

THE EASIEST UP-SELL

Once you've uncovered a customer's longing for a bigger boat, zero in on the right product in your booth.

BY MATT ALDERTON

Though you won't find it in any medical dictionary, "two-foot-itis" is a condition that frequently affects boat owners. Typically, it starts in the gut at the time of purchase, when the buyer wonders—if only for a second—whether or not he or she can afford a larger model.

Then, after two or three years of contented boat ownership, something happens. What began as a moment of hesitation grows into a full-blown case of two-foot-itis. And you can offer an antidote right on the boat show floor.

First, find out what exactly has the buyer considering a new boat, says Julie Steelman, author of *The Effortless Yes: Demystifying the Selling Process and Discover Your Selling Archetype, Your Natural Asking Style, Your Bankability*.

Then, dig deeper to determine what's important to the customer and what factors will go into the purchase decision.

Once the customer's "symptoms" (i.e., needs and wants) are identified, your booth staff can prescribe a cure—namely, a model from your inventory.

RX: Understand the Urge

Boat shows are teeming with people who'd like to trade in their boat for a bigger, better model. But you can only

up-sell if you get into their mindset: They love their boat—but they might love the idea of another boat a little bit more.

Closing the deal means offering solutions, not sales pitches.

"When you're developing your marketing messages, zero in and talk specifically about a problem your customers have or a result they want," says marketing and sales strategist Dov Gordon, president of DovGordon.net, a site designed to help small business owners attract customers.

Be subtle in your messaging, though, adds Steelman. "I would suggest using personal and more private promotions to reach these people. They won't want to feel like they are part of a big push to generate business."

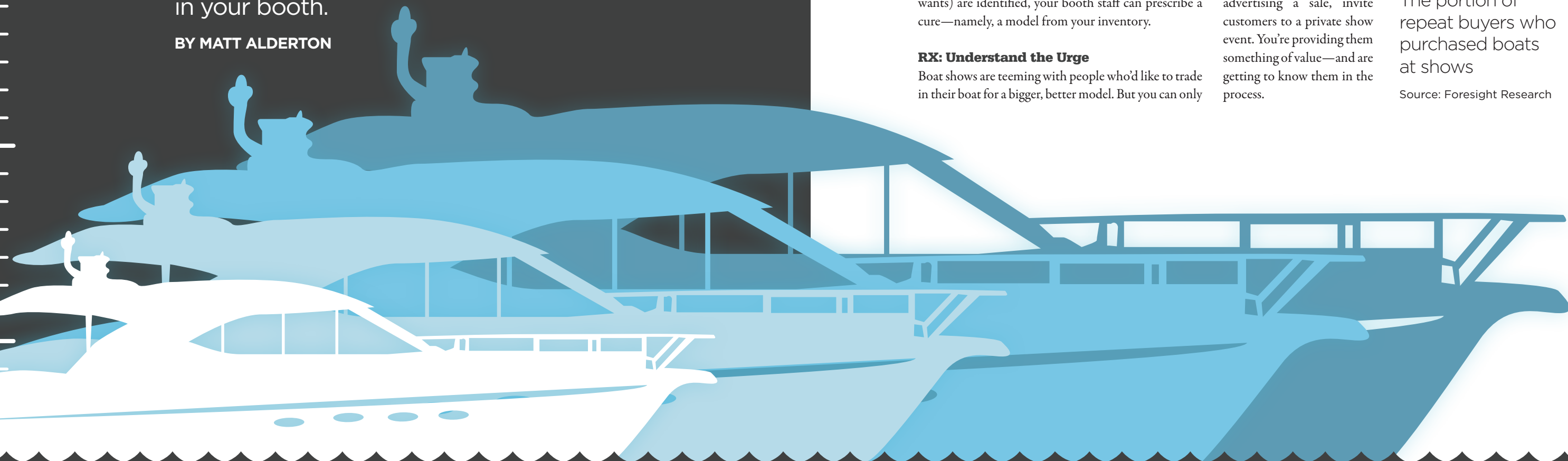
For instance, instead of advertising a sale, invite customers to a private show event. You're providing them something of value—and are getting to know them in the process.



60%

The portion of repeat buyers who purchased boats at shows

Source: Foresight Research



RX: Develop a Bedside Manner

“The best salespeople are the best question-askers,” says Jeff Goldberg, president and founder of Jeff Goldberg & Associates, a sales training and consulting firm.

He suggests asking probing questions to reveal what’s inside a prospect’s mind:

- What do you enjoy about boating?
- What kind of boat do you have now?
- Why did you buy that particular model?
- What do you like about it?
- What don’t you like about it?
- If you could buy a slightly bigger model, which one would it be?
- What would a bigger boat mean to you?

“There’s always some angle of desire and disappointment, and if you understand both of them—where they’re happy and where they could be happier—you can work on a solution to fill the gap,” adds Mark Faust, author of *Growth or Bust! Proven Turnaround Strategies to Grow Your Business*.

For instance, is your prospect a “feature creature” who wants all the latest electronics? Is your prospect image-conscious, looking for a boat that will impress others? Or is your prospect a “speed freak,” craving a high-performance go-fast vessel with a powerful engine? Once you have that information, you can steer the person to the right boat in your exhibit.

“With a boat, it’s less about the concept of finding out needs as it is wants,” says Mike Schultz, co-president of Rain Group, a sales training and con-

sulting firm. “Buying a bigger boat is often about emotional hopes and dreams and less about technical specifications.”

The same goes for identifying your prospects’ reluctance. Having a conversation at the boat show can help you determine why they are hesitant about purchasing a bigger model.

RX: Play to Their Emotions

Repeat buyers don’t need to be sold on the lifestyle as a first-timer does. So when they come to your booth, you may want try a storytelling strategy.

For example, if a prospect expresses a desire for a larger boat so his or her family can spend more time together, talk about a previous customer who upgraded to a boat with a sleeper cabin so his family could take cruises on the lake together.

“Zero in on where the buyer feels unfulfilled with their current boat,” Steelman says. “When the customer sees how they can get the feeling they want by upgrading, you will have won their heart. Win over the heart first, and then the head.”

RX: Don’t Censor Your Inventory

One reason so many boaters suffer from two-foot-itis is that they don’t buy the boat they want in the first place. Use their time in the booth to show off your inventory.

“You have a right and an obligation to show your customer all of their options because they won’t know what they want and need until they know what’s available,” Faust says.

“If you start at the best one and work your way backwards, customers are more likely to end up at the higher end of their budget, because they’ll understand all their options,” Schultz says.

For example, if a couple is looking for a \$150,000 boat, start with a model that’s a bit above their stated price range. In this case, you might begin by showing them a boat that costs \$220,000 and is loaded with features. Then present them with a \$190,000 model that sacrifices a few features and is probably toward the higher end of their price range. Finally, present them with a boat that’s in their stated price range but lacks quite a few of the key amenities included in the other two boats.

Ultimately, it’s not about selling a more expensive boat. It’s about finding boaters their perfect match.

“Usually, customers are looking for an upgrade because they feel unfulfilled, dissatisfied or want to reinvigorate their passion for boating,” Steelman says. “When you upgrade, your passion feels new again, and the enjoyment quotient rises.”

TIP: Ask the right questions, advises Mike Schultz of Rain Group.

If you ask, “Do you want the more expensive or less expensive boat?” the answer is likely to be, “Less expensive.”

Instead, ask:

- “Do you think you’ll ever entertain parties of more than 20 people on the boat?”
- “Would you want to spend over seven days away from any port?”
- “Do you think you’ll ever make runs of more than 600 miles at a time?”

“They might answer yes to all of the questions,” Schultz says. “If you know the less expensive boat can’t do these things, you’re steering them—with questions and savvy—to the ‘next level up’ option based on their desires.”

The Next Big Thing

Some people simply must have the latest and greatest accessories, electronics and engines—and boat shows are full of them. **Here are some tips to turn those cravings into sales:**

BUILD A FAN BASE:

Brand loyalists aren’t just customers; they’re fans. To create that kind of rabid aficionado, inject a bit of mystique in your booth. “Create an exclusive experience and serve the best wine and food. Then showcase your products in beautiful ways, and find a creative way to express the features and benefits of owning these products,” says author Julie Steelman.

CREATE AN EXPERIENCE:

Let customers interact with your accessories so they can see for themselves how cool and cutting-edge they are. If you’re selling wakeboards, for example, shoot for a “wow factor.” “Go for flash and whiz-bang,” says Mike Schultz of Rain Group. “Have a flat-screen TV showing wakeboard lessons—all the cool flips and jumps—and allow people to grab the remote control and play the video back or see it in slow motion.”

ESTABLISH A DISTINCT BRAND PROMISE:

“Define, know, clarify and communicate your philosophy,” says author Mark Faust. A lot of your competitors may focus their marketing efforts on explaining what their accessory is and how it’s different from other products at the show. But if you want to win early adopters, the key question to answer right away is *why*—as in, “Here is the reason why you need this specific product.”



Johnny Cain



Tim McAfee

