

How to give boating a practical

BY KEN HEY

Although the boat and motor industry is undergoing some tough times these days due primarily to current economic conditions, the overall weakening of the industry appears to be due to an even more onerous trend that has evolved over the last 10 or so years: a lack of free time. Today's gas prices might be at an all-time high, but fuel still only accounts for a fraction of the total cost of boat ownership. Sales can still be made by varying boat size, features, and finance packages, but the bigger concern is that it is getting much more difficult to find time for boat-



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ing in our busy, modern lives.

Given this predicament, many dealers and service centers are asking, "Is there something we can do to stop and reverse this boating trend before it's too late?" Boat and motor dealers can't change fuel prices or stop people from trading in their SUVs for small cars without trailer hitches, but there are some things they can do to make boating more practical. One easy way for dealerships to help increase boat sales and improve profitability is by educating consumers about today's boat lifts, and adding boat lifts to the list of items sold at the dealerships.

Over the last decade, advancements in boat lift technology have begun to significantly alter the way people use their

boats and in the process, it has greatly improved boating access. Today's boat lifts virtually eliminate the maintenance time and costs associated with wet storage. Moreover, boaters can choose from portable, ultra-fast, solar-powered, hydraulic, freestanding, and free-floating lifts. With a little knowledge and education, it is easy to see how the new generation of boat lifts can be a valuable tool for dealers and a possible solution to the growing need of consumers for no hassle, simple, stress-free, time-sensitive boating.

A brief history

In 1978, Orin Edson, founder and president of Bayliner, developed the boat package concept. It involved selling a boat, motor, and trailer as a complete package. This paradigm shift in the sale

and purchase of boats elevated the customer experience, decreased the barriers to entry for new boaters, and resulted in a significant increase in new boat sales.

It is now 30 years later, 2008, and the world has changed dramatically. But boat and motor dealers still sell the boat, motor, and trailer package. What leads the industry to believe that a package considered complete in 1978 can still address current boaters' needs?

It's time for dealerships to make a paradigm shift. They need to add boat lifts to the boat, motor, and trailer package. If one examines the selling process from the customers' perspective, it is not surprising why the use of boat lifts is rapidly increasing, even though this has not always been the case.

To be honest, the early versions of boat lifts were not the best. In fact, boat lift manufacturers have not enjoyed an enviable reputation earned from the early generations of lifts. Consumers have always liked having dry boats, but they did not embrace many aspects of the earlier boat lifts, including their look, speed, and pilings.

Modern boat lifts

Today's boat lifts are a far cry from those earlier versions. Not only are they designed for storage, but also for active boat usage. Hydraulics are now replacing cables, just as they did in many products ranging from steering systems to steam shovels. New hydraulic designs address the perennial problems regarding speed and durability. Today's boat lifts are fast, with the ability to travel up and down in about 30 seconds, and they are more reliable.

Not only do today's boat lifts operate more rapidly than before, the lift structure is now hidden under the boat instead of being visible above it. This makes the lift and boat combination visually appealing by proudly displaying the boat. Today's lifts are also more portable, harnessing solar power that has further opened up lift use to marina slip renters and remote access areas, such as mooring fields.

When it comes to selling boaters about the benefits of boat lifts, dealers should educate their consumers about the practicality of modern boat lifts, telling their customers that the lifts do not require special equipment or expert-



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ise for installation and operation. Boat dealers can easily add 15 percent or more on to the average boat sale and control the delivery date of the boat by not waiting for a lift to be installed. Boat salespeople can be easily trained on how to use a boat lift to address many of the non-financial objections during the sales process regarding the practicality and hassles of owning a boat. Owning a boat lift makes boating easier and reduces maintenance costs because the boat is not constantly in the water.

The specific advantages

When dealers sell boat lifts as part of a boating package, they can emphasize to customers that many people use lifts to get more value and satisfaction out of boating. The reduced time of getting into and out of a boat finds many boaters boating more frequently. Others see boat lifts as ways to save money by maintaining a dry boat and avoiding the following aspects associated with wet storage:

- Boats stored in the water require regular, costly maintenance and cleaning.
- Wet stored boats should use bottom paint, which not only has to be reapplied every year or two, but can also instantly depreciate the value of a boat by 15 percent, thereby, lowering the resale value.
- Bottom growth and its solution paint creates drag, which decreases fuel efficiency and results in higher fuel costs.
- According to Boat U.S., more than 80 percent of all boats that sink, sink at the dock. This won't happen with boat lifts.

- Wave action puts wear and tear on the boat and dock.

When customers say they don't want to spend any more on their boats aside from the boat, motor, and trailer package, dealers can sell a portable boat lift as an accessory, include it in the finance package, and cost justify it at the time of sale.

In today's economy, it is important for boat and motor dealers to consider how boat lifts could help grow their businesses, the marine industry, and boating customers.

How many people would seriously consider a new boat purchase if they could avoid day-long commitments, unpleasant boat maintenance, spousal arguments at the boat ramp, and fear of spending a lot of money on something that will be of little use?

What shape would the future of boating take if more people enjoyed shared experiences on the water?

As noted earlier, boat and motor dealers can't slow down the rapid pace of today's society, but they can use today's technology to make boating more convenient and their businesses more profitable. Boat lifts have the power to increase boating sales and customer satisfaction. ⚓

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