily social distancing ourselves, we will always want to stop the spread of aquatic invasive species.

Creating your own resources like this one created by the MRAA when COVID-19 hit, builds trust and engagement with your customers.

resources will take time, but it will also position your dealership as an expert. As you have time, create videos, blogs, emails, social media posts, brochures, handouts, and/or letters to help your customers navigate their boating lifestyle. You can create general boating operation resources, information on common boating lifestyle themes, or be extra helpful by filling in the holes of the resources you don't have. For example, if there isn't a resource already available about the waterway you're on, you can create that. Make the resources engaging, insightful and helpful. One of the best ways to do this, as taught by long-time MRAA subject matter expert Marcus Sheridan, is to log all the questions you get from customers and then create resources — he recommends videos and short articles — that answer those questions. This simple task will solidify your position as the expert. (He also has a book on the topic titled, "They Ask, You Answer," and we highly recommend it.)

The key with all of these resources is to comb through them, find the ones that will most apply to your customers and share them.



MRAA

29 TIPS TO SELL AND SERVICE BOATS SAFELY

Marine businesses throughout North America are working to adjust their operations to care for their team, and for current and prospective customers during the COVID-19 Pandemic.

The World Health Organization (WHO), the U.S. Center for Disease Control (CDC), and the Canadian Government have led the way for us all, using their expertise and authority to provide guidance for businesses and consumers. We've provided links to their guidance at the bottom of this document.

In addition, many states, provinces and even counties have issued their own regulations and guidelines to help keep the public and the businesses who serve their communities safe.

As you follow the regulations and guidelines that specifically apply to you, your team and your community, below are some ideas and best practices collected by the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas you might consider to help you safely adapt to the COVID-19 Pandemic.

Boat & Engine Service

Physical contact between customers and your staff must be eliminated to reduce the risk to spread the virus.

Here are a few ways you can do that:

1. Service writers can communicate with customers via

Appointment Setting

1. Direct customers to use the Appointment Request forms hosted on your website, if available. This will help with capturing the customer data and boat information, and give your team a start on understanding the needed service.

Associations like the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas focuses on providing resources like this to dealers across the nation.

Curate a package of information (physical or digital) that you give to all customers after their boat purchase, maybe even while they're waiting for delivery. And follow up with all of your customers with some of these resources year-round. Sharing this information with your customers will make for happier, safer, more knowledgeable boaters. And it will position your dealership as an expert, an organization that cares enough to share non-sales information, creating loyalty and a level of trust for the next time they're ready to buy a boat or refer a friend to boating.

We fuel dealer education. Our partners make it possible.

STRATEGIC PARTNERS

The MRAA's Strategic Partners are the strategic and financial backbone of the association. They believe in, support and contribute significantly to the strategic direction of MRAA's work to fuel the success of your business. Today, more than ever, MRAA's Strategic Partner support enables MRAA's creation of the critical tools, resources and educational programs — like this comprehensive publication — you need in order to survive and thrive now and into the future.

Build Your Customer Experience Strategy

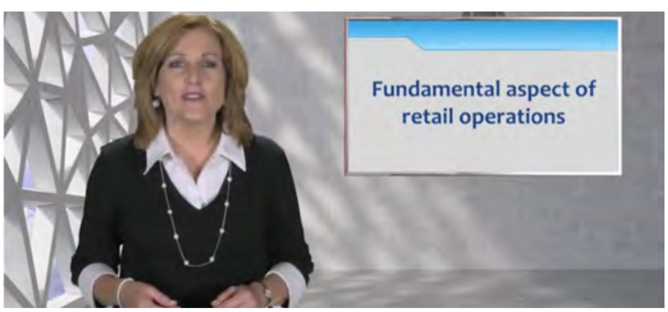
By: Matt Gruhn, MRAA President

All this talk about the customer experience feels great. We can all nod, smile and agree that the steps we've shared in this publication are great tactics for delivering for our customers. But how do you pull it all together in a customer experience strategy?

This is exactly where MRAATraining.com comes into play. MRAATraining.com is an online educational portal where you and your team can access well over 100 courses on just about every topic in marine dealership management, including, of course, the customer experience. Some of the courses I outline below are FREE for anyone to access, while others can be accessed at no charge if you are an MRAA Silver Member or Gold Member. If you are not a Silver or Gold member, you can purchase courses a la carte.

To build your strategy on the customer experience, here are a few key courses I'd recommend you take a look at:

The cornerstones of our customer experience content include two courses by renowned expert Theresa Syer: Make Customer Service Your Competitive Advantage and a workshop called Supercharge Your Customer Experience. These courses will help you really think about how to focus you energies on delivering a powerful, rewarding customer experience. They are great for your team to watch together and to inspire the team to build customer-focused steps into all of your processes.



A preview of "Make Customer Service Your Competitive Advantage" available on MRAATraining.com.

Make Customer Service Your Competitive Advantage promises to deliver a clear understanding of the difference between good service and experiential service, fresh insights and techniques to provide a more emotional approach to customer engagement, and tips on how to make your customers feel valued and appreciated.

Theresa Syer leading the in-person session at Dealer Week. "Supercharge Your Customer Experience" is also available on MRAATraining.com.

In **Supercharge Your Customer Experience**, which was recorded at the 2019 **Dealer Week**, you will learn how to improve further upon the customer experience, with insights on defining the customers' emotional motivators (what drives them to buy), identifying key emotional drivers that can shift conversations in your direction, and understanding the consistent actions required to elicit a positive emotional response from your customers. Any strategy on customer experience should start with these courses as the foundation.

A preview of "Buyer Motivation: The Key to Building Value" available on MRAATraining.com.

Any great customer experience must begin in the sales process. MRAA's course **Buyer Motivation: The Key to Building Value** offers incredible sales insights, but most importantly it has been designed to help dealers respond to changes in customer behavior and ultimately close more deals. It teaches sales team

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members how to customize sales presentations to buying motivation and will help any dealership drive more business at a higher profit while increasing customer satisfaction and customer loyalty. This course is free for anyone to take at MRAATraining.com and is made available by MRAA's Dealership Certification Program.

A preview of "Grow Your Business with First-Time Boat Buyers" available on MRAA.com.

Another set of free courses that will help you set the tone for a world-class customer experience is [MRAA's Grow Your Business With First-Time Boat Buyers] three-part series. There's no need to even login or visit a different website with these courses, and they will help you understand and guide first-time boat shoppers and sell to first-time buyer motivations, while providing you with a bunch of tools that will help you convert first-time shoppers into buyers.

While those courses offer great foundational concepts to build a customer experience strategy around, others found at MRAATraining.com can help you create solid tactics for enhancing that strategy:

- **Service CSI & Upselling: Not an Either/Or Proposition**, by Valerie Ziebron, can help you build long-term customer loyalty and dealership profitability, one interaction at a time.

- **CSI: Outside the Box**, by Steve Pizzolato (formerly of Avala Marketing, which was acquired by Rollick), will provide insights into consumer satisfaction during the consideration phase, the initial purchase phase and the post-purchase phase.

- MRAA also published a **Guide to Defining The Customer Experience** with Pizzolato and his team, which provides a deeper understanding of the basics of delivering a more rewarding customer experience.

- You can learn more about first-time boat buyers through **research conducted and shared by Discover Boating.**

- Valerie Ziebron offers a great course on how to **Turn Upset Customers Into Loyal Ones**, which shares positive conflict resolution techniques that you can use to improve customer satisfaction and loyalty.

At the MRAA, we seek to provide resources that you and your dealership need to help you make decisions and run your business with confidence. We know the challenges you face in adjusting your business to meet changing customer demands. That's why we create powerful resources like those above, but please know that's not all we have to offer you.

The MRAA runs the marine industry's only program focused on helping dealers deliver a world-class customer experience: **Dealership Certification**. Not only can our expert consultants help you put the processes in place to ensure a great customer experience, but the continuing education that is built exclusively for Certified Dealers helps you and your team stay up to speed on the latest methods for developing a competitive advantage through the customer experience. These include two in-depth courses by Theresa Syer on building a customer experience strategy; a course titled **Take Your Dealership From Good to Great with CRM, by Sam Dantzler**; **Align Your Dealership with Today's Customer, with MRAA's Liz Walz**; and more. These courses are packed with great insights, downloadable resources and dealer discussions.

If you're not ready to get Certified just yet, each year, **MRAA's Dealer Week** conference and expo provides the latest insights, trends and strategies your business needs to thrive in any market conditions. This year, with all of the chaos in the marketplace and the uncertainty that plagued the economy, you can't afford to miss Dealer Week which has moved online and is now more accessible than ever. As the industry's only dealer-focused event, it's your one opportunity to access the leading experts, the top industry partners and like-minded dealers who are all vested in your success.

Make the Commitment to Your Customers

By: Matt Gruhn, MRAA President

In any business, it's difficult to ascertain just what it is that our customers want and need. In a discretionary income business like boat sales, it's even more difficult. And when you add in the technology that makes shopping from home a breeze, well, it can feel downright impossible.

There are, however, a few key fundamentals that customers expect from your business, and all of them can be found in MRAA's Marine Industry Consumer Commitment, a one-page pledge created as part of the Grow Boating program at its inception. Drafted by both dealers and manufacturers, the Consumer Commitment is a staple of the Dealership Certification program and is a requirement to be publicly posted both in-store and online at Certified Dealerships.

If you're looking for what customers expect of you, the Consumer Commitment is a great place to start.

It outlines 18 key deliverables your dealership and your team should ensure are present at all times. Broken down into sales, service and operations, this document could be a great guide for your business to start with. In fact, I would suggest it's really the foundation of any great dealership.

A few of the key elements of this include items like:

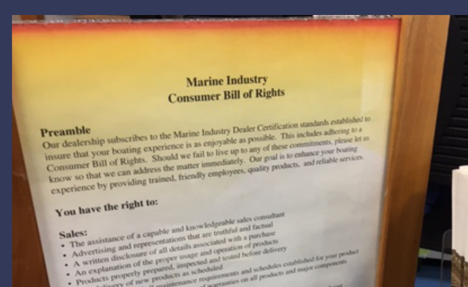
- A written disclosure of all details associated with a purchase.
- An explanation of the proper usage and operation of products.
- Products properly prepared, inspected and tested before delivery.
- An itemized list of all service charges with thorough explanation.
- Timely notice of changes in service delivery time if delays are experienced during repair.
- Inspection of any replaced/damaged components upon presentation of invoice or work order.
- Fair, open and honest treatment without discrimination.
- Privacy and confidentiality of customer records.

There's nothing about this Consumer Commitment that's outside of what you would expect, and it's designed that way. These are the basic fundamentals of running a dealership, but the power in this commitment is your pledge to make it happen.

If you want to demonstrate to your customers that they can expect a higher standard of professionalism when working with your business, Dealership Certification's Consumer Commitment is the place to start.

DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCE

Dealership Certification's Consumer Commitment



DOWNLOAD

Make Your Customer's Boating Experience Better with Accessories

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

The changing of seasons is upon us and while boats may still be selling for you in what appears to be a record-setting season for the industry, we can all see the traditional slowdown coming. And, as we've heard, some of you are completely out of boats right now.

So how do you continue to build revenue for your business and continue to deliver an excellent customer experience? Accessory sales!

By now, your winter, spring and early summer buyers are fully settled into their boating lifestyle. They've become accustomed to what they like about boating and have started to learn to overcome anything they don't like (backing up a trailer, anyone?).

If they weren't thinking about accessories when they first purchased their boat, maybe they are now. They might be thinking that they've brought their boating experience to a 10 out of 10, but now they want to pump up the volume and bring it to an 11.

But many of them don't know where to start. So this presents another opportunity for you to be the expert, the guide, the friend, who helps the customer improve upon their already fantastic boating experience.

So how can you promote the accessories that you sell to improve their boating lifestyle?

- You can't deliver what they need without talking to them, so let's note another great reason to have a follow-up plan.
- As you're making follow-up calls and sending follow-up text messages, ask the boater what activities they've been participating in and what they're interested in doing that they haven't tried.
- Push out an email blast to your full database to showcase new, popular, sale, clearance and other products.
- Use your social media to highlight your customers using accessories. Describe which products(s) the customer is using, how they're using the product and remind your customers that you sell it.

Accessories and upgrades are a great way to sell product in the off-season.

- Create a video walkthrough of your Pro Shop, focusing on the most popular, visual products on the floor.

What types of accessories might a customer be interested in as they enter the back half of the season?

1. **Towables:** Maybe they've been cruising all summer, but their kids are begging for a towable. Showcase the variety that you carry.
2. **Wakeboards, wakesurf boards, skis and accessories**: Just like with towables, your new boat buyers may be out on the water, seeing more and more people participating in these sports. Encourage them to buy their first board, or upgrade what they already have.
3. **Fishing equipment:** If you're in a fishing-heavy location, show off your fishing rods, reels and accessories and encourage your customers to upgrade from the equipment they've been hanging onto for the past decade. Make sure you're offering fishing advice, too. Fishing strategies evolve as the seasons progress, and fishing in late summer and into the fall is definitely different than fishing in the spring. Make sure they're staying on the fish by giving them some much needed-tips or advice or even the recommendation of a guide.

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4. **Electronics:** Now that they've gotten out on the boat and have experienced driving it, your boat buyers may want to enhance their lifestyle by adding a GPS, a fish finder, a stereo system or some other electronics.

5. **Sun-safe products:** We've all seen a photo or two of a bad sunburn this summer (or have had one ourselves). Remind customers that you sell sunscreen, tanning lotion, SPF shirts and hats.

6. **Coolers:** If it has been particularly hot in your area, tell customers which coolers you carry and the benefit to using those coolers on their boat versus a cheap cooler they can buy elsewhere.

7. **Swimming accessories:** If your boaters are anchoring out and going for a dip, they may want to bring along a swim mat, floats, goggles, or snorkels for themselves and their passengers. Also, they might need a new swimsuit after too many Instagram photos in the same one.

8. **Life vests:** If you didn't convince your customers to get new life vests when they purchased their boat, remind them again of the different, lightweight and comfortable options you have in stock (if you do still have them in stock), and remind them to have life vests for everyone on board!

9. **Boat covers:** Again, maybe your buyer didn't want to pony up the money to buy a boat cover with their initial purchase, but now they may be considering the longevity of their boat. Encourage them to protect their investment with a boat cover.

There are many other accessories, or parts, that your customers could be interested in, as they become more comfortable with their boat and their boating activities. Take a walk around your Pro Shop and your parts department and make sure you're marketing what you have.

Again, if done right, sharing information with customers about how to improve their boating lifestyle will position your dealership as an expert, guide and friend. And it will drive traffic and revenue back into your dealership, even if you're out of boats.

Why F&I is Critical to the Customer Experience

By MRAA Partner: Maxwell Haning, Dealer Innovative Services

The F&I office is a second thought at many dealerships. If it exists at all, it primarily functions as a lending arm or paperwork administrator for the sales department. This approach not only loses your dealership significant amounts of money, it also greatly impacts your customer's satisfaction with the sales process.
Every minute that a customer must sit in chair instead of driving off with their new boat decreases their overall satisfaction with your dealership. Your customer is now used to buying things off Amazon and having it delivered the next day. They get their movies and shows on Netflix instantly. Customers now expect an efficient and timely delivery of their goods and will seek out those companies that can deliver that to them, while avoiding those who cannot.

Sale

Nowhere in the sales process is inefficiency more apparent than in the F&I office. In fact, some dealers have no dedicated F&I process in place at all. Without a process, financing often must be secured externally, and consumer products that would otherwise be presented go overlooked. This creates more work for your customer and deprives them of additional services and products that may be of benefit to them. It also removes additional revenue opportunities from your dealership and opens you up to a whole slew of compliance issues.

By having a dedicated F&I office or partnering with a third party to provide the service remotely, you mitigate these issues while also greatly increasing customer satisfaction. Now instead of your customer having to pass information between the dealership and the bank, your dealership can quickly secure a lender while your customer is still working with sales, picking out the color of their seats. By the time the customer has made their purchasing decision, the paperwork is ready to go, and the F&I manager can introduce themselves and present the customer with their terms. This also allows a quick break for your salesperson so that they may print or procure any additional items for the customer, while the customer is engaged with F&I. This handoff also ensures that when the customer returns for delivery, they already know your F&I manager and are more comfortable during the delivery process.

Delivery

Upon returning for delivery, your dedicated F&I manager has overseen the titling and financing paperwork, allowing your salesperson more time to look over the unit and ensure it meets the customer's expectations. This separation of tasks also decreases the chances that a mistake is made on the paperwork or with the unit. Having an extra set of eyes on closing documents adds a level of redundancy that can save you — and your customer — major headaches. Since your customer is already familiar with your finance manager, sales can now do a complete hand-off and return to focusing on their duties.

Print finance documents ahead of time and be prepared to explain each document, answering any questions they might have thorouhgly.

Finance now has the responsibility to quickly and accurately present the customer with his or her closing documents and ancillary services. These documents need to be printed ahead of time and presented in a clear and concise way, along with a menu to clearly and quickly show additional services that are of value to the customer. Bringing additional value to your customer is extremely important during the delivery process, as it increases long-term satisfaction with your dealership and leads to more repeat customers.

Products

Some of the products that build additional value are service contracts, appearance protection, pre-paid

Continued ...

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maintenance, GAP or trailer tire and wheel coverage. It is important to know these products intimately and only present ones that will have an added value to your customer. For instance, if a customer is buying a boat, but will keep it in a slip and not on a trailer, then you should exclude tire and wheel protection from your presentation. The inverse of that would be someone who drives 30 minutes to the lake every day. They may have a spare tire for their trailer, but since a normal car jack should not be used on a trailer, they have no way to install it. Most customers — especially first-time boat owners — do not know this. By bringing it to their attention and offering them a solution, you increase their initial satisfaction while also ensuring continued satisfaction down the road.

Another example of this is with service contracts and appearance protection. The customer expects that the new boat that you just sold them will continue to look new and operate without issue. However, things happen and that is not always the case. When they do, the customer will always reach out to the dealership to make things right. Having to explain to your customer why they now need to spend sometimes thousands more on a boat that they already spent so much on usually leaves your customer less than thrilled. Instead, if you had offered them a way to cover these items when they purchased the boat, and allowed them to wrap those payments into their financing, you could quickly fix the issues at no additional cost to your customer. Getting your customer quickly back on the water for no perceived cost greatly increases their satisfaction and goodwill towards your dealership. It also ensures they return to you for their services. This keeps those service dollars in-house and allows the customer to look at that shiny new boat that you have on the showroom floor.

Why F&I

Having dedicated F&I can greatly affect your customer's buying process and ultimately how they perceive your dealership. With that said, it is not enough to just have an office – it is also essential that your processes and products are at a level of quality that your customers deserve.

This is a guest blog written by Maxwell Haning of Innovative Dealer Services, Inc., a partner member of the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas.

First-Time Boat Buyers are Here. We Need to Keep Them

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

We've heard that many customers who have purchased boats this year are first-time buyers. Data is now proving so. More than one-third of those who have purchased new and pre-owned powerboats this year are first-time boat buyers, Info-Link has confirmed.

The thought is that due to the COVID-19 Pandemic, a boat is the perfect solution. A place to get out on the water, away from others, and watch something other than the TV, as highlighted by this recent [Associated Press article](#).

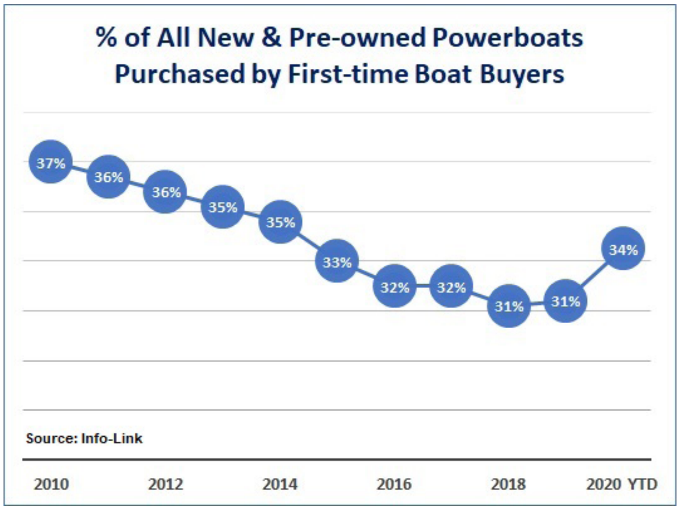


Chart 1 provided by Info-Link indicates the percent of new and pre-owned powerboats purchased by first-time boat buyers over the course of the last 10 years.

hit that milestone. So what good is it bringing in new buyers, if we're not going to keep them? All we're doing is using our funnel to refill a bucket that has a big hole in the bottom of it.

That's why we need to be focused on the customer experience. This isn't a new problem — it's something NMMA, Discover Boating, MRAA, Info-Link and others — have been discussing for at least the past few years, but it's an issue that has really been brought to the forefront by the number of sales in 2020.

While first-time boat buyers are coming in at a higher clip than they have been since about 2014, the concern still lies that we may lose those boaters going forward, as their regular activities, lifestyles and vacations return. Looking at the Info-Link First-Time Boat Buyer purchasing chart, you'll see that the industry averages about one-third of sales to first-time boat buyers.

Data provided by Info-Link indicates the 5 year attrition rate after the purchase of a boat.

But the issue is in the second chart here. When we look at the five-year attrition rate — how many buyers remain in the sport within five years of buying at boat —we're losing 42 percent of first-time boat buyers before they

If we want to build on the momentum we've built this year, we have to help our customers by showing them the boating lifestyle is THE lifestyle they want to be a part of, and a boat is something their family just can't part with. Throughout this publication, you'll see there are a variety of ideas to drive a positive customer experience. Once you get the customer to buy a second boat from you, the five-year attrition rate shortens to 24 percent, then down to 18 percent and 12 percent as they continue to buy, for an average of 19 percent for boats two through four.

As Jack Ellis, managing director at Info-Link shared, "One certainly can't expect a 19 percent attrition rate for first-time boat buyers, but the information on this graphic suggests that it's perfectly reasonable to think we could improve the attrition rate a bit. There are currently about 400,000 FTBBs each year, so if we could improve retention by just 5 percent, this translates to another 20,000 people we could keep in boating each year, rather than have them run off to a different activity."

Converting those first-time boat buyers into second-time boat buyers is the key to plugging that hole in our sales bucket. Let's do what we can to fill that hole by improving our customer experience.

If Something Has Gone Wrong, Fix it ASAP

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

When discussing following up with recent buyers, we've heard reluctance. What if the customer is unhappy? What if the issue is something that you can't fix quickly? What if the boat needs to come back to service, and you're overbooked?

First, that's no reason to not follow-up with your customers. The fear of the unknown is a poor excuse for not offering the levels of customer experience that your customers expect. Second, follow-up helps you discover those issues that arise and address them as they come.

Sometimes the feedback may be something small, such as, "I thought I purchased four lifejackets, but when I got home, there were only three in the boat." Other times, it will be something much bigger, as in, "After the second time out with the boat, the dang thing won't even start."

But without asking, you'll never know where these issues are surfacing. And, even better, by asking, you get the opportunity to fix the issue. Data from the Technical Assistance Research Programs (TARP) and others shows that by fixing a customer's issue, you can actually build more loyalty than you can from just the sale.

Here's some of that data from TARP:

- Ninety-five percent of customers with minor complaints ($1-$5 losses) will buy from you again, if you solve their complaint quickly. Of those with major complaints (over $100 losses), 82 percent will buy from you again if you solve their complaint quickly.
- On the flip side, if their complaints aren't resolved, only 46 percent of customers with minor issues will return, while only 19 percent with major complaints will.
- Don't think that not asking for feedback helps. Of those who are unhappy with minor issues, who don't actually share their complaint, only 37 percent will return to your business. Those with major issues who don't complain will only return 9 percent of the time.
- Those non-complainers will tell 9-10 other people about their bad experience.

So, what can you do to serve your customers? In her course, "Turn Upset Customers into Loyal Ones" on MRAATraining.com, Valerie Ziebron shares the Five Keys to Turn Upset Customers into Dealership Advocates.

1. **Recognize basic expectations:** Your customers have expectations of trust, quality, convenience, personalized service and value when they work with a dealership, so offer them those things.
2. **Fix the customer and the issue:** You have to fix the customer, meaning restore the trust with them, first. You have to listen. You cannot assume that by fixing the issue, fixing the boat, that they will be happy.
3. **Create a partnership:** "Customers who feel they participated in solving the issue are more satisfied with the solution." As dealers, you need your customers to help you diagnose a problem, so informing them that they're part of the solution will empower them to help you, so you can fix their issue.
4. **Be open and fair:** Most customers will accept honest mistakes if you own up to them, apologize and correct the mistake.
5. **Have a plan for recovery:** In this session, Valerie talks about service recovery, but the same could be said for sales. Everyone on the team should be trained in conflict resolution and the dealership's process for handling upset customers.

Of course, all situations can't be fixed quickly. Right now, getting certain parts is hard, and you're already extremely busy trying to get work done. Just be honest and transparent with your customer and offer them the best solution you can at the time, while setting expectations for when the final resolution will come.

Remember, the goal of improving the customer experience at your dealership is to show your customers that you're their guide in their boating lifestyle. When a customer comes to you with a complaint, take a step back and think how you'd want to be treated in that same situation, or how you would treat your friend or neighbor if they had the same issue.

The data shows that by helping that customer, fixing their issue and restoring their trust, you can flip the unhappy customer to a raving, loyal fan.

Choose the Platinum Rule Over the Golden Rule

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

When a customer brings their family into the dealership, this is a great opportunity to provide a great experience by asking about their needs and desires.

We've all heard the Golden Rule and probably had it engrained into us at a young age. The Golden Rule is to treat others like you would want to be treated.

While the Golden Rule is a great start, we should be living by the Platinum Rule, which is to treat others as they would like to be treated.

Dealers who were enrolled in the 2019 Continuous Certification Curriculum should remember the Platinum Rule from Jim Million's course "Develop Your Dealership's Workforce Outside In." In that course, Jim discussed how we can use the Platinum Rule in coaching and mentoring our team.

But we can also talk about the Platinum Rule when it comes to your customers, treating each individual as they would like to be treated.

How would this look within your dealership? Here are just a few examples:

- When collecting customer information, ask the customer how they want to be contacted. Ask them if they prefer to communicate via phone, email, text and/or video. If you have them choose the option or options that work best, they'll better appreciate the outreach and will be more likely to respond.
- Going back to page 38 on fixing customer's issues, you want to work with each customer to come up with a solution, if they have a complaint. For example, if a customer's boat gets stuck in the shop for an extra week, you may think you have to go over the top to make them happy, but maybe you just need to connect them with a rental boat for the weekend to keep their loyalty. You won't know unless you ask.
- When a customer has a family, especially when that family is involved in the purchase and delivery, during follow-up and subsequent visits, the customer will likely want you to ask about their whole family and how the family is enjoying the boating lifestyle, not just themselves.

There are numerous ways to treat people like they would like to be treated, but you have to ask and take notes. Of course, if you don't know how people want to be treated, you can start with the Golden Rule and treat them as you'd like to be treated. But as you get to know the customer and build a relationship with them, take notes of their needs and wants. Record those in your customer relationship management system and reference those notes every time you call or text your customer or see them in person.

Again, the goal is to serve them at the level at which they'll want to return to your dealership and shop nowhere else for their boats and boating accessories.

ONLINE RESOURCE

"Develop Your Dealership's Workforce Outside In"

VIEW

9 Ways to Keep in Touch With Your Customers Year-Round

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

With the way lakes, oceans, rivers, bays and other waterways are busy right now, it's hard to imagine a time when the boats will be put away. But for many of us, there is a boating season, and then there's winter.

And when winter comes, as a consumer, it becomes frustrating to make those boat payments, knowing your boat is sitting, unused in your garage, alongside the house, or in storage. This is especially true for first-time boat buyers, and those who used their vacation money in 2020 to buy a boat rather than travel.

Reaching out to your customers in these moments of doubt are key touchpoints to assure that you don't lose your customers.

So, as the season winds down (whenever that might come in 2020), it's time to start thinking about your marketing, sales and outreach plans for the fall, winter and early spring. What can you be doing in the off-season, if you have one, to reach out to your customers and get them excited about the next boating season?

Here are nine ideas of how to contact your customers in the off season:

1. **Personal outreach to your customers:** Call, text, email, or video chat with your customers. Aim for a personal outreach at least once in the off-season to check-in with each of your customers, understand how you can set them up for success for next year's boating season, and get them more excited about the boating lifestyle.

2. **Run a customer photo contest:** Ask your customers to dig out their summer photos for a contest. Give away some sort of prize or prizes. This helps customers go back to their boating photos, reminisce over their awesome summer and remember how great it is to own a boat. Plus, other customers and prospective customers will see the excitement those families experienced over the summer. Certified Dealer Norfolk Marine hosted a photo contest for their customers this past spring that's worth checking out.

Lifestyle photos like this one provided by Discover Boating can help keep boating in the forefront of your customers even in the off season.

3. **Share boating lifestyle videos:** When the chill has set in, people love thinking about the warmth. So share boating lifestyle videos with your customers via social media, email and/or text. Videos can be found for free through Discover Boating. Your manufacturers also likely have some available, as do any pro athletes associated with your brands. And your customers may have some to share, too.

4. **Host off-season events:** While COVID-19 may prevent your dealership from hosting in-person, indoor events this off-season, consider hosting a few virtual events. Maybe it's a class on winterizing, or oil changes. Or maybe it's information about safety or a boat show preview. Get creative, host the event live, and record the event, giving you optimal use of one event.

5. **Show your customers what off-season looks like at your dealership:** Customers might think you just close up shop the second they put their boat in storage, so show them what kind of activity goes on within your store after the boats are out of the water. Showcase what service is up to. Remind them that the parts and accessories department is open. Take a spin through storage, asking your

Continued ...

THANK YOU Education Champions.

MRAA's Education Champions support our mission of delivering world-class education so your business can thrive, and we are indebted to them for their support in such a challenging year.

Continued from previous page...

customers if they can spot their boat.

6. **Tell your customers how you're improving:** Many dealers spend the off-season getting their operations prepped for the next season. Show your customers the work your team is putting in to improve their experience with your dealership. If you're going to Dealer Week to learn about the customer experience, tell them. If you get Certified or are working on your Continuous Certification education, let them know you're making those improvements for their benefit. If you're attending a 20 Group or participating in any other type of education, share that. Make sure you take photos and video to capture your customer's attention.

7. **Host an ice-out contest:** Many of you on icy bodies of water may be already doing this, but if you're not yet, consider adding an ice-out contest. Have your customers vote for when they think the ice will break for boating season and offer a prize for the winner. This will build up the excitement right before the season begins.

8. **Create a countdown:** Pick a boating date to get excited about, whether it's your area's fishing opener, the first holiday of the season (Memorial Day or Victoria Day), or a date that customers are typically pulling their boat out of storage and create a countdown. Remind your customers how many days are left on a weekly basis.

9. **Host a sale:** Just because people are no longer boating doesn't mean they aren't still thinking about boating parts and accessories, especially around the holidays and shortly before the season starts. Put a product or a group of products on sale, and tell your customers to stop by, so you can continue to build your relationship with them, and they can get more used to coming into the showroom.

You probably have a hundred or more other ideas of how to reach out to customers when they can't be out on their boat, and you're probably already doing a lot of outreach. The important thing to remember is to keep those dreams of the boating lifestyle alive, even when the boat is locked up for the year.

Help Your Customers by Helping Your Techs

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

While the sales team has been cranking out boats all spring and summer, we all know your service team is just as important to your business.

As the old saying goes, "Sales sells the first boat; service sells the rest." But hiring in service, let alone your other departments, has been difficult for quite a while. It's no easy task to find skilled technicians or talented service advisors.

However, if you can fill those positions, you can also help those gifted folks by including more support staff that will keep both your technicians and your service advisors on track.

Hiring support such as a porter helps keep your technicians turning wrenches.

When you look at your service department, technicians are hard-to-find, well-paid employees, so they should be doing what they were hired to do — working on boats — as much as possible. As Jordan Schoolmeester of Garage Composites says in his MRAATraining.com course, you should **"Keep Your Surgeons in Surgery."** Technicians should have assistance from support positions, such as porters, riggers, a service and parts associate, a service assistant, or some sort of similar position or positions, so they can keep working in the shop. Job descriptions for these positions are available for MRAA members **here**.

Here's an example. Let's say you go to Bar A. It's busy, four people deep up at the bar rail. There are three bartenders working, but they're still struggling to pump out drinks. Supplies are running low, so one has to run and get ice, another has to head into the kitchen to get clean glasses, the third is cutting up some limes, and no one is serving a drink. The customers are getting frustrated, and not many sales are being made.

Bar B is just as busy, four people deep at the bar, but those customers are actually moving, getting drinks and getting back to their friends. Bar B has only two bartenders, BUT they also have a barback. The barback is taking care of refilling the ice, bringing in clean glasses and cutting up the limes. The barback makes sure that the skilled bartenders have everything they need to keep pumping out drinks, which means cranking out sales.

So which bar does your service department look like? Are your technicians turning wrenches for a large majority of their shifts? Or are they running to get their own parts, moving boats in and out of their bays, looking for keys, and reassembling every part of the boat after mechanical repair?

Those types of jobs can be trained to be completed by more entry-level employees, rather than a skilled technician. In turn, that keeps your technician in the shop, the dealership turning boats in and out of service more efficiently, and your customers happy because of the faster turnaround.

This step of prioritizing your technician's work by hiring support help, is likely to make a significant impact on your service efficiency, your bottom line and your customer experience.

DOWNLOADABLE RESOURCE

Service Assistant Job Description

DOWNLOAD

Give Your Service Advisor an Assist

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

Operation: Keep Your Customers Boating has been focused on providing exceptional customer experience to your new boat buyers, so they have a better boating lifestyle, stay in the sport, become loyal customers of your dealership and refer their family and friends to you.

And the service department is an integral piece in that equation. Service is the primary department your customers will interact with between their first boat purchase and any subsequent boat purchases. So the experience your customers have with your service department is critical to them returning to your dealership again and again.

One of the key things a dealership can do to improve the relationship a customer has with the service department is for the customer to have their "person," their primary contact, the person the customer knows will always have their back, says Rallee Chupich, an MRAA Certification Consultant who spent 34 years working at the dealership level, specializing in service.

The Course "Take Your Dealership From Good to Great with CRM.

Sam Dantzler, of Garage Composites, also backs up that assertion in his 2018 Continuous Certification course, "Take Your Dealership from Good to Great with CRM."

What customers want is a key contact in service who knows them by name, understands their past and current issues and will be liaison for them in the service department. To make that possible, Rallee recommends you hire one or more service advisor assistants, employees who may not have as much of a service knowledge base as your primary service advisor, but instead can focus on the customer experience and helping the customer close the gap between having an issue with the boat and having that boat fixed and back on their trailer or dock.

Service advisors are skilled individuals, who balance an understanding of the service department, service scheduling, technical knowhow and customer experience. But many could use additional help, with the number of clients and service appointments a dealership has to handle. So while a service advisor can still write up repair orders, work with VIP customers and coordinate with the service manager, the service advisor's assistant can handle the rest.

A service advisor's assistant, Rallee says, could handle some of the following tasks:

- Answering the service department phone
- Being the go-to person for most customers
- Calling customers the day before their appointment to confirm they're coming in (saving a headache for the rest of the department, if the customer isn't coming in)
- Calling customers to schedule boat pickup
- Getting pre-authorization or authorization of work to be completed
- Assisting in sales of service products
- Entering customer information into the CRM (customer relationship management system)

Having a service advisor's assistant will help the dealership by preventing burnout among the talented advisor staff, offering a better customer experience, and possibly giving the dealership someone to train up to the next service advisor position.

When customers have that go-to contact at your dealership that they can trust will take care of them, it builds up their trust with your entire dealership, getting them closer to becoming a customer for life.

Case Study: Be The Resource for New Boaters

Special Page Dedicated to New Buyers a Huge Success

By Jerrod Kelley, MRAA Content Manager

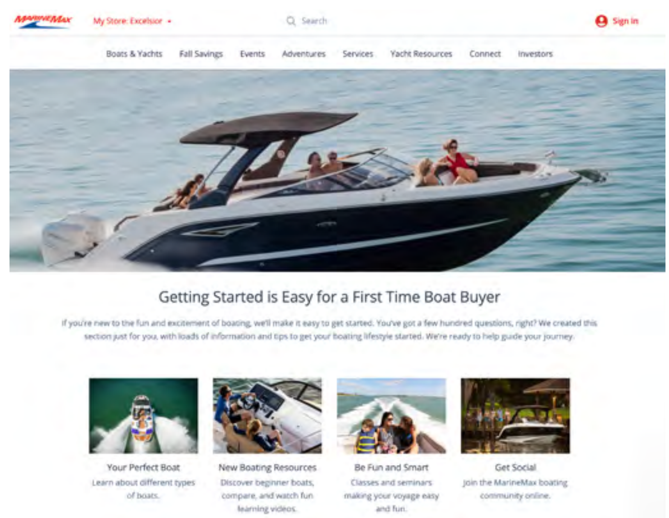
The strategy for MarineMax has always been to get people on the water. And in 2020, that mantra rings truer than ever as thousands of new customers have purchased boats or sought to join the global boating family. Early in 2020, MarineMax decided to speed up its boater education efforts by recommitting to a section on its website that is dedicated to consumers who are new to the industry. Dubbed, "New to Boating," the page resulted in a 461 percent year-over-year increase in pageviews in the 90 days covering May through July, according to Lisa Harrison, MarineMax PR and Content Manager.

That substantial traffic increase is direct result of a well-coordinated plan from MarineMax and also an enormous flow of new customers flocking to dealerships to discover new methods of social distancing, one that includes exploring waterways by boat. Abbey Heimensen, Director of Marketing, and Harrison recently shared how MarineMax refocused its marketing and educational efforts to target the new boater segment and recent industry growth.

"For MarineMax, we're always trying to bring in more people to our ecosystem and into our family," Heimensen said. "Statistics from the MRAA and NMMA tell us that approximately 3 percent of the U.S. population boats, which is a very small percentage. We spend a lot of time supporting MRAA, Discover Boating and things like that to help move that gauge. We know that we personally may not help move that gauge to 4 percent or 5 percent, but we know we want to get a larger piece of the pie of the people who boat."

"How can we help support the effort to get more people in?" Heimensen said. "Once they get to our website, we found that one of the things they were searching for was 'new to boating.' We had been relying on other sources for that, and we felt that we were not doing our customers justice by not having that information on our website."

Heimensen says their marketing strategy was catapulted forward with what has happened with COVID-19. "That made us move more quickly and



Marine Max's New to Boating page on their sites.

get this New to Boating site out there, for not only the customers who come to our website but also in general for the boating industry. As much traffic as we are able to generate to our website, it really made sense to help the industry as whole have that information there."

Heimensen explained that some growth was expected, but they are pleased that it has also become a traffic driver to the MarineMax website. "It has become sticky content," she explained. "It has kept people on the site longer. They are doing more research; they are reading the documents, and they are going through the channels we're asking them to go through. For us, that's actually a bigger win. To be perfectly honest, everybody, including us, is seeing awesome traffic on our websites. Right now, it's been exponential growth. But what we really wanted to see is would they stay on our website longer and do more research? They are spending almost twice as much time rather than bouncing off."

Heimensen said reach has grown for both the MarineMax database and for new users. "But we've also seen a 40 percent growth in new users on our site. We are tracking that through IP addresses and new leads being put in."

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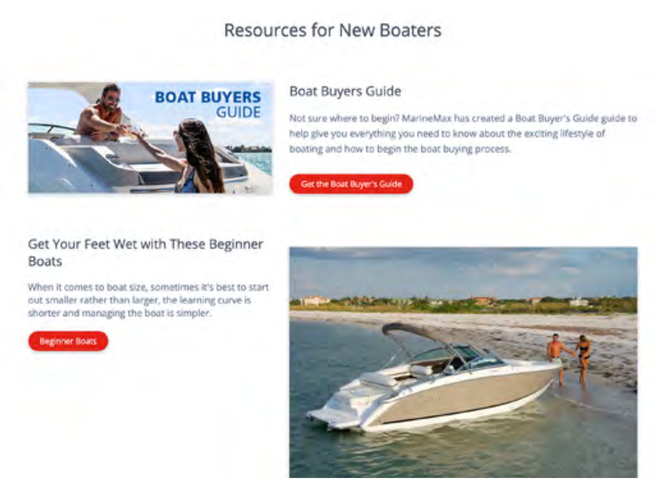
MarineMax was then able to attribute those analytics and information back to the sales that have happened, and they've turned into sales-qualified leads that are completely new to the MarineMax ecosystem. "We have a 22-year-old database, so we can tell if you've been in our system or not at one time or another," she added. "We are seeing exponential growth in 'new' to our website and that's to our entire point of doing this project; to bring new people into our atmosphere who were not aware of MarineMax and what we do."

Heimensen also attributes the technology that MarineMax invested in as delivering more clarity to the insights. "We've invested in technology, like HubSpot and things like it, that are helping us take the data that we have known we had all these years and not have to guess," she stated. "Data is one thing, and you can do a thousand things with data. But, to be able to glean insights from that data is where we are winning."

EDUCATING BOATERS



Marine Max dedicates an entire page on their website to education their customers on how to begin as a boater.

MarineMax designed the landing page to be educational, a resource to learn from prior to making a purchase. "This is helping you make a decision before you make a large investment," explained Heimensen. "It doesn't matter if it's an aluminum bass boat or a $6 million yacht. It's an investment of your time, your family; it's a very serious investment ... one that is different than purchasing a car. Purchasing a boat is purchasing a lifestyle for your family. You're making a commitment that we're going to be on the water; we're going to do this on the weekends — everybody's in!"

For the marketing team, and sales team for that matter, the site ensures customers are well-informed and can select proper choices prior to making such a huge commitment. It's designed to enhance the customer's comfort level with researching, buying and owning a boat, as well as improve their entire shopping experience.

"Not only are these documents and landing pages there to help do that, but also they are there for our sales consultants to make the good purchase decision for their family," said Heimensen. "There's nothing worse than getting in the wrong boat. Not only is it important for them to know what they are getting into when they purchase the boat, but also where are they going to keep it? Does it have to be licensed? Do they trailer the boat?"

IN-HOUSE DESIGN AND EDITORIAL TEAM

While not all dealerships will have the size or enough employees with the skills or time to formulate an entirely new page, MarineMax is large and was capable of this ground-up page creation. It used its sizeable and self-described in-house agency consisting of graphic designers, Content Management Specialist Jason Killingsworth, management and the PR and marketing teams to do all the necessary legwork. This included the backend page creation, design and all the readable and visual content, from graphics and images to headers and storylines.

"This was Jason's project that he spearheaded for us," said Heimensen. "We know that not everybody can create the things that we get to do. We take a lot of responsibility on our shoulders like creating an item like this New To Boating campaign, so people can use it and get it out there in front of the industry. Our No. 1 goal is to get people boating – our absolute No. 1 goal."

Heimensen said the real project effort was the website creation time. "There are so many layers as to what happens when you're able to see this," she explained. "I would say by the time the creation of this piece of website was done, it was probably 40 hours, because we had to create what we call profile cards." The cards essentially work like an if-and-then book, where the user chooses their own path. "What that means on the

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backend of the website, is if you go to our website, and you do these five things, we'll show you this. Jason had to do this to have it seemingly organically appear to the consumer when, in fact, it was very meticulously planned to have it show up when it shows up. Other dealerships would probably need to engage their website company to put the content on their website ... where they could maybe have a freelancer or maybe another third-party to create the content."

DETERMINING CONTENT

"We took and looked at information that what was already out there," said Heimensen. "Our friends at Discover Boating, and different places like that, over the years have done a great job of helping with what segments are already out there. We didn't reinvent the segment. Do you want to fish? Do you want to cruise? Do you want to do tow sports? We knew those were things we didn't have to reinvent."

MarineMax also featured products that its stores carry — 29 different brands at its 59 locations. Heimensen said if the content was going to be on their website, they felt it was very important to reflect the brands they carry because those brands were chosen very specifically in their portfolio to make the customers' choices that much easier.

MarineMax used statistics from its own website and the information visitors were searching for during site visits to create a content flow for customers. "We used a heat map on our website," said Heimensen. "We worked through that for the steps we were looking for, where they needed to see this piece of content."

She said if a customer visited the site and couldn't decide between a cruiser or a fishing boat, then a certain piece of content would pop up. She described this background process extensive because of all the potential processes and options. But in the end, it's about getting them to the correct path or funnel to find an accurate fit for which they seek.

YOUR CONTENT, YOUR VOICE

For MarineMax, it was important that all the content came from their team and was in their voice. " Other resources do a fabulous job, but they have to be very neutral," explained Heimensen. "They have to talk about everything as a whole. For us, we can talk about the brands we carry and about why this boat is right for you if you're a fisherman or a cruiser."

She also said the content voice matters because it matches some of the other things her team is doing already with other forms of customer interaction and content. "In each one of our stores, we have something called a delivery captain," added Heimensen, "When you take delivery of your boat, he will spend delivery time with you. He will take the time to go through the details of your vessel.

"But beyond that, we want it in our voice because we have Women on Water classes, Kids in Boating, intro to boating, advanced boating, charting, navigating your local water, fishing ... our classes are for anyone who is interested, and most of them are free," she said. "We want them to be able to say, 'I have a question about my boat, I better contact Captain Keith,' not worry about logging on and Googling it and digging for resources elsewhere."

Your team, your voice and your messages delivered also means you can continue to reach out to customers to aid your branding and sales efforts by helping move the leads through the funnel. Heimensen said because MarineMax is publicly traded, its privacy policy is very strict and most customers need to double agree to be in their system based on General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) laws. "We give them ample opportunities on our site to sign up for our national newsletter, events and giveaways information and, of course, once they're a little further down the funnel ... quotes, financing ... we don't share our data with third parties; it's only with MarineMax."

ADAPTING TO A PANDEMIC

Prior to COVID-19, shutdowns and mask restrictions, MarineMax held in-person classes both in classrooms and on the water. They've since had to adapt by going virtual to connect.

Along with its New to Boating page and classes, MarineMax has also invested in two other projects that focus on educating boaters, called "From the Helm Boating Broadcast," a weekly podcast-style show, and "Boating Tips LIVE," its Facebook live-streaming show featuring a moderator and interactive experts, called captains.

"With COVID, obviously, that has changed a little bit," said Harrison. "With our classroom portion, we took to Zoom. We were able to involve more people than our

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Marine Max turned to educating consumers during the COVID-19 Pandemic with a series of Facebook LIVE videos calling them "Boating Tips LIVE."

in-person class settings. We were still able to connect with people. It's amazing how many new boaters are out there."

Heimensen explained that the MarineMax virtual classes have also extended their voice and reach a bit. "One of the things we found with the virtual classes was that our store out of Charleston ended up with a couple of people from New York," she explained. "It didn't matter if it was in their backyard or not, our customers and others were able to join online and were able to learn. That's a win for us."

Their new podcasts is another way to interact with their customers. She explained it as live Q-and-A sessions with customers where MarineMax provides as much accessible information to as many people as possible. "They basically go back-and-forth and talk about different topics, for example, courtesy on the waterway or how to shore anchor. It's a live forum on Facebook," added Harrison.

The New To Boating page has proven itself as a popular landing spot for new boaters and those with more intermediate experience on the water because it's a purpose-built educational landing spot designed by a team of experts. MarineMax had the foresight to create the New To Boating page even when no one could predict how the economy and consumer mindset would react to global pandemic and economic shutdowns. MarineMax became the essential resource for its customers in a time of need.

Continue to Train Your Customers in Boating

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

When your customer received their boat, hopefully you were able to give them an in-depth orientation and demo at delivery. But, as many of us know, one hour or a couple hours of training do not make for an expert boater.

Now is the time to think about how you can offer additional training opportunities to your customers to make them safer boaters and offer them a better experience going forward.

Here are few ways to continue to train your customers:

Women on the Water classes: Popular among many dealers, Women on the Water classes take the recent female boat buyers and offer them a class with their peers to learn how to drive, dock and trailer a boat. These sessions are no pressure, allowing the participants to ask questions and try each skill themselves. While having large class sizes is not advisable during the COVID-19 outbreak, you may consider hosting one-on-one or small group classes (with local safety regulations in mind).

Boat captains: If you don't yet offer a captain's service, this may be something your dealership could offer. Pair your new boat buyer with a captain either on staff or a captain service nearby, so the new boat buyer can get used to boating and a better understanding of the rules of the water, while on their own boat with a trained captain.

Wake boarding, wake surfing, or skiing classes: Have your on-staff or nearby watersports expert take customers out on their own boat, or a similar dealership-owned boat, to demonstrate the best way to use the boat for watersports. Allow the customer and their family to have a chance to try wake boarding, surfing, or skiing themselves, so they can get a hang of the sport.

Offering educational classes to your customers is a great way to encourage repeat busines and set yourself apart from competitors.

Safety courses: Host safety courses either on site at your dealership, or virtually. This offers boaters a better idea of what they should be thinking about when it comes to safety. Some dealerships even host courses after which attendees can earn a license or certification.

Video training: Many dealers are getting into video creation, and one of the great things to do with video is to offer product demonstrations. In each video segment, released periodically, teach your customer about a different part of the boat, offering them tips and tricks for a successful day out on the water.

Second orientation: We all know it's hard to soak in all the information during the initial delivery orientation, so if you have the time, you can offer your customers a second demo, after they've gotten the hang of the general operation of boat. During a second orientation, the buyer would be armed with questions that relate directly to what they've been experiencing, and it gives your team an additional touchpoint with that new customer.

Level Up Your Customer Experience Efforts by Getting Certified

By: Liz Keener, MRAA Certification Manager

As your dealership begins turning up the dial on customer experience efforts, you're likely looking at several options to better serve your customers and prospects. You may be considering steps, such as adding a customer experience representative, outsourcing some of your follow-up efforts, integrating more digital retail into your processes, and more to improve the experience customers have with your dealership.

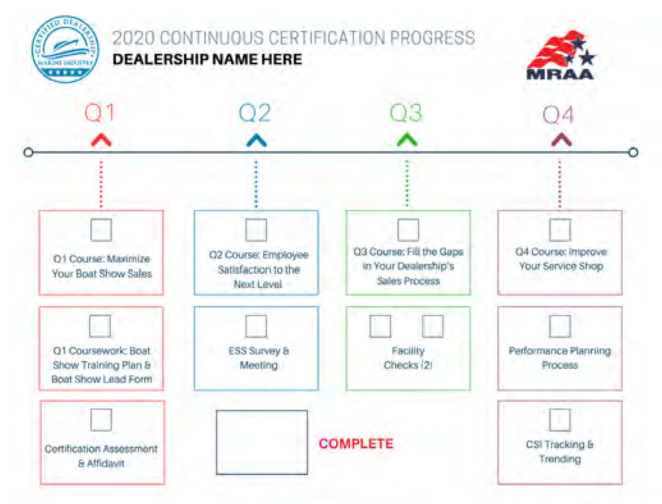
But one of the ways to really amplify your efforts is to go through the [Marine Industry Certified Dealership]() program.

The customer experience is one of three key pillars that the Certification program is based off of, so going through Certification will allow you and your Certification Consultant to analyze your current processes and how they impact your customer experience, and then use proven best practices to improve your efforts.

The following are just a few parts of the Certification process that can impact the customer experience you offer:

- Marine Industry Consumer Commitment
- Employee Satisfaction Survey
- CRM process
- CSI tracking & trending
- Sales process, including 100 percent follow-up
- Delivery
- Customer product orientation
- Website standards
- Facility standards
- Service process, including 100 percent follow-up
- Repair orders
- Quality assurance process
- Service comeback tracking
- Parts process
- Mystery shopping

Through Certification, you'll go over each of these areas and more, to cover your customer experience, employee engagement and dealership operations. It's a surefire way to shore up your customer experience efforts, learn from your Certification Consultant, implement best practices of other Certified Dealers and improve upon the experience offered to your customers, which, in turn, should improve your dealership as a whole.



The timeline for this year's Continuous Certification Program that offers quarterly courses to keep your dealership on track.

On top of that, after you're Certified, you'll enter into the Continuous Certification program in each subsequent year, offering you exclusive customer experience education annually. Thus far, the Continuous Certification has covered the following customer experience topics: Take Your Dealership From Good to Great with CRM, Improve Loyalty with a Customer Experience Mindset, Align Your Dealership with Today's Customer, Supercharge Your Customer Experience and Update Your Sales Process for Today's Marine Market. Other courses in Continuous Certification have also touched on customer experience as well.

To take the next step in your dealership and to get Certified, contact Liz Keener, lizk@mraa.com.

RESOURCES

*Some of these courses are available exclusively for MRAA Certified Dealers