



Dealers can use marine canvas products as a way to close the deal.

Marine canvas products can be a revenue stream for boat dealers

BY JEROME A. KONCEL

When I first approached Russ West, vice president of marine sales for DOWCO Marine in Lebanon, Mo., to discuss trends in boatcovers/suntops, little did I know that I would be interviewing a person who had first-hand experience with the GO RVing campaign, which is the basis for the Grow Boating campaign flooding the nation. So, in one sense, readers will get a two-for-one article.

Not only will readers receive an update on trends in boatcovers and suntops, they'll also learn about West's experiences with GO RVing.

Q: What's happening in today's marketplace for boatcovers/sun tops?

A. It's an interesting time for suppliers of what used to be mundane products, such as boatcovers and suntops. There's a lot of innovation occurring in this area, and the successful companies will be those that enhance the value of the product to the dealer and eventually the end customer, the boater. Companies are making big investments to increase the positive boating experiences of boaters.

Q: Can you be a little more specific about the changes taking place in the marketplace?

A. There are changes in two basic areas. First, boat dealers and their customers want products that will allow them to enjoy boating and the boating experience. They don't want to spend time performing activities and doing chores

to keep their boats in the water. This translates into fast, hassle-free experiences for boaters.

Second, manufacturers are adding value to their canvas products. The value is found in easier-to-use products that are better designed and incorporate new technology. In short, it wasn't that long ago that boat covers were considered bags to cover boats. Fortunately, that idea has given way to today's custom-fit, stylish products.

Q: Can you give me a specific example of this custom-fit, stylish cover?

A. Sure, our most recent product is a multiple use boat cover designed for trailering or covering a boat on the

water. The customer drapes the cover over the boat, pulls the rope ratchet fastening system tight, and the boat is ready to go. It's one cover that serves two purposes—trailering and mooring—and provides a custom fit over the boat.

Q: When you designed this product, what qualities did you specify for the marine canvas?

A. When we designed a fabric for custom fitting, we wanted a snug fit cover that would protect boats from the elements, that is the sun, wind, rain, and other damaging elements. It's a solution-dyed polyester material designed to meet specific marine requirements, i.e., water-resistant, UV-resistant, color-fast, mildew and fungus resistant. It has a five-year warranty and it won't stretch or pucker out of shape. It's called the ClimaShield® Plus fabric.

Q: What I hear you saying is that you designed a product based on feedback from customers. Is that correct, and can you tell more about this process.

That's correct, Jerry. Whether it's a fabric or a mechanical product, the demands from customers are the same: ease of operation, less maintenance, more dependability, and greater reliability. I see this as pushing manufacturers, so it's not something bad. What this is saying is that boating is becoming less "technical" than in the past. Boaters are looking for products that are more durable so that they have a more enjoyable boating experience. They



This two-tone boat cover is another example of a custom fit.



Producers supply products for a variety of boats, such as this Tahoe Bow and cockpit cover.

