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## Idea-sharing at MDCE yields marketing gems

Posted on February 12th, 2014 Written by [Wanda Kenton Smith](#)



The speed at which our world is changing is leaving us no choice but to change ourselves and embrace the new norm.

This was evident at the Marine Dealer Conference & Expo in November as 1,200 of the industry's brightest and best boat dealers (and those who serve them) gathered for three busy days of educational fortification and celebration.

MDCE organizers (the Marine Retailers Association of the Americas and Boating Industry magazine) deserve a round of applause for orchestrating a first-class event. I attended in my role as director of marketing for Legendary Marine, the No. 1-ranked boat dealer in North America (now for the second year, thank you), and as the moderator for a marketing presentation on diversity.

What a feast of knowledge! There was a sales/marketing, service and leadership track, along with keynotes and workshops. Every session I attended served up lessons I could immediately apply to my business or recommend to my clients. I returned with an iPad brimming with notes. I've picked five of my favorites to share.

No. 1 — Think free. Several panelists shared a treasure trove of marketing freebies. Here are my top picks:

Carl Blackwell shared Discover Boating's free loan calculator, which you can plug right into your website, along with a fun "spousal conversion kit." There's a spectacular Facebook movie maker that allows your Facebook friends to load a series of photos and set them to music, terrific for creating engagement and contests on your own FB page. More: POS materials, a Beginners Guide to Boating booklet (available in Spanish), a looped DVD, popular "Good Run" video, plus many other how-to videos on multiple topics. Order the "Welcome to the Water" signage, e-blast templates, plus access to PR University. Shipping is free. Info: <http://www.growboating.org/>

Frank Peterson, of the Recreational Boating and Fishing Foundation, shared the Take Me Fishing campaign chest, which offers a Boat Ramp app available through the iTunes store, an extensive photo library with free fishing images (including Hispanic photos), multiple videos, an event-planning guide, social media links and a free subscription to the monthly newsletter, which offers shareable content. Info: <http://takemefishing.org/general/about-rbff/programs-and-materials/>

No. 2 — Think social. Auto marketer Kathi Kruse focused primarily on Facebook and shared a few gems. She and I advocate the need for a social media plan. Define your goals and objectives, strategies and tactics, and determine how you will measure your social media ROI and performance on an ongoing basis.

Every business needs a social media policy/guideline that the team understands. If you'd like a sample of such, email me and I'll share one I recently produced. Engage your employees on the company FB page to share content, build traffic and drive their friends to like your page. Creating and posting regular blogs attributed to members of your team is another bonus that pays dividends.

The hottest marketing trend on FB? Kruse says it's "sponsored stories" and serving up ads to the friends of your FB friends. "Retargeting" is also a robust strategy. Here's how it works, from my own experience. I searched for purple shoes on the Zappos website. A cookie dropped. The next few days, purple shoes from Zappos showed up on my FB page. And, yes. I bought a pair of gorgeous purple alligator pumps. Retargeting works!

Check out your Facebook cover photo. What is depicted? Kruse recommends a fun shot showing people enjoying the products or services you sell, not the product itself or your facilities. That first emotional connection counts.

Content is king, and Kruse says it is driving search. Content needs to be fresh — updated regularly. She recommends that an editorial calendar be established to plan and synchronize all of your social media and website content. Mix it up. Shoot a quick video walkaround on every new boat. How-to service tips. Specials of the week. Pop open-ended questions and follow up with new questions after response to keep the engagement alive. Photos and videos are always a hit, including pics of your customers, the boating lifestyle and tasteful humor.

Another great tidbit on the Twitter front: If you retweet, tap that retweet list and follow those followers and tweet to them. Great strategy for mining the competition's tweetosphere!

No. 3 — Think branding. David Arvin said that when it comes to branding, it's not who you know, it's who knows you. What is your business known for? Why should prospects choose your firm?

How do you influence the way people think about you? Your brand is what they think about you.

Several speakers, including Arvin, noted that we've shifted from a selling to a buying mentality. People buy and they like being in the driver's seat. They decide who will enjoy their business.

How do we differentiate ourselves from the competition so the customer will choose us? What can be said about your business that no one else can claim? Mention your company/brand and see what is said.

Some tips for creating differentiation. Be the best choice for one thing. Avoid criticizing the competition — the better strategy, Arvin says, is to promote the things you can offer that your competitor can't. Promote the specialties that have made you the leader or "expert" in the market. What will a customer miss if he fails to do business with you? The biggest challenge, he says, is not really your competitor. It's anonymity.

The greatest compliment we can receive is a referral. What are we doing to generate and cultivate them? And is there a protocol in place to manage the process?

No. 4 — Think time. Keynote speaker Jeffrey Gitomer asked this question: "Where is think time on your

calendar? We are all so busy doing that we fail to think.” Think about that.

Gitomer also asked about what affects our attitudes. If we surround ourselves with negative news channels, we become negative. He opts for more positive influences.

Several speakers, including Gitomer, addressed this thought: The customer believes he is the most important person in the world. What are we doing to reinforce that belief? Fellow speaker Steve Cohn added, “When I walk into your dealership I am the only person in your store. I am the only person in the world. That’s how I want you to make me feel.”

We’d all agree that most customers today are more knowledgeable than many retailers about their product of interest because they’ve invested the time to do their homework. We also know they don’t trust salespeople. Question: How are we building trust? The dumbest sales question ever, Gitomer adds, is, “What can I do to earn your business?”

He says we must make the customer comfortable by first connecting on a personal level. Get them to laugh and relax. Don’t jump headfirst into a sales pitch. Kibbitz. Talk sports, kids, family. Ask about their first/earliest boating experiences or their favorite boating trip ever or what they envision themselves doing on their next boat. Engage emotionally.

Gitomer also said sales success is directly linked to your core beliefs. If you truly believe you work for the best company and you truly believe you sell the best products and you can differentiate yourself from the competition, you can be highly successful in sales. If you truly believe a person is better off purchasing from you, that belief is transferable.

Another Gitomer bullet: “People buy for their reasons, not yours.” And, “People don’t like to be sold, but they love to buy!”

I could have kissed him over this one: “Men decide nothing. Women make the decisions, including boat buying.” I always add that mama doesn’t just decide the boat brand or model. She decides whether there’s a boat at all.

There were no sacred cows in the audience, and dealership principals were in the bull’s eye. Gitomer says most are 10 years behind the personal technology curve. Most don’t have a clue how to personally use Facebook, Twitter or LinkedIn themselves.

Another management warning: If your team ever says this about its leader, your organization is in trouble. “Is he in a good mood today?” Also, “Do your people want to listen to you or do they have to listen to you?”

No. 5 — Think diversity. My last column addressed the seismic population shift happening in North America, coupled with the need to embrace and engage new diversity markets. I shared a plethora of staggering statistics while four savvy dealers talked about how they have significantly increased revenue by selling to affluent Hispanics, Asians and African Americans, along with gays and lesbians.

2014 will see a concerted industry diversity effort launched through the RBFF Hispanic Initiative, along with the Recreational Boating Leadership Council’s Diversity Task Force activities. My recommendation is to analyze your market and determine the local demographic and ethnic composition. You may just be sitting on a red-hot opportunity.

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