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Elevate Summit came through with strong content

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Boating Industry's inaugural Elevate Summit delivered high marks for content geared to the C-suite, according to participants. The three-day event also attracted smaller crowds than previous events like last year's MDCE. Organizers said the smaller attendance is part of its "management-exclusive" model.

"The Elevate conference had high-quality presenters and beneficial training for all functioning aspects of the boat business," Russell Baqir, senior vice president of Northpoint Commercial Finance, told Trade Only Today. "Attendee participation and dialogue addressed both micro and macro hurdles facing the industry."

From a vendor perspective, however, Baqir added that exhibits were "lightly attended." He added that some fellow exhibitors reported solid leads.

"It was slow on the floor concerning discussions with dealers, and there was no OEM boatbuilder presence," he said. "I did have some quality meetings with some of our existing dealers and enjoyed quality time with a few of the engine OEMs present. The jury is out, however. We'll have to see whether or not vendors realize much return from their investment."

Jeff Husby, owner of Regal Nautique of Orlando, agreed that there was a high caliber of education at Elevate. He also wanted to see more OEM, dealer and vendor participants.

"While there were a lot of new faces in attendance, which was great, the opening two days didn't have many big dealers or boat OEMs," Husby said. "I especially would have liked to have seen more vendors."

Husby said since the event was geared to executives, "the smaller, much more intimate setting provided easy interaction with the guest speakers, plus the diverse crowd in attendance."

He said he participated in a lively dealer/supplier panel presentation. He and his leadership team also attended multiple sessions.

"From a content perspective, we loved Dr. Elliot Eisenberg as the economic speaker," said Husby. "We also enjoyed the Rosen School of Hospitality speaker who addressed young leaders; I would pay to see him again."

For future summits, Husby said he would recommend more boating-focused content versus the broad overall review.

"One word describes the kick-off of the Elevate Summit--intimate," said Bruce Hawkins, market developer for Vantage Resource Group. "I was met by the owner of EPG Media who escorted me to my booth and took time to review the complete schedule of events and the event networking APP." Hawkins said the "icing on the cake," was an impromptu meeting with a key speaker, Scott Crabtree of Yacht Executive Solutions. "It was highly valuable," said Hawkins.

Keri Doscher, vice president of Emerald Coast Marine Group and a speaker on the Women's Leadership panel: "I was pleasantly surprised by the quality of speakers and the leadership-level educational opportunities. I found the smaller attendance beneficial in terms of networking and had a chance to meet and connect with several key players from different segments of the industry. The depth of content and the size and scope of the event was very positive."

Volvo Penta was an Elevate sponsor. Outgoing president and CEO Ron Huibers delivered a fireside chat, sharing candid insight regarding everything from retail pricing and market sectors to the critical need for ongoing industry innovation.

"Continued education, development and best practice discussions are imperative for anyone in the marine industry, regardless of the sector one represents or the level of experience they may have," said Huibers. "Volvo Penta welcomed the opportunity to engage and exchange ideas with partners and peers during our time at Elevate."

Elevate provided an "approachable, relatable and high-level view" of the boating industry, Leslie Zlotnick, advertising manager for Yamaha Watercraft, told Trade Only Today.

Boating Industry Elevate Summit and Top 100 Managing Director Jonathan Sweet said planning is under way for 2020.

"We plan to conduct further participant surveys following Elevate, but our initial speaker evaluations have been very positive," said Sweet. "We're thrilled and excited about improvements ahead."