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# SOUNDINGS Trade Only



For 2025, amid emerging technologies and rapidly evolving platforms, I thought it would be a good idea to get an accurate gauge of current attitudes, priorities and areas of focus within the marine marketing community. I reached out to the Marine Marketers of America's newly elected president, Alisdair Martin, and asked to create a membership survey.

This win-win partnership provided key insider intelligence for this column to benefit the industry and its marketing community at large, while giving the MMA's leadership team firsthand insight into membership interests.

A broad mix of 39 marketers participated, including 18% from marine manufacturers; 23% from marine dealers and retailers; 5% from marine accessories and component providers; 3% from marine service providers; 10% from marine association members; 23% related to advertising agencies, P.R. firms and marketing consultants; 10% from marine media; and 8% who fell under “others.”

Here’s what they had to say.

## Key Findings

Marine marketers are actively engaged in a host of marketing initiatives, with a whopping 97% ranking social media engagement as first overall. Trailing with combined scores of 89% each are digital, website and SEO and email marketing initiatives, followed by video marketing at 87%.

Second-tier initiatives include event and content marketing at 76% each; marketing promotions at 74%; and print advertising at 71%, though 10% of respondents plan to reduce print investments in 2025. Boat-show marketing and newsletters each captured 64% of marketing focus, followed by marketing sponsorships at 61%. Public relations and cooperative marketing partnerships each scored 58%, while product literature, influencer marketing and B2B trade shows each leveraged 53%.

Marketing deliverables with less priority included marketing research, with 41% of survey respondents participating, followed by employment and recruitment marketing at 30%; radio or television advertising at 28%; and outdoor marketing at 25%.

Only 20% of marine marketers are engaged in AI and machine learning, with 7% investing in chatbots and other initiatives.

When asked to name the most successful area of marketing activity for achieving goals in 2024, two dominant responses were social media, at 28%, and digital marketing, at 23%. Event marketing and content marketing garnered 15% each.

Newer marketing initiatives, technology and platforms include streaming audio and television, virtual reality, big data and voice search, among others. However, AI commanded the undisputed lead at 51%, followed by personalized marketing at 28%.

When asked to identify the top three areas of marine marketing focus for 2025, results were scattered. However, the areas with the highest overall response included website/SEO and content marketing, at 31% each; digital marketing at 26%; social media at 23%; video at 21%; and AI and branding initiatives at 13% each.

Another question is whether marketing budgets are aligned with projected activities. Some 28% of respondents said their budget will be somewhat increased from 2024, while 20% expect it to remain flat. Another 10% expect their marketing budget to significantly increase in 2025, while 10% expect a significant decrease, and 5% expect a slight decrease. Surprisingly, 25% of respondents were unsure about their marketing budget as the 2024 calendar year drew to a close.

I included an open-ended question with optional attribution to see what else people were thinking about. The upshot is that when it comes to marine marketing, some people are highly optimistic while others are more cautious.

“Our plans for 2025 are based on a growth strategy,” said Frank Ferraro at Nautical Ventures, a South Florida retailer with eight locations. “We will end 2024 up 5% over 2023; 2025 will be based on a 10% to 15% increase over 2024.”

An anonymous respondent said: “State of marine marketing is currently strong and positioned for significant growth in the coming years. With inflationary pressures easing and technological advancements on the horizon, 2025 could usher in a boom in marine sales across the industry.”

Victor Gonzalez at Sportsman Boats responded: “Our vision is not changing for 2025. Educational content will continue to be our main focus. We’ve increased our budget to allow for even more content. We’ve hired a second content creator as well, which will lead to double the content output. We feel strongly that our market will be strong in 2025.”

An anonymous respondent said: “We are excited to be shifting from a holding position to expanding market share for our clients.” Still another replied: “We were just keeping the lights on this year. Next year will hopefully be better.”

David Pilvelait at Home Port Global said: “Biggest challenge for marketers, I think, will be helping clients deal with the anticipated downturn in the industry.”

An anonymous respondent wrote: “Preparing for continued soft market conditions and focusing on taking market share, but not expecting major growth.”

## Marketing Focus and Planning

“In 2025, we’ll focus on creating more personalized, data-driven marketing strategies and leveraging new technologies to enhance the customer experience,” said Paola Latorre at Regal & Nautique of Orlando. “We’re exploring digital tools that will help us engage customers more effectively. Our goal is to strike a balance between online engagement and in-person experiences to ensure we connect with customers wherever they are.”

Mary Strauss at Galati Yacht Sales replied: “The state of marketing in general ... the need to be everywhere and to go where the customers are ... there is not a single channel that is the holy grail.”

An anonymous respondent said: “I urge this industry to continue to grow the pie, work to attract a younger audience, and create cultural relevancy with communities that are not yet consumers in our industry.” Another anonymous reply was: “It’s all the same noise. We have to break through the clutter.”

Capt. Vicki Norman at Digital Throttle said: “Measure, measure, measure to know how your money is working for you.”

## Final Takeaways

Overall, while 59% of respondents don’t value marketing research as highly as I do, I’ve always championed its ability to deliver quantifiable answers to important questions. And I was pleasantly surprised by the exceptional mix of marketing activities underway, and especially encouraged to see progressive technologies and platforms on the horizon.

We are competing for every recreational dollar. The industry, and our individual companies, must be highly aggressive and sharp to gain market share and grow our collective customer base. Thank you to the C-suite executives who understand and value marketing’s contribution to the bottom line, and who are strategically ramping up investment.

To old-school bean counters who misguidedly view marketing as an expense, take a lesson from Warren Buffett at Berkshire Hathaway: “In the business world, the rearview mirror is always clearer than the windshield. Marketing budgets help you see forward and ensure you’re driving demand.”