***Auxiliary Marketing ideas***

***June 2018***

***What is the Value of the Coast Guard Auxiliary Brand?***

Many of us who instruct and organize Public Education classes feel not only a strong sense of duty and urgency to educate the boating public, but also a sense of competition with other boating education programs. In particular we often feel that competitive sense around the free online boating programs within our states. Although we are not a business, we worry about not having enough students to meet either our education goals or bringing in revenues to pay for the rental of flotilla meeting rooms or Public Education classroom space. Sometimes it appears that the answer to the free online courses is to reduce our PE fees to very low, or even free. However, this not only devalues the brand of our programs, but also that of the U.S. Coast Guard Auxiliary. Rather than treating the Coast Guard and Coast Guard Auxiliary brand as a highly valuable commodity, many of our flotillas are treating this value as ***ZERO*** when it comes to our Public Education courses.

It is impossible to come up with a fixed price that is universal across the country as it depends on your location, but there is high value to the brand. Let’s look at some of the factors that determine value.

**The Coast Guard Auxiliary brand (our name) like the Coast Guard brand represents:**

**Service**

**Dedication**

**Professionalism**

**Selflessness**

**Safety**

**Stewardship**

**Respect**

**Readiness**

**Trust**

**Volunteerism**

* A brand is more than logo, name, or slogan. It is the entire experience the customer (your student) has with the company (USCGAUX) product or service (PE class, vessel exam, or program visit). Outgoing Commandant Admiral Zukunft reflected on his guiding principal, “Commitment to Excellence.” “When a [#USCG](https://www.facebook.com/hashtag/uscg?source=feed_text) uniform walks into a room, it does not matter if it is a Seaman Apprentice or the Commandant, there is immediate respect and admiration for our service - I call it brand recognition. Our people are phenomenal ambassadors of goodwill - and it shows as we have become the world leader in maritime governance.”
* Our brand defines not just our image, but our message to the boating public. Our boating safety and education message has the highest value. According to the 2017 Recreational Boating Statistics released by the Coast Guard in late May 2018, “Where instruction was known, 81% of deaths occurred on boats where the operator did not receive boating safety instruction. Only 14% percent of deaths occurred on vessels where the operator had received a nationally-approved boating safety education certificate.” Clearly, the Public Education component of the RBS mission has the potential to significantly reduce the numbers of deaths and injuries.

* The Auxiliary is often associated with and occasionally mistaken as Coast Guard since our uniforms are so similar. In the mind of the average boater, we ARE the Coast Guard so we should take advantage of that perception and association. This is a distinct advantage the Auxiliary can utilize when promoting our brand. No other providers of boating safety education have this unique advantage.
* Successful brands do not price their products to minimize their cost compared to the competition. They price their product in relation to the ***perception of value*** of the product or service (Apple, Disney, Starbucks, etc.). Price charged for a product must match the value consumers perceive they are getting for that product.
* Markets will bear the price a consumer is willing to pay based on the value they perceive a high-end brand delivers. In other words, a good product is worth one price and a better product is worth a higher price.
* While it is easy to price a product according to tangible difference (a large screen television costs more than a smaller screen), services and intangible differences are more difficult. Consumers (students) must perceive differences in the value of the experience (hands-on classes, experienced instructors, discussion, etc.).
* Successful products find their right price point to achieve maximum sales without damaging the perception of the brand's value.
* A good price point is also dependent on knowing the local market, who the consumer is, and how that consumer perceives the value of the product. It is not just based on the price of similar goods and services, and then lowering your price.
* In general, short-term price reductions deliver only short-term results. Over time, price reductions drive sales down by ***perception of a lesser value*** for your product. ***“You get what you pay for.”*** You are offering a premium product at a great value. Don’t undersell that value.
* If a person has the disposable income to buy a boat, pay for gas, purchase insurance, and perform required maintenance, they certainly have money available to buy something that is priceless – a basic boating safety education course. The argument that we need to give our classes for free because boaters don’t have money just does not hold water (pun intended).

**Benefits of taking a Coast Guard Auxiliary boating safety class:**

* **Professional:** Classes based upon Coast Guard boating standards
* R**esearch:** Classroom materials based upon Coast Guard experience, investigations, and studies of boating safety
* **Experience**: Class material represents 228 years of U.S. Coast Guard marine experience
* **Confidence and Trust**: U.S. Coast Guard is recognized as the best marine safety service in the world
* **Instructor Experience**: Coast Guard Auxiliary instructors are certified to Coast Guard standards and bring their boating experience and training into the classroom
* **Individual Support:** Coast Guard Auxiliary classes provide students the opportunity to ask questions and get individualized support
* **Group Instruction**: Allows for group interaction, exchange of experience, and students who learn from each other
* **Hands-on Instruction:** Allows for live demonstrations and hands-on learning

Remember that you are offering a premium product delivered by professionals with experience. If you are trying to make the case for why students should choose this premium product delivered by professionals versus the free courses, you ***MUST TELL YOUR CUSTOMERS (STUDENTS) WHAT THEY ARE GETTING FOR THEIR MONEY.*** Unless you can convey this information to them at the time of decision, many if not most will default and choose free because they don’t have enough information to make an informed decision. By competing on price alone and thereby trying to compete against free, you will lose almost every time!

What works in your area may not work everywhere and there is no “one size fits all” solution. Some questions to ask when evaluating your program:

* What are other providers of boating safety classes doing with marketing for their classes?
* What can you offer that they cannot?
* What can you offer that is better than what they offer?
* Are you using all the tools in your toolbox including your entire RBS team to help recruit new students?
* Do you have information packs or handouts on your classes to be passed to every boater when they receive a VSC?
* Do your PVs have class schedules and descriptions to place in the racks of their partners?
* Do you have this information on your website?
* Are you using Social Media to spread the word?
* Are your members telling their friends who are also boaters or want to be boaters?
* How about other partners such as fishing and hunting clubs who might be looking for a speaker at their meetings where you could talk about education?
* The list is nearly endless with possibilities.

Students will learn from experience, but nowhere does it say it has to be all their own. Smart people learn from others and don’t repeat mistakes others have made. If they take a free class, they are almost certain to miss an opportunity to learn from others – especially with on-line courses. For those who only want to punch their ticket to be compliant with state mandatory education requirements, it might be more difficult to “sell” them on your premium product. However, you might be surprised at the number of prospective students who want more than the minimum represented by the free classes and will be receptive to your efforts once you tell them what they are getting for their money. Don’t judge a book by its cover and don’t assume a student wanting to take a free course will be satisfied with the value received from free. Unfortunately, they just don’t know what they don’t know until you tell them.

Filling seats in your PE classes is a team sport that is not solely the responsibility of the FSO-PE. Engage Flotilla leadership to help organize and coordinate all the moving parts that are required to maximize success. Engage your entire RBS team and engage every member of the flotilla to help spread the word. Take a look at potential outside partners and special events in your area as opportunities to engage more potential students. Look to civic clubs, condo associations where boating is a part of the mix, hunting and fishing clubs, marinas and yacht clubs, and even organizations such as Rotary, Masons, Toastmasters, and many of the other civic organizations across the country. All of them are looking for outside speakers to talk to their membership about some area of expertise, and you are certainly expert in boating safety education. There is a good chance that some of your audience will be or want to be boaters. By definition, you are a speaker because you are qualified to teach Public Education classes and are likely comfortable presenting to strangers. Give some of these ideas a try and share your successes so others can benefit.

**Please share your PE stories with us at****pe.feedback@cgauxnet.us**