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[TradeOnlyToday](#) > [Columns & Blogs](#) > [Marketing Insight](#) > Have plans for June 18? Get out and sail(stice)

Have plans for June 18? Get out and sail(stice)

Posted on June 12th, 2011 Written by [Wanda Kenton Smith](#)



The Grow Boating task force is on the cusp of launching an exciting new consumer campaign called “Welcome to the Water.” This new platform will serve as an invitation to the boating lifestyle, with marketing components designed to introduce prospects to boating through a variety of consumer incentives. The goal is to get people on the water and to motivate boaters to extend an invitation to friends and family.

In my opinion, this is a long overdue, rock-solid concept, and one I personally championed a few years back when the bulk of our industry’s Grow Boating funds were targeting new prospects instead of current owners. Although I agreed that we did need to target newcomers, I proposed that virtually ignoring our existing owners was a costly mistake. I believed then — as I do now — that current boat owners represent our lowest-hanging fruit and that their influence among friends and family has the greatest potential to positively impact sales.

Years ago I voiced the need to fully engage this highly influential group of boaters, with the goal of enticing them to take ownership and to help promote the cause of boating. I’m absolutely thrilled that Grow Boating has adopted a similar strategy and is taking this major step to leverage our current boat owners by offering multiple incentives in order to engage. I also am pleased to see our limited budget being funneled to highly targeted, more cutting-edge media, including search engine optimization, a mix of social media, [www.weatherbug.com](#) advertising and some select smart phone initiatives.

I was given permission to take a sneak peek at some aspects of the newly revamped [DiscoverBoating.com](#) prior to its launch and what I saw looked great. There appears to be lots of relevant, rich content, and I was especially happy to see that the Discover Boating DVD can now be viewed and accessed online for immediate consumption in the comfort of your home or office without the week or two delay associated with mail order, although that option is still available.

At least at first blush, without benefit of seeing the entire campaign, our new industry marketing outreach made a positive first impression and appears to be a very focused program and one we should all support, embrace and ultimately apply to our own respective businesses. As we consider how to build momentum and awareness for boating and, more important, how to drive our existing boaters to carry the flag and invite their circle aboard, I submit we should carefully study the proven success story of one tireless, crusading promoter who has worked diligently to harness the power and spirit of sailing.

I'm a John Arndt fan and have been ever since I shared the speaking stage with him at an American Sailing Association national convention a few years back and heard his passionate plea. He's the assistant publisher of the West Coast sailing magazine Latitude 38 who has traveled the country at his own expense to promote the Summer Sailstice, a concept he launched in 2001.

His dream and vision was to hold an annual global celebration of sailing on the Saturday closest to the summer solstice. When he introduced the event in 2001, some 200 boats signed up to participate, largely the result of Arndt's own influence, coupled with strong word-of-mouth advertising. Now celebrating its 11th year of steady growth, Summer Sailstice has become one of sailing's most popular events. It is expected to enroll 2,000 boats globally and involve about 10,000 avid sailors this June, all of whom will take to the water with friends and family to promote their love of sailing.

Last year's program saw sailors from 50 U.S. states and 47 countries participating, each creating their own unique sailing celebration in a waterway all their own. Boats large and small — monohull and multihull, new and old, flocked by sailors of all ages, genders and ethnicities — took to the water, sharing a united spirit and passion that only this type of global goodwill event can inspire and deliver. It's being part of something really special and sharing a sense of unity that makes Summer Sailstice a truly unique and wonderful affair.

So what are some of the tactics Arndt and crew have developed to fashion Summer Sailstice into an annual sailing extravaganza of mega proportions — well, at least by sailing industry standards? First and foremost, it's free and easy. No one has to pay a red nickel to participate. All you have to do is go online and register, then get out on the water and sail on the designated day. Although there are some yacht clubs, associations and fleets that host special events as part of their own Summer Sailstice event planning, the vast majority of participants are simply individual boat owners who set their sails and do their own thing. No rigid rules, no red tape, no requirements. Simply sail and have fun.

Upon registration, participants are automatically enrolled to win one of more than 400 prizes donated by a vast array of event supporters. Wow! What a treasure trove in this rich prize portfolio. There's everything from exotic yacht charters provided by The Moorings to free magazine subscriptions, a ton of sailing gear and accessories, performance clothing, instruction — heck, even a signature beanie and a whole lot more.

In addition, there are numerous contests that add even more excitement and incentive to participate. Sailors can enter the Best Summer Sailstice Photo Contest, Best Summer Sailstice Story, Biggest Event — Number of Sign Ups, and another, Number of Participating Boats, Largest Crew, Longest Distance Sailed and, of all things, even a Summer Sailstice Fishing Contest.

The prizes and contests alike create a powerful promotional draw that obviously works, plus the end results deliver plenty of fantastic imagery and stories that are brilliantly used to effectively pepper and populate the online archives, photo galleries and testimonials.

Summer Sailstice generates tremendous press in targeted print and online sailing media because it's a feel-good event the media like to support. As sailors are exposed to the message and event through a variety of media channels, they are driven to the dedicated event website for detailed information. And this website doesn't disappoint (www.summersailstice.com). It is full of helpful information, is easy to navigate and is loaded with fabulous lifestyle photos and personal stories.

The overall impact is very engaging, colorful and enticing. I enjoyed casually cruising through the site and visited every page, an achievement in and of itself. After viewing, I truly desired to be part of this unique

event. Anybody aboard a sailboat in northwest Florida reading this? I'd love to crew and hitchhike a ride June 18.

Here are a few other comments about how the website captivated my attention through several really clever components. Besides an introduction to Summer Sailstice, there's a well-defined place to sign up, plus navigation options for yacht clubs, schools, associations and boat classes. There's also a great nav bar that takes you to a section where you can easily invite your friends and colleagues to join you for an event, along with a dedicated page where you can find crew like me who are looking to hook up.

Want to know what boats have signed up so far or how you can join an existing party? Interested in hosting your own regional event? Want to shop from the e-store? There also are sailing links and blogs. If by now you still need convincing, click on the link titled "Top Ten Reasons to Sign Up."

Another strategic move on the part of Summer Sailstice has been to partner with and promote a non-profit whose mission is to educate and empower the boating community about the need to protect and restore oceans and coastal waters. Its active support of "Sailors of the Sea" is yet another positive component and message that resonates among the sailing community and provides more motivation for sailors to get involved.

As I've said for years, the secret to selling more boats is to sell boating. We gotta "put the 'ing' in the thing," as authors Gilmore and Pine so aptly dubbed it in their bestselling book, "The Experience Economy."

It's truly all about the experience. We can market, promote, advertise, preach, teach and pound our message from the boating pulpit all day long, but our salvation lies in this revelation: We must figure out how to get more butts in boats and how to enlist our boat owners to help make it happen.

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