

Winning Sales with a Changing Consumer

Boating Industry magazine has reported the average number of meetings with customers before a boat is sold has declined from over three to just over one in three short years. Boat shows are changing with some cancelled and others shrinking, while showroom walk-in traffic is declining for many dealers.

To win the business of today's boat buyer, you must have a web presence or they will go to a competitor. And simply sending web visitors to the manufacturer's site is not an effective solution, because they can access other dealers once they are there. Postal code dealer searches are also not your best bet. These can send visitors to dealers nowhere near where they actually boat since the home address may be hundreds of kilometres away.

Customers may arrive at your dealership with a printout of what boat model they want. Dealers even tell us the first time they meet some customers is when they take delivery of the boat. Everything can be done on email.

To take advantage of the changing buying and media habits of your potential customers, your first step is to develop a website. The following is a road map to achieving a site that will deliver sales.

Logo Development

If you don't have one or your current logo is not doing the communication job, contact a graphic artist. Give them a briefing of what your dealership is all about, including your core customer profile (i.e. cottage, cruiser, angler or action sports).



Website Functions

The basics are:

- "Contact us" with phone no., address, click to email, hours of business
- Products
- Sales, Services, About the Company
- Brand Catalogue (link to manufacturers not ideal)

Options are:

- Request a quote
- Insurance quote
- Join the newsletter
- Service quote or booking
- Financing options
- Insurance options
- Parts and Accessories
- News & Events
- Video (83% of web users watch video weekly)

Don't include any category that you are unwilling to keep current. Email leads must be managed hourly (see next issue for more information).

Cost will depend on functions included (estimate anywhere from \$800 to \$3,000).

Technical Constraints

The cost range is wide because it depends on the developer's skill set, as well as if they use an open source framework and engineer it to meet the client's needs or simply design a custom solution. The costs are essentially a measurement of the time invested, which will be less with an experienced and competent web programmer or application developer.

Usually there are maintenance agreements to purchase that range from \$100 to \$500 per month.

Opting out of maintenance when you have something designed for you is foolish as there WILL be bugs in the code or functionality and security holes may be exposed that allow hackers and web deviants to manipulate your site or abuse its resources. Poorly designed forms, search tools and weak coding are key vulnerabilities exploited by hackers and automated malware (short for malicious software) or trojan software. The next biggest vulnerability is weak password guessing.

Showroom

This is the most important consideration since it will deliver the majority of your sales. Your online showroom must have the following functions:

- Visitors should be able to search by length, type and brand for new boats. Used boats should allow searches by price, length, brand and type.
- New boat catalogue with full specifications
- Length searches should have a length from and to field.
- It is most important there be at least one picture with more for larger vessels.

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boatbuys.ca **boattest.ca**

- Adding motors and trailers for sale may generate more traffic and customer leads.
- Pricing for used or brokered boats is a must. Pricing for new boats is optional.

Showroom Options

Custom Design

You can contract with a web developer to build a customized website and showroom. Costs for the showroom only will range from \$2,000 to \$3,000 depending on level of functionality.

Subhead???

A “Virtual Showroom Solution” that integrates into an existing site is the best route, assuming it is being built and maintained by a company or service committed to the design and functionality required, ongoing upgrading and maintenance, and preventative security

countermeasures to ensure uptime and reliability. That is unless your dealership has IT expertise in-house with the time and programming experience to develop, maintain and secure the virtual showroom.

Third-party suppliers

There are third-party online showroom suppliers that are “framed” on your site. This means the showroom is actually hosted elsewhere and cuts costs significantly in many cases. As important, it also eliminates the extra work of updating multiple sites. To generate satisfactory leads it is necessary to list on third-party sites.

Some current third-party suppliers:

- **BoatBuys.ca and Boattest.ca** offer a virtual showroom at no cost to marketers. These Canadian sites are owned by Lifestyle Integrated.
- **Boatdealers.ca** offers virtual

showroom for dealers.

- **Channel Blade** offers website development and virtual showroom, as well as lead management. They also offer auto propagation for dealer-owned sites.
- **Iboats.com** offers virtual showroom framing.
- **Yachtworld.com and Boat.com** offer virtual showroom and auto propagation. The two companies are owned by Dominion.

So choose the solution that is right for your dealership. You will reap the rewards.

This is the first in a five-part series on winning with today's customer. You can download a PDF of this article at www.boattest.ca/dealerupdate.html. Comments are welcome and encouraged at info@boattest.ca.