



WHAT BEST PROMOTES SAILING FOR LIFE? IS IT GOING TO HUGE INTERNATIONAL EVENTS? OR IS IT....

THE TIMES THEY ARE A CHANGING

WITH fewer new customers buying boats, with less younger customers taking their place, boating trade body British Marine commissioned research into market and industry trends, writes Alan Henderson.

Marketing consultant Liz Rushall led a Futures research project. She revealed its findings at the RYA Dinghy Show and was joined by online sailing publisher Mark Jardine.

Her conclusions are clear, but persuading the industry, training organisations, clubs and classes to radically change in response to big market movements will take time, energy and leadership.

At the base of the industry are clubs and class associations, and their volunteers, who currently hold the sport and industry together. Here are some of Liz's conclusions, followed by some suggestions from me on how clubs can respond.

The participation trends are gloomy for the industry, so their research is much needed. 90% of people do not do any boating. Racing is on a downward trend, and only 25% of yachters race, most preferring to just cruise. Windsurfing is collapsing. Among age cohorts, participation by both 16-34 year olds and 35-54 year olds is declining, and even less are racing. The effects of the 2008 financial crash are still being felt in a discretionary spend area like boating.

If this sounds challenging, wait till you hear the social trends among younger age groups. There is a big mismatch between the traditional model of clubs, and the desires of young people.

Younger age groups want informal and last minute bookings of fun activities, preferably booked online. They want to try new experiences, they have short attention spans, and don't want to be tied down by duties,

clubhouse buildings, or by owning boats or even cars.

They like personal challenges, and don't like formal qualifications. Millennials and Generation Z don't like to own things, but instead hire them, and might even just hire them occasionally. They may not even learn to drive. To go to an open meeting at present, you need to own a boat, and own a car with a towbar. All three items are missing for the younger groups, so a tradition of regular sailing, leading on to open meetings or championships, is just not going to develop among these generations.

And 80% of people live in cities, so would have to travel to the coasts even if boats were available there for them.

Younger age groups prefer newer forms of watersport, with cheaper and more easily stored equipment like stand up paddle boards, canoes and surfboards. These are also more quickly



...GOING TO FUN EVENTS, LIKE THIS EXEMPLAR, SOLWAY CADET WEEK?

mastered than sailing dinghies or yachts.

The younger groups are less interested in sport as competition, preferring to gain new experiences, and enjoying fitness related activities. These activities should be bookable via your mobile phone, but should offer a social experience, either in real life and/or in virtual communities.

That briefly summarises the Rushall report. Also via a webinar, Mark Jardine of sail-world.com added his views.

He tore into the current British youth/performance pathway. The attrition rate in junior and youth sailing is far too high, he declared. Youth pathways are far too focused on a narrow 'top' of each group of squaddies. Coaching is too intense. Many young sailors are intimidated, particularly at the huge youth events. The focus is all on the top level sailors in each age group. It has all got much too serious.

But a great thing about sailing compared with other sports is that it is a sport for life. You may change between branches of the sport at different stages of life, but can stay with the sport.

So the aim should be to make sailors for life. Not to burn them out by age 17.

We need more club level, fun activities, giving kids freedom to learn at their pace, and in a way that suits them. But most important is to have fun, Mark continued. If they have fun, they will stay. He gave examples of fun sailing weeks, highlighting **Solway Cadet Week** as an ideal, in which games and non sailing activities were probably more important than the sailing.

If more clubs organised activities like this, and we had less of the intense squad systems, would it harm our Olympic chances, he asked. No, was his firm answer.

So from Mark's perspective, our ways of teaching kids to sail and race, need major change, while Liz's work on the desires of young adults confirms major changes are needed here too.

The mismatch between these desires, and the current industry, is stark. Selling increasingly big and expensive yachts is not going to work with these age groups, who are far less likely to ever



CARSINGTON SC USES A MIX OF STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS TO PROVIDE A GREAT SERVICE TO MEMBERS. PHOTO: NICK ARRAN.

buy a sailing dinghy, never mind a yacht.

Equally there is a widespread perception that much of the RYA's activities on the performance side are OK for producing medals, but detrimental to persuading young people to adopt sailing for life.

The growth of yacht marinas is one welcome move over the last decades, providing a far more civilised experience for their berth holders than the old days of small yachts moored on club anchorages in exposed positions.

But some marinas lack social experience, and owning a yacht in a marina is not a realistic aspiration for younger age groups.

Training establishments now offer a wide range of fun, outdoor activities, while also supplying RYA certificated sailing courses. So they often offer canoeing, stand up paddleboards (SUPs), RIB driving, windsurfing etc.

Lastly, sailing clubs. They largely cater to the needs of present and past members, not of younger future members, and as a result have huge gaps in age profile, with few members in the 20-50 year bracket. The same applies to most class associations.

Of these groups, training establishments have probably adapted best. How could sailing clubs adapt to these changes and offer a way of life among younger adults?

- Ownership. Millennials/Gen Z don't want to own things, just to have access to them when desired.

Response: Sailing clubs need to take on ownership of a range of boats, which can be hired out to customers, as well as sometimes used in training programmes. These boats need to be well maintained, and give an enjoyable sail.

- Bookable via smartphone

Response: Both training courses and hires should be bookable and paid for by smartphone or laptop. So sailing clubs need to have facilities for online payments and booking, and do more marketing via Facebook or websites.

- Provide other watersports/other sports. Young age groups want to try easier forms of watersport, requiring less long term commitment, and offering experience, not sporting competition.

Response: A sailing club's hire fleet could include kayaks, SUPs, surfboards as well as sailing dinghies or keelboats.

- Social experience, in real life and/or via virtual groups

Response: This is not a strong area for most sailing clubs, but in future as more members/customers are less interested in racing, it needs improvement.

Virtual communication among groups of members, via eg Facebook or What's App, can build group identity, and for instance result in agreeing painlessly for a few people to go sailing at the same time and place.

At the last minute, as the young groups desire. In real life, social experience can come from members racing together, cruising together, volunteering together or doing collective

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THE FIRST 'RETURN TO VOLUNTEER' TRIP ON CALEDONIAN HERO IN LARGES.

'RETURN TO VOLUNTEER' INSPIRES CANCER RECOVERY

ELLEN MacArthur Cancer Trust is unique as it works with young people post treatment of cancer and through the 'Return to Volunteer' programme, the eight to 24 year olds can continue their relationship with the trust and keep making a difference especially after they turn 18.

The strong support from players of People's Postcode Lottery has made a huge difference to the trust and the number of young people that can take part in this unique programme.

In 2018, more young people than ever before will take part in the special five day trips when the young people will learn the

skills required to be a volunteer, including working through their RYA Competent Crew qualifications.

The four day sailing trips are a unique and life changing experience for the young people that join them, but they are about much more than just sailing. 'Sailing is just a vehicle,' says trust founding patron Ellen MacArthur. 'It's about regaining your life. The joy of the trust trips is overwhelming, there are always transformations.'

The young people are initially invited to take part in a four day sailing trip on yachts in the Solent or on the Firth of Clyde, which are run throughout the summer holidays. They are all about having fun; and regaining a sense of independence. Crewing onboard a 45ft boat with other young people in the same situation allows them to feel normal again, for once they aren't the only kid in the room with cancer, it's the perfect blend of empowerment, challenge, and distraction.

Jack Hocking, 23, from Edinburgh completed his volunteer training on Caledonian Hero, a specially adapted yacht that was kindly donated to the trust by players of People's Postcode Lottery. He went on his first trip in 2015 and has been on four trips since.

'The trust helped me to come out of my shell post treatment and now I feel confident enough to come back and help others,' said Jack.

● www.ellenmacarthurcancertrust.org/get-involved



walks or cycle runs during the winter. Clubs should encourage anything like this, which gives members more from their membership.

Not dealt with in the report, but pertinent to clubs are clubhouses. Clubs deploy a lot of their financial resources and volunteer resources on maintaining clubhouses, or on applying for funds to build new clubhouses.

The other form of capital deployment is on the club's fleet of boats. To appeal more to younger generations who don't own things, I'd suggest that clubs will need to devote more capital and manpower towards purchasing, maintaining and hiring out a greater fleet of boats, and less towards clubhouses. Clubs might consider buying cheaper, second hand boats for their fleets, rather than expensive brand new boats. And they might consider selling on any of their fleet to customers/members, who have had the chance to try them.

Re buildings, perhaps clubs could hire modular buildings/portakabins in future, renewing them every ten years or so. Some clubs of course are blessed with recently erected new buildings, if so the challenge will be to achieve

greater utilisation of these buildings to help provide an income, for instance allowing use of the building by non watersport groups, eg cyclists, camera clubs, art clubs etc. This also builds links within the community.

Overall, clubs of the future are likely to be more commercial in character than at present.

CLUBS TO TAKE ON STAFF?

Currently most small/medium clubs have no employees, with all work shared among the members. Can this model continue? I'd suggest more clubs will take on staff, who may be short term to deliver a training course, seasonal, or permanent in larger clubs with demand for meals/bar.

Large clubs in cities, like Queen Mary SC will evolve much more towards the gym club model, with high monthly fees but convenient services to suit the customer when he/she wants them.

Medium size clubs like Carsington in Derbyshire currently have employees who multi-task between providing rescue cover most days of the week, to bar work, hiring out boats, marketing the club etc, alongside the club

committee.

This club kept a good balance between being a social destination at weekends for meals, to still being an active sailing club, with members including Sailability, Scout groups etc, as well as individual racing/sailing members.

So it is a hybrid staff/volunteer run club, appropriate to a medium/large club with a good local population base.

Smaller clubs in rural areas are likely to remain volunteer run, but probably with a smattering of paid instructors/bar/catering staff at peak times.

Thanks to the RYA training system, there are plenty of trained instructors/RIB drivers available now, while catering/bar staff are used to shift work. So the opportunities for clubs to find good staff are far better than they were in sailing's growth period in the 60s/70s.

The Futures report argues big changes will be needed in the sport, but this is not an impossible task. Many clubs are making progress towards becoming multi-sport clubs, to taking on staff, and to increasing marketing/purchasing.

So clubs, training centres and boat builders will all have to adapt considerably to remain viable.