

# BUILDING BUZZ

IF YOU WANT TO MAKE SALES AT THE BOAT SHOW,  
MAKE NEWS AT THE BOAT SHOW.

BY MATT ALDERTON



Reporters are always looking for a good scoop. And with a well-constructed public relations (PR) blitz, you can pique their interest, score some free coverage—and get customers to your booth.

tip:

**Don't just pitch stories; pitch visuals, too.** For example, if you're pitching a story about boat safety, include pictures of people wearing lifejackets and a video demonstration about how to choose them and put them on.

You're not going to get very far without a solid hook, so here are a few ideas for pull in the press pack:

**Introduce a new product or service:** "Any time you have 'the first ever' or 'the only' of something, it's a really great opportunity to garner some attention," says Caroline Sherman, vice president at Alpaytac, a Chicago, Illinois-based PR firm.

**In Action:** Because fishing boats are especially popular in the Pacific Northwest, Boston Whaler debuted its first-ever pilothouse at the Seattle Boat Show in January. In addition to drafting a press release, the company hosted a special launch event on the opening night of the show that helped create considerable industry buzz.

And a local paper, *The Herald*, found Gateway Yachts' fractional ownership a unique angle to focus on in its coverage of the Seattle show.

**Celebrate a company milestone:** Highlight an anniversary or sales record.

**In Action:** After the 2011 Dubai International Boat Show, ART Marine, the Middle East's largest importer and distributor of luxury motor yachts, announced it had set a new sales record—news that was picked up and published internationally by boating bloggers as well as business reporters.

**Host an event:** Contests, competitions, seminars and celebrity appearances can all attract coverage.

**In Action:** Professional kayak angler Drew Gregory appeared at the Progressive® Insurance Atlanta Boat Show® in January, courtesy of exhibitor Jackson Kayak. The event was featured in an article in *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution*.

**Do some good:** Align your product to a charitable endeavor or fundraising campaign.

**In Action:** At the Progressive® Insurance Minneapolis Boat Show®, Midwest boat wrap provider Crow River Signs partnered with Jared Allen's Homes for Wounded Warriors—a nonprofit created by pro football player Jared Allen to build and modify homes for injured military veterans. The two organizations created a military-themed wrap that was displayed during the show. With Allen himself in tow, the company's design was featured in a televised sports report broadcast by the local CBS affiliate.

**Apply for an award:** Nominating your company for a prize like "best booth" means it has the chance to not only win, but it also gets recognized by reporters covering the awards.

**In Action:** At the Progressive® Insurance Miami International Boat Show® in February, 13 marine products were honored with Innovation Awards. Not only were the

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Kayak maker Paddle and Trail rode the wave of free publicity surrounding PaddleFest, an event at the Chicago show.

## LET THE Blitz Begin

**Six to nine months before the show:** Begin applying for awards and speaking opportunities at the show.

**Four months before the show:** Decide what you're going to announce at the show, obtain last year's press list and begin pitching reporters at long-lead media outlets, such as magazines.

**Six to eight weeks before the show:** Contact reporters to schedule press briefings at the show.

**A couple of days before the show and the day of:** Email press releases to reporters and invite them to stop by your booth. Also, drop off marketing materials in the pressroom and check back as the show progresses to make sure you haven't run out.

honorees mentioned in the boat show's official awards press release—which was published on the show's website—but they were also listed in articles about the awards published by several industry publications, such as *Soundings* and *Cruising World* magazines.

**Book a speaking engagement:** Signing on as a presenter at the show can help establish your company as a thought leader, says Matt Serra, vice president for North America at Mulberry Marketing Communications in Jacksonville, Florida. And it might also earn your company mentions in the show's marketing materials.

**In Action:** At the Progressive® Insurance

## Tip: Target your PR Messages.

Research what media will be covering the show and tweak your pitch accordingly. National trade media, for instance, are generally interested in trends and new innovations, according to Caroline Sherman of Alpaytac. Local consumer media are looking for breaking news and current events. And a business reporter will have different interests than a sports or lifestyle reporter.

If you're launching a new fishing boat, the editor of a national boating industry magazine will likely respond best to a press release sent on the first day of the boat show outlining specifications, price and differentiators. A local sports reporter, on the other hand, is more likely to respond to statistics or events—for example, a company survey revealing that fishing boats are the most popular type of boat in the boat show's host city, or a live fishing demo that takes place on the show floor aboard the new boat.

Chicago Boat, Sports & RV Show® in January, exhibitors had the opportunity to introduce consumers to paddle sports at “PaddleFest” by giving free kayak and paddleboard demos on an indoor pool. As a PaddleFest presenter, Paddle and Trail, a Loves Park, Illinois-based kayak maker, was not only featured on the show's official website but also mentioned in articles produced by local newspapers and television stations, including Chicago's local ABC affiliate.

**Look beyond your product:** Tips like what to look for when purchasing a boat get a lot of mileage in the media because they're educational, Serra says.

**In Action:** During the 2012 Tullett Prebon London Boat Show, Shieldbase, a British fleet-tracking company, attracted media attention with its article “15 Ways to Prevent Boat Theft.”

### MEET THE PRESS

It sometimes helps to make your pitch in person. To get some face time with reporters:

- **Hold press events:** At the Miami show, for instance, Chris-Craft president Steve Heese unveiled two new models at a

press conference. Exhibitors can often entice busy reporters with the offer of a good meal or a cocktail—as you tell them all about your company and its products, Sherman says.

- **Schedule one-on-one briefings:** Serra recommends scheduling 30-minute appointments with individual reporters on the pre-registered press list. Not only can these meetings secure coverage at the show, they also help establish relationships that bear editorial fruit weeks, months or even years afterwards.
- **Offer onsite interviews:** Make a company spokesperson available for impromptu interviews with reporters who stop by your booth. “Choose somebody who represents your company well, who knows the product and is personable,” says Daniel Grant, account director at Pierson Grant Public Relations, a Fort Lauderdale, Florida-based PR firm that handles publicity for five boat shows. If your spokesperson hasn't conducted formal interviews, consider media training beforehand.

### PARTNER FOR PUBLICITY

To maximize your exposure, work in conjunction with the boat show's PR efforts, such as:

- **Media placements:** Before, during and after the show, the event's PR team sends out press releases. Keep event organizers informed about your boat show plans, and they may include you in their marketing efforts and promote you to reporters, Grant says.
- **Pressrooms:** Stake out the spot where reporters convene to work, rest—and pick up marketing materials.
- **Show dailies:** Many shows publish daily newspapers for attendees. Speak with organizers to see how you can garner some coverage.

PR opportunities abound at boat shows. And they all come with an added benefit: credibility. “Stories about how nice your product is are much more powerful coming from a third party than from you,” Serra says. 🌐



## Get the Word Out Digitally

Distributing news is as important as creating it—and most reporters prefer the digital route. “No media members want to be weighed down by pounds of paper,” says Caroline Sherman of Alpaytac.

**1 Press releases:** Email press releases directly to media a few days before a show and then follow up on opening morning. But don't ignore wire services that can give press releases a longer shelf life by popping up in search engine results during—and long after—the show, says Matt Serra of Mulberry Marketing Communications.

**2 Media kits:** Sherman recommends distributing branded flash drives loaded with press releases, executive bios and headshots, press clippings, a company fact sheet and high-resolution product images. Be sure to post the same items on your website in an online pressroom, too.