



INDUSTRY SUMMIT

PRICE CLARITY IN MARINE RETAIL

Practical Considerations for Dealers and Manufacturers

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How to Use This Document

If you have 5 minutes:

Read the At-a-Glance section.

If you have 15 minutes:

Add “What Price Clarity Means” and “Pathways to Price Clarity.”

If you have 30+ minutes:

Read the full document, then consider the 1–2 questions you most want the Summit to answer.

PRICE CLARITY AT-A-GLANCE

Purpose

This document is a pre-read designed to support constructive industry discussion about Price Clarity. It is not a pricing mandate, and it does not prescribe a single model across a complex industry. Instead, it consolidates research and stakeholder insights and offers practical considerations dealers and manufacturers can evaluate independently.

Why This Matters Now

The industry is navigating a sustained downturn, with unit sales declining materially since 2018 when excluding the COVID peak years, while retail prices have risen significantly — increasing affordability pressure for many households.

Info-Link reporting shows first-time new-boat buyer activity has fallen to the lowest levels on record in the most recent year shown. While many factors influence first-time participation, this decline raises a question the industry should examine: Does pricing friction and ambiguity disproportionately reduce new entrants?

Research cited in this paper indicates that when objective price information is absent during the evaluation stage, shoppers are less likely to continue searching, less likely to become leads, and report lower purchase intent — all signals of a disrupted purchase journey.

Price Clarity Defined

Price Clarity means a prospective buyer can access meaningful price information early in their research — and can understand what they are actually comparing.

What Price Clarity Includes

- » An early price signal that helps a buyer decide whether to stay engaged (e.g., “starting at,” base + power, or another credible reference point).
- » A range — and the “why” behind the range (options/packages, freight/prep, and other legitimate drivers of variation).
- » “No hidden fees” in the buyer’s view of pricing (make mandatory costs visible up front).
- » Comparability support (clearer feature/option presentation and package-style framing).
- » Payment context where feasible (e.g., approximate monthly payment ranges with clearly stated assumptions), recognizing many buyers shop on payment.
- » Ownership-cost context where feasible (focus on predictability and avoiding surprises; market-specific cost ranges are often best addressed locally).
- » A clear path to get answers without friction (reduce unnecessary barriers to information access while preserving the relationship-based purchase experience).

Key Hurdles

- » Trades and valuation inconsistency distort pricing and create “gap” expectations between advertised and transacted outcomes.
- » Lack of a shared, trusted “source of truth” for used values, options, hours/condition, and what boats actually sell for.
- » Configuration complexity (boats are not apples-to-apples; long option lists and inconsistent SKUs make comparisons difficult).
- » Landing costs and dealer prep variability (freight, PDI/prep, delivery standards) create real differences in “ready-to-go” pricing.
- » OEM policy constraints (what dealers are permitted to publish, and mismatches between build tools and real-world delivered costs).
- » Dealer economics matter (floorplan costs, aging inventory risk, trade exposure, warranty reimbursement gaps, and service absorption realities).

Top practical considerations

For Dealers

- » Use an early price signal that keeps shoppers in the funnel while avoiding fully optioned sticker shock.
- » Create clear guardrails for trade scenarios (and set expectations early) to reduce perceived gamesmanship.
- » Simplify how equipment and options are presented to support apples-to-apples comparisons.
- » Make legitimate drivers of variation visible (freight/prep, delivery standards, and after-sale support).
- » Where feasible, provide payment context and reduce “call for price” friction in the early research stage.

For Manufacturers

- » Enable clearer price signals in dealer agreements (even if not a single fixed price) so dealers can meet digital-first expectations.
- » Standardize configuration/option data so pricing and trade valuation can become more accurate and comparable.
- » Improve build-and-price realism (or clearly label what is included/excluded) to reduce cross-touchpoint confusion.
- » Reduce dealer prep volatility through better delivery condition and quality control.
- » Support better valuation infrastructure (hours/condition/options/region) because it unlocks trade clarity and reduces downstream friction.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The marine industry is entering a new era of buyer expectations — one in which trust is formed earlier, shoppers self-educate online, and the absence of credible pricing signals can cause prospective buyers to disengage before a dealer or manufacturer ever has a chance to help them. In response, this document uses the term Price Clarity to describe the outcome the market is demanding: Buyers need access to meaningful price information early in their research, and they need to understand what they are actually comparing.

This document is not a pricing mandate, and it is not an attempt to force a single model across a complex industry. Instead, this white paper is designed to serve as a practical, industry-informed framing to help dealers and manufacturers participate in a shared conversation about how marine retail can reduce friction, rebuild confidence, and keep more buyers moving toward purchase.

Context matters as part of this conversation. The marine industry is navigating a sustained downturn, and the underlying economics of purchase have shifted meaningfully in just a few years. According to data from the National Marine Manufacturers Association, excluding the COVID fueled peak years of 2020–2021, new boat sales, which have been in a long-term decline for 40 years, declined from a high of around 208,000 units in 2018 to 165,000 in 2024 (nearly a 21% decrease), while average boat retail prices increased by 78% over that same period — compounding affordability pressure for many households.

Against that backdrop, Info-Link data also shows that first time boat buyer activity fell to the lowest level on record in 2024. While many factors influence first time participation, this trend raises an important question the industry can't ignore: To what extent is the friction and ambiguity of today's pricing experience contributing to fewer new entrants? Industry stakeholder discussions repeatedly highlight that first time buyers are the most likely to disengage when they cannot tell what a boat will realistically cost or why prices vary.

Research referenced in this paper indicates that when objective price information is missing during the evaluation stage, shoppers are less likely to continue searching, less likely to become leads, and less likely to express purchase intent. At the same time, industry stakeholders agree that the current marine pricing system was built for an earlier “trust architecture” — one optimized for negotiation, trade mechanics, and complex deal structures rather than digital-first comparability.

Accordingly, this publication does three things:

1. Defines Price Clarity and what it includes
2. Summarizes the key hurdles that make progress difficult
3. Offers “Pathways to Price Clarity” as practical considerations — separately for dealers and manufacturers — focused on how to minimize transition pain while still accomplishing what every stakeholder wants: increased buyer confidence, higher-quality leads, and healthier retail outcomes.

Ultimately, this work is an invitation. The industry can either allow new buyer expectations to reshape the market by default, or it can engage proactively and collaboratively to improve clarity in ways that respect real-world variability while strengthening trust. The next step is to use this framework to identify where alignment is possible, where experimentation is needed, and what questions the industry must answer together.

Throughout this publication, we will cite research and insights from key sources, including research from former National Marine Manufacturers Association President Thomas J. Dammrich’s doctoral dissertation research on the impact of missing objective price information in the new-boat shopping journey, Discover Boating/Ipsos research insights on how consumer expectations, trust, and digital-first behavior are evolving, and a wide body of qualitative input gathered through industry conversations.

These conversations include perspectives from dealers and manufacturers, as well as industry consultants, technology providers and lending/finance-related stakeholders who are directly impacted by trade values, valuation methods, and consumer financing constraints. We will also reference other industry sources used as practical context, such as the Dealer Week Future of Marine Retail panel discussion and articles from Soundings Trade Only. Finally, where helpful, we will incorporate complementary, cross-industry research on transparency and trust to illuminate patterns that are not unique to boating, while keeping the recommendations grounded in marine retail realities.

The intent is not to argue a predetermined conclusion, but rather to present a fact-based, stakeholder-informed foundation that supports constructive discussion and practical experimentation as the marine industry seeks to evolve and meet evolving consumer expectations.

Competition & Antitrust Note: *This document is intended to support the marine industry in collaborating to improve consumer understanding and industry practices related to price clarity. It does not propose or imply coordination on prices, margins, discounts, dealer territories, or competitive strategies. Any guidance is presented as principles and operational considerations for individual businesses to evaluate independently.*

PRICE CLARITY AND WHAT IT MEANS

In conversations with dealers and manufacturers, we heard a consistent warning that “price transparency” may be the wrong terminology. “Price transparency,” they argued, almost suggests that industry stakeholders are hiding something. With this in mind, MRAA has adopted the use of the term Price Clarity because it keeps the conversation focused on the outcome the customer needs: Being able to understand pricing early enough to stay engaged, and being able to understand what drives price differences in a complex category.

Price Clarity means: A prospective buyer can access meaningful price information early in their research — and can understand what they are actually comparing.

This definition matches the consumer-centric framing raised in industry discussions: Transparency means they can see the price; Clarity means they understand it.

When buyers can’t tell whether a boat is in their affordability range or they can’t tell why two similar boats appear to have wildly different prices, the purchase journey can stall or stop. This isn’t hypothetical. Former National Marine Manufacturers Association President Thomas J. Dammrich’s research on new boat listings found that when objective price information is absent during the evaluation stage, consumers are less likely to continue searching, less likely to become leads, and report lower purchase intent — all signals of a disrupted purchase journey.

What Price Clarity Includes

Price Clarity is not one single tactic; it is a set of information elements that reduce ambiguity for the buyer while respecting how marine retail works. At a minimum, Price Clarity includes:

1. **A meaningful price signal early in the journey**
An objective offering price or another credible price reference point that helps a buyer decide the type of boat, based on its capabilities and whether to continue evaluating a specific boat of that type.
2. **A range and the “why” behind the range**
A price range available to buyers that explains why prices skew higher or lower: Power, options, packages, freight and make-ready costs.
3. **“No hidden fees” in the buyer’s view of pricing**
Make mandatory costs visible up front, rather than introducing surprises late in the process.
4. **Comparability support**
Clearer feature/option presentation and package-style framing help customers compare across models and brands more accurately.
5. **Ownership-cost context where feasible**
Offer buyers basic guidance that helps avoid late-stage surprises, while recognizing that specific cost ranges are often market-specific and are best addressed locally.
6. **A clear path to get answers without friction**
Reduce unnecessary friction in the information search process and eliminate a perceived pressure associated with contacting sales, a key reason the purchase journey can derail.
7. **Payment context where feasible**
Approximate monthly payment ranges (with clear assumptions) help many buyers self-select realistically.

Note: *This publication does not attempt to standardize or quantify ownership costs across regions; where ownership-cost discussion is useful, the goal is to improve predictability and reduce surprises – not to publish universal cost benchmarks.*

Price Clarity is intended to reduce early-stage confusion, increase trust, and keep buyers engaged long enough to become qualified leads. It should help buyers compare more accurately, including understanding differences that come from dealership delivery standards and after-sale support, not just the boat configurations. This publication focuses on enabling the development of working models that provide and improve consumer-facing Price Clarity.

THE SHIFT IN BUYER EXPECTATIONS

Today’s boat buyer is increasingly **digital-first** and forms opinions before speaking with a dealer. Research summarized in the Discover Boating Playbook emphasizes that prospective owners are younger, more peer-influenced, and more likely to rely on digital channels (including friends/family, YouTube, and social media) as early-stage information sources.

Across markets, technology has reset expectations for **instant access, mobile-first research**, and a **seamless journey across touchpoints**, and price information is a key “gatekeeper” during the evaluation stage.

Trust is central to high-involvement purchases. The Discover Boating/Ipsos research identifies transparent pricing and “no hidden fees” as influential in dealer choice, reinforcing that clarity and trust are linked in the buyer’s mind.

Finally, this publication draws from Thomas J. Dammrich’s research, which found that when objective price information is absent during the evaluation stage, consumers are less likely to continue searching, less likely to become leads, and report lower purchase intent, all signals of a disrupted purchase journey.

For readers who want the full research detail and extended excerpts, see Appendix A: Research Highlights and Supporting Detail.

WHY PRICE CLARITY IS HARD

Industry stakeholders broadly agree that buyers are demanding clearer pricing signals, but they also agree the current system was built for an earlier era — one optimized for negotiation, trade mechanics, and complex deal structures rather than digital-first comparability.

The hurdles below summarize “why it’s hard” in a single scan. These themes are explored again later as practical considerations for dealers and manufacturers.

- » **Trades + valuation inconsistency:** Trade dynamics can distort pricing expectations and drive a gap between what buyers see and what they expect to pay, particularly when valuation inputs are inconsistent or opaque.
- » **Trade Reality:** Across stakeholder discussions, trade-in dynamics emerged as a major barrier to Price Clarity — not simply because trades vary, but because marine lacks consistent, widely understood inputs that make trade valuation predictable across configurations, conditions, and regions. This is compounded by the fact that first-time buyers often don’t understand the “MSRP game,” while repeat buyers may have strong expectations tied to past trade experiences. In practice, trades also intersect with financing and monthly payment expectations, meaning the “real” affordability conversation can break down quickly when value signals are unclear.
- » **No shared “source of truth” for used values:** The industry lacks consistent, trusted data infrastructure for options, condition, hours, and reliable sold/value signals—making pre-owned valuation and trade discussions difficult to standardize.
- » **Configuration complexity:** Boats are often not apples-to-apples; long option lists, inconsistent SKUs, and limited cross-brand option literacy make comparison and trade valuation challenging
- » **Landing costs + dealer prep variability:** Freight, prep/PDI, delivery standards, and dealership-specific practices create real differences in “ready-to-go” pricing across markets and businesses.
- » **OEM policy constraints:** Dealer agreements and pricing rules can restrict what dealers can publish, and OEM build tools may not reflect real-world delivered costs, creating mismatches across touchpoints.
- » **Dealer economics are part of the reality:** Floorplan costs, aging inventory risk, trade exposure, warranty reimbursement gaps, and service absorption realities influence how dealers price and how much variability must be managed.

With these constraints in mind, the next section outlines practical considerations—separately for dealers and manufacturers—designed to reduce friction, preserve healthy economics, and improve buyer confidence early in the journey.

PATHWAYS TO PRICE CLARITY

Industry stakeholders broadly agree on two realities: (1) we need to move toward clearer price signals because buyers are demanding it, and (2) current boat pricing strategy wasn't designed for today's digital-first buyer or today's expectations.

The goal of the pathways below is not to prescribe a single approach. Instead, it's to offer practical considerations for dealers and manufacturers to reduce friction, keep buyers in the funnel, and minimize the pain that comes with change, while still respecting the complexity of boats, trades, regions, and both individual manufacturer and dealer business models. This document emphasizes early-stage price clarity and comparability; ownership-cost discussion is included only as a predictability principle and is best localized.

Several stakeholders suggested that durable progress toward Price Clarity will require more OEM-led enablement than dealer-led execution, particularly around configuration discipline, data consistency and what dealers are permitted to publish online.

Further, focus on the first-time boat buyer should be primary in the conversation helping them continue the purchase journey. As we consider solutions, we should keep two important points in mind: First, first-time boat buyers are most likely entry-level price point buyers; and second, first-time boat buyers are unlikely to have a trade in. Still, there are two lanes to consider in considering next steps:

Two Lanes: New Boats vs. Pre Owned (and Trades)

Price Clarity is not one conversation. In practice, it shows up in two distinct lanes, each with different drivers of price variation and different expectations for what "clarity" should include.

Lane 1 — New Boats (configuration + delivery-ready price)

For new boats, Price Clarity is primarily about helping buyers understand what they're comparing and what drives price differences. That typically includes:

- » A credible early price signal (e.g., "starting at," base + power, or as-equipped pricing)
- » Option/package clarity (what's included vs. optional; what materially changes price)
- » Delivered/ready variability (freight, prep/PDI, and dealership delivery standards that legitimately affect "ready-to-go" price)
- » Payment context where feasible (many buyers shop on monthly payment and need a realistic range early)

Lane 2 — Pre Owned Boats (condition + upgrades + valuation confidence)

For pre owned boats, "clarity" is less about a single number and more about helping buyers understand why the range exists. Pre owned clarity is shaped by:

- » Condition and usage (hours, maintenance history, prior repairs, and survey outcomes)
- » Upgrades and add ons (equipment that can meaningfully change value but may not be consistently captured in valuation tools)
- » Reconditioning and risk (what it takes to bring the boat to a dealer's standard, and the economics of taking it back in trade)
- » Valuation inputs (the need for better, more consistent inputs for ACV/wholesale logic so trade expectations are more realistic)

Implication for this section: Several considerations below apply to both lanes, but some are primarily new boat issues (configuration, build-and-price realism, freight/prep disclosure) and others are primarily pre owned/trade issues (valuation data, condition transparency, trade mechanics).

How to read the two lists: The dealer considerations below focus on actions within a dealer's control. Many of these efforts, however, are constrained or enabled by manufacturer-side choices, especially around option structure, build-and-price inputs, and dealer agreement policies.

Considerations for Dealers

1. Use an early “price signal” designed to keep shoppers in the funnel

Many stakeholders describe “starting at” or “base boat + power” as an effective way to avoid scaring shoppers with fully optioned sticker shock while still providing a credible entry point.

- » Practical examples surfaced in discussions include “starting at” pricing or similar framing as an early-stage signal that gets phones ringing without implying a final, universal transaction price.

2. Separate “no-trade” pricing from trade-based deal-making — and say so up front

Multiple stakeholders emphasized that “trade changes everything,” and some dealers explicitly reset pricing to MSRP once a trade is introduced (because the structure of the deal changes).

- » A practical pathway could be to make the rule visible: “This is a no-trade price; trade-in requires a re-work of the deal.”

3. Make “apples-to-apples” easier by simplifying how equipment is presented

Option complexity, which differs from brand to brand and model to model, is repeatedly cited as a root cause of confusion and a reason “call for price” persisted historically.

- » Consider moving toward clearer packaging / tiering logic (e.g., standard vs. upgraded features, common bundles) so customers can compare more accurately.

4. Explain landing costs and dealer prep as real variables (without over-explaining)

Breakout sessions highlighted that freight, prep/PDI, and “dealer personality” items (custom add-ons) vary materially by region and dealership, and that this is a legitimate barrier to “one clean online price.”

- » A simple “what’s included / what’s not” note can reduce confusion when OEM site build pricing doesn’t match the dealer’s real delivered/ready cost.

5. Align your online pricing posture with boat show / showroom reality

Stakeholders described how visible discrepancies between boat-show pricing and website MSRP can create distrust or the perception that pricing is “loose” or inconsistent.

- » If you run multiple pricing tiers (showroom vs. sale/boat-show pricing), consider a consistent method for how qualified shoppers access the next tier.

6. Reduce friction for legitimate shoppers while protecting dealer agreements

One dealer described using a “Know Your Customer” style approach to reveal showroom pricing to verified shoppers and route out-of-territory traffic appropriately, balancing convenience with agreement constraints.

- » The broader principle: make it convenient for legitimate buyers to get real pricing without forcing them into a premature conversation.

7. **Standardize your trade intake process to reduce “gamesmanship”**

Several stakeholders described trade value distortion as a “monster we created,” rooted in decades of training customers to focus on trade allowance rather than the difference between the cost of the new boat and value of the trade-in.

- » One practical consideration raised: Require customers to complete structured trade questionnaires themselves (to reduce overly optimistic “verbal drift”), and document condition/hours/aftermarket equipment consistently.

8. **Build internal guardrails so pricing clarity doesn’t accidentally compress margins**

Stakeholders highlighted that margin realities differ dramatically across dealerships and segments, and dealer prep / warranty exposure can materially affect profitability.

- » Practical examples discussed: Clearer approval thresholds for discounting, treating prep variability as a real cost driver, and even maintaining reserve funds for warranty-related dealer costs when reimbursement is incomplete.

9. **Use “buy-it-now” selectively as a pressure-release valve**

Stakeholders cited “buy-it-now/no haggle” as effective in specific use cases, particularly aged inventory when the price is “right,” and referenced “call for price” as a major friction point.

- » The principle is not “everything must be buy-it-now,” but rather: Deploy it strategically where it reduces friction and clears inventory without breaking your core model.

Considerations for Manufacturers

Why OEM enablement is foundational: Across discussions, stakeholders repeatedly pointed to configuration complexity and inconsistent option structures as a root cause of pricing confusion — for customers and for dealers trying to value trades across brands. In categories where options are extensive, “call for price” has often been used to prevent apples-to-oranges comparisons. Moving toward clearer packages, more consistent configuration data, and more realistic pricing tools can unlock meaningful progress without forcing a single national price.

1. **Recognize the real retail deal structure is not the wholesale deal structure**

Stakeholders repeatedly noted that OEMs sometimes assume retail should work like wholesale (“here’s the price list; buy it”), while dealers emphasize that retail involves trades, financing, seasonality, and customer experience delivery.

- » A practical pathway starts with acknowledging those realities, especially trade complexity and the service expectations that come with the product.

2. **Revisit what dealer agreements allow (or restrict) around publishing price signals**

Breakouts and stakeholder conversations repeatedly cited that some OEM policies restrict posting any price online, limiting dealer experimentation even when dealers want to provide clearer signals.

- » A practical consideration is enabling a safe middle ground (e.g., “starting at,” “base + power,” or other permitted signals) that supports early-stage buyer self-selection.

3. **Standardize configuration/option data so pricing and valuation can become more accurate**
Multiple stakeholders highlighted that boats lack consistent option decoding and that major add-ons may be invisible to valuation tools, creating large swings in trade values and deal outcomes.
 - » A practical pathway is improving how option data is structured and shared so dealers, lenders, and valuation systems can reflect real equipment value.
4. **Improve “build-and-price” realism (or clearly label what it does/doesn’t include)**
Dealers and manufacturers noted that online build tools often omit freight, prep, and dealer-specific delivery variables — which creates consumer confusion when “the same boat” doesn’t match in price across touchpoints.
 - » A practical consideration is either increasing realism or explicitly labeling what’s included/excluded so expectations are set early.
5. **Reduce dealer prep volatility by improving delivery condition and quality control**
Quality-control issues are a cost driver that increases dealer prep and makes pricing harder to stabilize; stakeholders described this as a primary pain point.
 - » A pathway to minimizing pain is improving delivery readiness and acknowledging the dealer’s cost exposure when product arrives needing significant work.
6. **Expect “transition pain” and plan for it — especially around trades and used values**
Stakeholders described the risk of abrupt shifts (margin compression, used value disruption) and suggested any narrowing of MSRP-to-transaction dynamics should be approached thoughtfully.
 - » In stakeholder dialogue, mechanisms analogous to holdback/back-end support were discussed as one conceptual way to help dealers navigate transition pressure while systems normalize.
7. **Support better trade valuation infrastructure (because it unlocks everything else)**
Panel discussion and stakeholder notes repeatedly frame trade valuation inconsistency as a “chicken and egg” problem: Without better, more consistent ACV logic, dealers feel compelled to preserve wide spreads and flexible pricing behavior.
 - » Practical pathway: collaborate (through appropriate channels) to improve valuation inputs (hours, region, options) so the market can get closer to consistent trade expectations.
8. **Preserve the role of the dealer experience while improving early clarity**
Multiple stakeholders emphasized that boats are emotional, relationship-driven purchases, and that overly commoditizing the sale can damage the ownership experience if service/warranty economics and customer support don’t align.
 - » A practical “minimize pain” principle is improving early-stage clarity without stripping away the dealer’s ability to deliver and fund the experience after the sale.

Shared Enablers

Stakeholders repeatedly point to three cross-cutting enablers: (1) better data for valuation and comparability, (2) clearer shared terminology that explains what buyers are seeing, and (3) tools that let buyers self-select into the right “ballpark” earlier — so dealers spend time on higher-quality leads.

APPENDIX A: RESEARCH HIGHLIGHTS AND SUPPORTING DETAIL.

This appendix provides expanded excerpts and supporting detail for readers who want deeper research context beyond the main pre-read.

Research Highlights and Supporting Detail

The boating purchase journey is increasingly shaped before a prospective customer ever speaks with a dealer. Discover Boating's research, which was produced by Ipsos and outlined in the Discover Boating Playbook, December 2025, emphasizes that prospective owners tend to be younger and more likely to engage boating through peer-driven, digital channels, with "friends and family, YouTube, and social media" playing a bigger role as key information resources. In the same playbook, Discover Boating notes that prospective owners and recent buyers differ from established owners in how they access information and form opinions, meaning dealers and OEMs are no longer "introducing" the category. They are often being evaluated after the buyer has already done significant research.

That front-loaded research behavior changes the role of a price conversation. When the buyer's early research happens online, the presence or absence of clear, objective price information becomes a gatekeeper. If buyers can't quickly determine whether a purchase is plausible within their budget, they can disengage long before a dealer has a chance to build trust and guide them.

This isn't a marine-only phenomenon; CarGurus' consumer insights report (auto category) describes how buyers are increasingly using online tools and research from home, while still expecting an omnichannel experience that culminates in an in-person step. The key takeaway for marine retail: the journey is still relationship-based at the point of purchase, but it's increasingly digital-led at the point of consideration.

Technology has reset the standard

Ipsos' research frames "Tech-celeration" as a macro force, highlighting that digital tools are now "seamlessly integrated into every facet of consumer life," creating an expectation for "instant, mobile access," not only for information gathering, but also for transactions and decision support. Ipsos further describes how this pervasive digital usage elevates expectations for a "seamless digital journey across all touchpoints," from initial research to purchase and ownership.

Applied to marine retail, this means a buyer's default expectation is that key product attributes (including price) should be discoverable early, and in a format that supports comparison. Ipsos explicitly recommends that dealers build "mobile-friendly website tools" that help consumers compare models and guide them toward fit. In other words, the standard for today's buyer isn't simply "can I get the information if I call?" It's "can I find the information efficiently, on my phone, while I'm still deciding whether to engage at all?"

Trust is central to purchase decisions

Discover Boating's playbook identifies "Transparent pricing with no hidden fees" as one of the top dealer factors that influence consumers when choosing a dealer or seller. This matters because it ties pricing clarity directly to

trustworthiness in the consumer's eyes — especially in a category where total cost is consequential, and ownership costs can be substantial.

Importantly, Ipsos doesn't frame this as purely transactional. The playbook repeatedly emphasizes the role of dealers and OEMs as trusted guides, encouraging “clear, easy-to-understand guides,” standardized digital assets, and tools that support research and confidence-building. Those recommendations align with the core reality of high-involvement purchases: buyers don't just want a number; they want confidence that the number is meaningful and that the seller will stand behind the experience.

Cross-category research reinforces this same linkage between clarity and trust. Capital One's 2024 Car Buying Outlook reports that car buyers who feel the process is transparent are substantially more likely to trust dealers, and that many buyers define transparency as having price and financing be clear. While boating has unique complexity, the direction of consumer expectation is consistent: clarity is becoming a prerequisite to trust as opposed to simply a nice-to-have.

Missing price isn't neutral

This is where Dammrich's research becomes foundational. In his doctoral dissertation from 2019, Dammrich notes that the evaluation stage of the purchase journey includes searching for product attributes including price, and that many high-cost, high-involvement industries (explicitly including new boats and RVs) often omit objective price information. His field experiment used a natural online environment with random assignment, comparing consumer behavior when objective price was present versus absent in new boat listings.

Dammrich's findings provide direct evidence that the presence of objective price information during evaluation increases key funnel behaviors:

- » Continued search: Consumers were more likely to click through to deeper product detail pages when price was visible.
- » Lead generation: consumers were more likely to become leads (contact seller) when price was visible.
- » Purchase intent: consumers reported higher purchase intent when price was visible than when it was not.

In plain terms: price visibility increased engagement and intent in a real-world digital purchase journey. This is exactly the crux of why Price Clarity belongs at the center of an industry growth conversation. It's not merely about preferences or philosophy; Dammrich's work shows that withholding objective price can reduce the likelihood that buyers continue searching, become leads, or develop purchase intent.

Why This Hits Boating Especially Hard

Dammrich explicitly frames new boats as high-cost, high-involvement products and connects missing prices to increased search effort, perceived manipulation, and social pressure tied to contacting sales, all of which are key factors that can derail or delay the purchase journey. He also highlights that these dynamics are particularly important in categories where purchases are discretionary and can be deferred until clarity improves.

The Discover Boating Playbook adds a complementary dimension: many prospective owners are concerned about costs (including ongoing costs like storage and maintenance), and they are navigating barriers that include both financial and confidence-related issues. That combination — high perceived risk + high financial commitment + digital-first research — creates a narrow window in which the industry either builds trust or loses attention.

This is also why Price Clarity cannot be limited to a single number. The Playbook indicates consumers want support that helps them understand the broader ownership picture (e.g., guidance, tools, predictable maintenance plans), not just a sticker price. The implication: clarity must reduce ambiguity early, but it must also explain variability in a way that feels fair and credible.

The Direction of Travel Becomes Clear

Across consumer markets, pricing clarity and “no surprises” are becoming formalized expectations. In automotive, Boston Consulting Group describes a shift toward fixed, non-negotiable pricing models and reports consumer interest in simplicity and transparency in that context. While boating is certainly not the same as automotive, this signals a broader cultural move toward reducing negotiation friction and increasing price consistency, especially when the customer journey begins online.

On the regulatory side, the FTC has moved to restrict hidden fees in specific industries by requiring clearer disclosure of total prices and fees up front for covered categories. Even though that rule has thus far been scoped to live-event tickets and short-term lodging, it reflects a broader consumer protection posture: the market is increasingly expected to present prices in a way that avoids late-stage surprises. For boating, the relevance is that consumer expectations are being reinforced by the broader pricing culture and policy environment.

When we combine these sources, the conclusion is straightforward:

- » The buyer is more digital-first and peer-influenced.
- » Trust and “no hidden fees” are explicitly influential in dealer choice.
- » Objective price presence increases continued search, lead generation, and purchase intent in the marine purchase journey.

Price Clarity represents a strategic lever for keeping modern buyers in the journey long enough to become leads ... and ultimately owners.

APPENDIX B:

WHY PRICE CLARITY IS HARD

Industry stakeholders broadly agree that buyers are demanding clearer pricing signals, but they also agree the marine pricing system was built for a different era — one optimized for negotiation, trade mechanics, and complex deal structures rather than digital-first comparability.

1. **Trades distort the entire pricing conversation**

Across dealer and manufacturer conversations, trade-in allowances repeatedly emerged as the single biggest barrier to clearer, more consistent pricing communication. Dealers describe an entrenched cycle: inflated MSRPs create room to “work a deal,” which supports over-allowing trades, which then reinforces the expectation that the numbers are flexible and negotiable. Complicating matters, dealers often need a “no-trade” price approach because trade disclosure changes the math and resets the deal structure.

2. **There is no shared, trusted “source of truth” for used boat values**

Multiple stakeholders point out that marine lacks the data infrastructure that makes vehicle valuations coherent (e.g., consistent VIN/option decoding, high-volume auction data, standardized condition history). Dealers cite that optional upgrades and major add-ons can be invisible in valuation tools, creating wide swings in appraisals and making it hard to be precise or consistent when a trade is involved. Stakeholders also note that “sold” pricing data can be unreliable or inconsistent in parts of the market, further weakening confidence in any single benchmark number.

3. **“Boat pricing” varies by season, buyer type, and urgency — not just by product**

Industry pricing behavior is heavily shaped by seasonality and buyer psychology. Some stakeholders believe there are distinct seasonal buyer patterns (bargain buyers, early adopters, “smart buyers” ordering ahead, and spring impulse buyers), each responding to different price/value signals. This matters because “one price” or even “one way to show price” can work for a subset of buyers, but not all — especially when urgency, availability, and timing affect both dealer economics and consumer willingness to pay.

4. **Boats are not apples-to-apples products — configuration complexity is real**

Stakeholders repeatedly highlight that boats can have extensive option lists and custom configurations, making online comparisons difficult unless equipment and pricing are presented in a structured way. Some stakeholders suggested the need for better “build a boat” style tooling so customers can see pricing impacts of options before visiting a dealership — while also acknowledging the risk that consumers can “overbuild” themselves into sticker shock without guidance.

5. **Landing costs and dealer prep create legitimate variability in “real price”**

Dealers and manufacturers identify landing costs (freight differences by geography), prep/PDI, and dealership-specific delivery practices (e.g., full tank of fuel) as practical barriers to publishing a single clean price online. Stakeholders also cite quality-control variability as a contributor: when boats arrive requiring additional dealer work, dealers face cost uncertainty that can affect margins and the final “real” price.

6. OEM policies and dealer agreements restrict what can be advertised

A recurring hurdle is that some manufacturers prohibit posting price online altogether (or constrain what can be shown), limiting dealers' ability to experiment with clearer price signals even when they want to. Stakeholders also note mismatches between OEM "build" pricing and dealer realities once freight and prep are included, which can create consumer confusion when prices don't align across touchpoints.

7. Regional and cross-border complexity makes standardization harder

Industry communications explicitly cite regional variability (freight zones, market differences) and cross-border considerations (e.g., Canada brokerage fees and exchange rates) as barriers to uniform approaches.

8. The service/warranty reality affects pricing behavior

Stakeholders emphasize that dealer economics influence how much pricing flexibility dealers need on the front end, including concerns about service absorption differences and limited warranty reimbursement dynamics. For example, in a Dealer Week panel discussion, moderated by a manufacturer and featuring four dealers, warranty expectations and post-sale support are highlighted as part of why commoditizing price can damage the customer experience if the economics don't support service delivery.

Despite these hurdles, stakeholders consistently converge on a practical takeaway: progress requires clarity that helps buyers get into the right "ballpark," understand what drives price differences, and reduce friction in the early journey — without pretending there is a single pricing model that fits every boat, region, dealer, or buyer type.