***NACON 2019 Value Added Marketing Thoughts for Education***

Auxiliary courses and particularly our certificate courses cannot be considered as "loss leaders" in the marketplace. While this is tempting when there are free online alternatives for the boating public, it devalues the Coast Guard brand, as well as the effort and dedication of those who worked developing the classes. Treating classes such as ABS (and soon Boat America) as a "loss leader" places those courses on the same level as Costco's $1.50 hot dog and drink on its lunch menu, something cheap to bring people in. The courses have more value than that.

A seminar course delivered at a boat show, community event, or similar venue could be done free as a taste of what we offer and an incentive to bring more people into a certificate course. A seminar such as Introduction to Basic Boating Safety is a good example of a program to whet the appetite for more advanced courses.

Instead of competing for the 10% of the marketplace that is currently taking boating classes, better focus needs to be placed on the 90% of the public not taking boating safety classes. There is more than enough market share in that other 90% for all boating safety organizations without devaluing our certificate courses.

The free pricing of classes by some units assumes that we are in competition with the free online classes. We are not. We are the U.S. Coast Guard's RBS experts. That means we represent the Coast Guard as the nation's leader in recreational boating safety. Our outlook needs to be that we are not in competition with them - but that they are in competition with us. Once the Coast Guard delegated its traditional RBS functions to the Auxiliary along with their trust in us to do the job, the Auxiliary became national leaders and we need to reflect that attitude and responsibility. We do not compete with online courses, we surpass them because:

* We represent the brand, the image, and the mission of the U.S. Coast Guard.
* We present a unique program based on experience, practice, and Coast Guard training.
* We supply real-world experience in a variety of voices, not a preprogrammed online standardized routine course.

With these concepts in mind, marketing of all Auxiliary courses including certificate courses needs to emphasize the following advantages compared to online courses:

* Classroom environment that allows for personal attention.
* Instructors who can answer specific questions and clarify information with personal examples.
* Group interaction and exchange of information among students and instructors.
* Multi-sensory experiences and physical displays.
* Hands-on demonstrations with boating equipment brought into the classroom.
* Classes highly customized to emphasize local waters, e.g. lake environments, rivers, coastal, and intra-coastal waters.

Determining the value of your product is a process that will be local by necessity. You must know what others are charging AND what they are providing for their fee. You must be able to tell your prospective customer what YOU are providing for their money that others in the market do not give them. A recent survey of on-line courses available in Florida revealed the following:

| **Company** | **Contact Information** | **Price** |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Aceboater | [Aceboater.com](https://aceboater.com/usa/en/florida) | $24.95 |
| American Safety Council | [Floridaboatingcourse.com](http://floridaboatingcourse.com/) | $15.00 |
| Boat Tests 101 | [Boattests101.com](https://boattests101.com/united-states/florida) | $29.99 |
| Boat US | [Boatus.org](http://www.boatus.org/) | Free |
| BoatEd Online | [Boat-Ed.com](http://www.boat-ed.com/florida) | $34.95 |
| BoatEd Online Interactive Course | [iLearnToBoat.com](https://www.ilearntoboat.com/florida/) | $49.50 |
| Boater Exam.com | [Boaterexam.com](http://www.boaterexam.com/usa/florida/) | $29.95 |
| BOATSmart | [TheCampfireCollective.com](https://www.thecampfirecollective.com/courses/boatsmart/us/florida/) | $29.95 |
| US Power Squadrons | [Americasboatingclub.org](https://americasboatingclub.org/education-matters/online-boating-education/) | $29.95 |

Comparing on price only is a mistake often made. Consider adding lunch, hands-on demos of a boat in the parking lot, etc. that offers something different they will not or cannot get elsewhere and capitalize on that advantage. Brainstorm for ideas that make you unique and better than any other alternative. Make it compelling and clear why your class is better and why it is worth the money. You MUST tell them what they are getting and why your offer is a better one.

You have a crucial advantage in the market as you represent the brand of the U.S. Coast Guard. They are acknowledged as the standard by which all others are judged. Our material is derived from this experience and knowledge and not emphasizing our linkage is a mistake often made. Don’t let this powerful advantage slip through your fingers. This is one advantage you have that no one in the market can duplicate.

From a recent article on marketing: "Underpricing is probably the biggest mistake most companies make," says Laura Willett, a business consultant and lecturer at Bentley University in Waltham, Massachusetts. "The perception is that your product doesn't have any value."

Conversely, owners find when they set a price that's in line with what other companies charge, prospective clients and customers take them more seriously.

One owner of a new business spent six frustrating months trying to turn no- or low-fee work into a growing business, and finally one day asked herself, "Where is this getting me?" She decided it was time to start charging what she knew she was worth.

"It was terrifying. I went through a period where I didn't have clients," she says. But she did find companies that needed the services she wanted to provide, and her company is now growing.

Some have argued that boaters won’t spend money for a course because they don’t have the money. That argument is absolute garbage. If they have the disposable income to buy a boat, put gas in it, perform required maintenance, obtain insurance, and buy food and beer for their day on the water, they have the money for a one-time expense of boating safety class.

***The value of an Auxiliary PE course or seminar is truly priceless as it educates boaters and allows them to make informed decisions that will make a difference in their personal safety which translates to more fun on the water.*** Make sure you tell them this! It is true that many boaters in the 90% just don’t know what they don’t know and it is up to us to reach out and educate them. If you utilize your entire RBS team along with support of your elected leadership, you can make a difference and start moving the needle in the right direction.