

NOVEMBER 2007 WHITE PAPER

Boating INDUSTRY

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eProfitability

Developing the right approach to your online business.

- How to convert a Web lead into a walk-in customer ●
- 5 keys to better online customer service ●
- 7 strategies for increasing online sales ●
- Managing your 24-hour showroom ●
- Tips for a steady supply of leads ●
- When opportunity knocks ●
- What is eMarketing? ●

Boat Trader
www.boattrader.com™

What is eMarketing?

And how is it better than your grandfather's marketing?

BY KEN ROHMAN, THE AVALA MARKETING GROUP

"What's that you say? eMarketing? Well, that's just the same as regular ol' marketing but done over that Internet thingy... right?"

Yes and no. Simply put, eMarketing refers to the application of marketing principles and techniques via the Internet and other electronic media such as cell phones and PDAs. And there's a big difference between traditional marketing and eMarketing. Over the past few years marketing's "electronic cousin" has developed into a standalone discipline with its own benefits and objectives.

eMarketing gives even small companies a truly global reach. It's fast, adaptable, easily measurable and – relatively speaking – it's cheap. More and more often, eMarketing is being used to develop leads and manage customer satisfaction by delivering quality, convenience and customized interaction. At its best, eMarketing can help create "customers for life."

But let's back up and talk a little about how the Internet has changed the present dealer network. In the past, customers came into a dealership at the point of interest, looking for information and just beginning the buying process. Now, by the time they enter a dealership, most customers believe they know everything they want and are all the way through the funnel to the point of sale.

So the question is: How does today's dealer make a connection with his or her customer before they walk through the door? The answer: eMarketing.

A Compelling Web Presence

The Internet offers many eMarketing tools, the most familiar of which is the Web site. By now, we all know that a dealership Web site acts as an online extension of the business and should present a clear, valuable and consistent message. It's often the initial point of contact with consumers, and it needs to make a good first impression.

As a leading provider of interactive strategies and customer relationship management for the marine industry, we have developed a series of best practices for maximizing Web site structure, including:

- Make sure your URL/domain name has a clear correlation to your business.
- Include your dealership logo, accolades, location and hours of operation.
- Update your content frequently, especially boat inventory and pricing.
- Use high-quality photographs, plus exciting graphics and detail.
- Double check that the site loads properly on all browsers.

Finally, and most importantly, the site must be able to capture visitor data and convert it into sales leads. This can be accomplished through required registration, a request for the information, entry into a sweepstakes, subscription to an online newsletter, etc.

Building Customer Relationships

What is the number one reason dealers don't get a customer's e-mail address? They forget to ask for it. This is a huge missed opportunity.

E-mail marketing is without question the lowest-cost, highest-return marketing channel available today. A competent creative associate or outside agency can create an e-mail campaign template in a few short hours. Add in some copywriting time, and your dealership has a series of targeted e-mails that pro-

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vide direct communication to your leads and customers throughout the year.

Taken a step further, an electronic Customer Relationship Management campaign contacts your leads and consumers at regular intervals – between 10 and 15 times annually – and it's not always to pitch a promotion. eCRM touch-points can be invitations to special events, birthday or holiday cards, service bulletins, e-newsletters and other value-added communications.

The bottom line is that happy customers are the lifeblood of future purchases. They typically remain customers longer, buy more often and refer more of their friends than do those who are dissatisfied. An ongoing campaign to existing owners is the most effective way to ensure that they will become lifelong customers.

The Future of eMarketing

With the arrival of mobile technologies, eMarketing has stretched even further. Projections indicate that by 2001 some 540 million households worldwide will have broadband Internet access. At the same time, 3.4 billion (that's billion with a "b") cell phones and PDAs with interactive capacities will be in use – nearly seven times the reach of computers.

Short Message Service is a means of sending and receiving text messages via cell phones. You can use it to notify leads and customers of special promotions, receive requests for more information, send service reminders and more. Think "texting" is limited to your 14-year-old daughter and her BFF? Think again. The technology is already being utilized by marketing powerhouses like Coca-Cola, Starbucks and BMW.

Like it or not, we've entered the 21st century, or in some cases been dragged into it kicking and screaming. Consumers have already embraced the online communications environment. Harnessing the eMarketing tools that can create customer relationships and extend the brand experience is the key to succeeding in the new consumer-centric marketplace. Don't let the digital boat buyer pass you by.

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prospects in the showroom for a scheduled appointment. The good news is that you can leverage proven, affordable lead management solutions to automate portions of the sales process and foster customer relationships. At Channel Blade, we find that successful dealers – small and large – rely on these easy-to-use processes to do the heavy lifting and generate Web-based, incremental traffic and sales.

3. Keep your ears open, listen effectively and ask engaging questions.

Once on the phone, you have two goals: begin building a relationship and secure an appointment at the dealership. Most people think they're good listeners when, in fact, they mostly pay enough attention to be able to phrase their comeback remark – a sure way to annoy your prospect right off the bat.

Listen intently to the words as well as the pitch and volume of the voice. That way, you can read between the lines and respond to any concerns or desires. When answering prospects' questions, be direct and to the point with your answers. When the time is right, ask open-ended questions to engage them. Get them to talk about their motivations, boating experience, family size, extra-curricular activities, likes and dislikes of their present boat and any other models they are considering. Use these hot buttons to create the desire to take the next step and visit your showroom.

Bottom line, profitable businesses treat their Web site and resulting leads as gold – especially in challenging economic conditions. There is no magic, one-size-fits-all formula, but there are affordable solutions from industry-leading providers that can help you increase sales and profitability.

If a quick e-mail or phone call could yield a single buyer from the 60 percent of leads that go unanswered, wouldn't you invest the time to put these ideas to use? Once you have prospects on your turf, impressed with your quick response and helpfulness, you have the upper hand and a much greater chance to turn them into customers

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