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# PROFILES IN LEADERSHIP: VICTOR GONZALEZ



*Recognizing Top Industry Achievers and Their Strategies for Success*

BY WANDA KENTON SMITH

Marine marketer Victor Gonzalez is heavily involved in the web development scene and teaches programming, design and web development on-line to anyone looking to enhance their skills. He's pretty good at his day job too. The director of marketing for Sportsman Boats recently helped his company earn the coveted "King Neptune" Best-in-Competition Award from Marine Marketers of America for its website entry. Judges liked the site's intuitive capabilities for customer engagement, dealer interface and brand awareness. They also said the website looked great and performed well, delivering impressive analytics.

Gonzalez's foray into the recreational marine industry back in 2005 was not nearly as splash-worthy. As a hungry college grad, he snagged a freelance job to update a website for a South Florida inflatable boat manufacturer, followed by a gig to take used boat photos and produce quick turnkey videos for posting on eBay.

Despite showing up for an interview with an edgy mohawk haircut, Gonzalez was hired by a top retailer in 2012 as a marketing assistant. Over a two-year period, he was involved in the launch of several innovative projects including the development of a major digital boat show display and an innovative website, the latter of which remains active today.

Sixteen years since that initial assignment, Gonzalez has earned a seat for himself at the marine industry's marketing table. While he continues to enjoy regular stints behind the camera shooting boat stills and video, the bulk of his time today is spent directing any number of marine marketing activities at Sportsman's along with overseeing the customer experience/customer service and warranty programs.

## **What's the philosophy in your overseeing both marketing and customer experience/service?**

**VG:** Many companies view marketing and customer service as different areas, but we treat it as one department. We believe a happy customer can sell way more boats than any ad we might purchase. Customer satisfaction starts the day they start shopping our brand; our goal is to keep that relationship a positive one for many years.

## **Let's shift gears and talk about your website that won the top Neptune recognition in its category, as well as the top award overall. What are some of the top KPIs (key performance indicators) your team measures?**

**VG:** We closely monitor and measure two key areas: session duration and lead conversions.

In 2017, our average session duration was two minutes and 18 seconds, with roughly 550 sessions per day on average. When I analyzed the raw amount of content on the site that someone could consume, I concluded that we simply did not have enough content to be consumed. It was a simple but very insightful turning point.

We outlined steps to increase the content on our site, with the goal to create content that would engage visitors for longer periods of time. The solution involved a complete redesign pivoting around the many features of our boats. We wanted to show the visitor every nook and cranny and take an educational approach to presenting our boats. We have found customers respond well to being educated versus being sold, especially if they consider you a reliable source.

Armed with this deeper understanding, we set the average session duration goal to four minutes and used a combination of photos, text and video to achieve the objective. Over the next three years, we added about 2,000 pages of content to our site including seven dedicated pages per boat model, plus tools to compare our boats, pages for all of our key partners, improved





monthly owner's photo contests, over 400 videos, more than 1,000 images and many other improvements.

To say this was a major undertaking is a massive understatement and it required a dedicated, in-house marketing and support team. No outsourced company could ever understand our product or be able to educate customers at a level comparable to ours. We eat, breathe and sleep our boats; this passion is what is required.

### **With a site so robust, what's your strategy moving forward?**

**VG:** When it comes to websites, there is no 'set it and forget it' solution. Every site should be under active development 365 days a year. It is a continuous cycle of small improvements that yield incredible results over time. I can't recall a day where our site doesn't have some sort of improvement or update. We add more content to ensure our customers have access to the absolute latest information.

Today, our site distributes 100+ leads per day to our dealer network and has an average session duration of over four minutes over the last three years. Our new goal is five minutes. We are already deep into developing the next iteration of our site that will launch July 1.

### **What do you think earned your website the No. 1 recognition in the industry?**

**VG:** If I had to pick one thing, it would be the amount of information and useful tools. We have dedicated endless hours to polishing every aspect of it and obsessed over user engagement, user experience and user needs. These are the key components to its success. It is a custom-made, user-centric site, not a purchased template.

### **What's the most innovative or breakthrough aspect of your website ... and what led to its development?**

**VG:** One of my favorite innovations is one that I obsessed over for weeks before coming up with an elegant solution. The idea came as I shopped online and saw the "related products you may like" section. Such a simple concept; I wanted to leverage that idea into our site so we could anonymously track a user's trail through our site and have the ability to display local inventory ranked on their viewing history. For example, if a customer is looking at our 23-foot center consoles and saw local listings for 23-foot center consoles I believed they would be infinitely more likely to click on it and convert.

We invested a great deal of time and resources to develop and execute this strategy. It has drastically improved and impacted the quantity of dealer website visits from our site.

### **How do you stay abreast of all the ongoing new developments in website design?**

**VG:** I'm heavily involved in the web development scene and education. I teach programming, design and web development online to anyone looking to level up their skills. I regularly post lessons to my YouTube channel and have built an incredible subscriber base that has accumulated more than four million views and countless success stories. It's an extremely gratifying project for me and has played a key role in my own skill development. Teaching has taken my learning to new heights. Knowing a skill is one thing

but understanding it deep enough to teach it to students at different skill levels, takes it to a whole new level.

### **What is your business or leadership mantra, favorite saying, etc. that you live by?**

**VG:** I have two favorite sayings that help guide decisions.

The first I heard from a computer programmer years ago; it's a simple saying but with powerful repercussion. His grandfather, a cabinet maker, used to say "sand the underside of the drawers." Sanding the underside mantra speaks to the level of detail we should all strive for.

The second: "It's only through iteration that we can attain perfection." The consistent polishing of all the small parts is what gets us the grand result, not just one huge, monumental movement followed by silence. ●

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